

Forum

When a ‘bit of a disaster’ becomes a thing of beauty



Rabbi Michael Birnholz
Newsweekly contributor

While I spend a lot of my time standing in front of people teaching or leading worship/ritual, it is fair to say that I spend more of my time preparing the materials for those moments and then putting them away.

This means that I end up in the file and store rooms at Temple Beth Shalom, taking out and putting back as well as looking over the storage bins and shelves of projects past.

The other day, as I was moving one project from autumn to the back and pulling an activity for spring forward, I saw an object and image full of incredible contrast. It was the frame of the light sculpture that I made for the Light over the Bridge experience from last year.

As the Bridge walk approached, I knew that I wanted a “globe of light” to pass from one end of the Merrill Barber Bridge to the other. I called on my Popsicle stick skills and made an octagon that I then coated in battery powered Christmas lights held together with electrical tape.

It was quite a monstrosity and felt like it was held together with prayer and hope as much as by engineering. We didn’t have the Bridge walk this year and are considering how to bring that energy into the community in different ways.

Seeing the frame and the bin of the lights I used set aside, reinforced how rickety the artifact had been. As that thought passed my mind, I saw a picture that had been set into the bin.

It was a picture from the Bridge walk with folks carrying the sculpture. In the dark of night, my cobbled frame glowed brightly. This frame with wood, wire, and bulbs held together with tape, glue

and prayer, was illuminating signs about kindness and faces filled with smiles.

What was a bit of a disaster in the light of day, became this incredible force of beauty and vision in the dark of night. How often we think of something being small or insignificant, a passing connection or spontaneous act, and yet, from a different angle, on another day, to another person, the light, the act, the connection is full of kavod – honor, force, glory.

As I looked at the picture side by side to my wooden frame for light, I remembered a quote from Hannah Senesh, a young poet who heroically gave her life fighting the Nazis during the Holocaust. Reportedly her words to her comrades before she was murdered were:

“There are stars whose radiance is visible on earth though they have long been extinct. There are people whose brilliance continues to light the world though they are no longer among the liv-

ing. These lights are particularly bright when the night is dark.”

I have to wonder, do we even realize the times when we share that small bit of light or care into the world? Do we turn off our light because we only see it in the context of greater or more beautiful light, forgetting that in the darkness it is actually more radiant and more powerful?

In this season of light, we must keep this understanding of vision in mind and heart. It might be imperfect or dim, but a seed of light, planted with spirit, strength, and a heart of joy, can radiate and reflect a lot more light and energy in to a different time, a different place and to the other people around us.

Rabbi Michael Birnholz has served Temple Beth Shalom in Vero Beach since 2002. One of his goals is bringing Jewish values and wisdom to the wider community.

‘Shop local’ movement drives sales of American-made yarn

Shireen Korkzan
ASSOCIATED PRESS

It began when Debbie McDermott allowed her daughter Jamie to raise two sheep for a 4-H project. Eventually, her 165-year-old farm was transformed into a successful, family-run, custom fiber processing mill.

McDermott’s Stonehedge Fiber Mill, which opened in 1999 in East Jordan, Michigan, now produces more than 700 pounds of yarn monthly for customers in 38 states and Canada. It produces an additional 15,000 pounds monthly for its personal lines of yarn, including Shepherd’s Wool, which is milled and dyed in-house before it’s shipped and sold in about 300 shops.

“I really think the appeal is our yarn’s made in the U.S., and people are more and more going toward U.S.-made products as a support for U.S. companies,” McDermott said.

Most garments worn in the United States in the first half of the 20th century were American-made, but the decline of the American textile industry began after World War II, according to knitting and wool industries expert Clara Parkes. She’s a member of the American Sheep Industry – an industry trade group – and author of several books on knitting.

In recent years, however, there’s been a slow-growing demand for wool yarn that’s completely produced in the United States, from sheep to skein, Parkes said.

One reason, she thinks, could be that consumers are turning back to wool because of the environmental risks of microplastics in garments made from syn-



Debbie McDermott’s daughter, Jamie Sparks, ties freshly-spun yarn into skeins. Sparks’ raising of two sheep for a 4-H project inspired her mother to establish Stonehedge Fiber Mill in East Jordan, Mich. SHIREEN KORKZAN VIA AP

thetic like acrylic, nylon and polyester. The microplastics are released into waterways when the synthetic garments are washed.

Locally sourced yarn helps not only the environment but local businesses too, Parkes said. “There’s the environmental impact of shipping goods all the way across the world and bringing it back, but now people are asking themselves, ‘What if I can get the wool here and just keep it here?’”

McDermott echoed that sentiment: “Shopping local is allowing farmers to raise and keep their animals on the farm.”

Consumer interest in locally sourced

yarn inspired the Michigan Fiber Cooperative to produce a line, Fresh Water Fiber, which uses wool and alpaca from Michigan farms. It’s processed by Stonehedge Fiber Mill and dyed by Why Knot Fibers in Traverse City.

One store that stocks Fresh Water Fiber is Wool & Honey in Cedar, Michigan. Owner Melissa Kelenske said she buys from Michigan-based fiber artists and companies that focus on producing high-quality, ethically sourced yarn with attention to their environmental impact.

“I think the farm-to-table movement of eating local, shopping local – basically the major slow food movement – laid

the ground work for the knitting industry,” Kelenske said.

Another yarn company that supplies Wool & Honey is Brooklyn Tweed, of Portland, Oregon. Knitwear designer Jared Flood founded the company in 2010 to “preserve, support and sustain” American textile production by doing business with sheep farmers, fiber mills and dyers across the United States.

The business concept “was not so much about patriotism as supporting local economies,” said Christina Rondepierre, Brooklyn Tweed’s marketing manager.

“It was also the revitalization of East Coast mills and dyeing houses and the whole U.S. textile industry so they could sustain income and make sure towns and business were able to stay afloat,” Rondepierre said. For example, the Harrisville, New Hampshire, Historic District mill village spins some of Brooklyn Tweed’s yarns. The village was declared a National Historic Landmark in 1977.

But patriotism, too, is helping to revive the American wool industry.

After Ralph Lauren drew flak for making its Team USA apparel for the 2012 Summer Olympics in China, the fashion company had all Team USA apparel for the 2014 Winter Olympics made in the United States. The yarn used for the closing ceremony sweaters was 4,000 pounds of Shepherd’s Wool from Stonehedge Fiber Mill.

McDermott was shocked when a Ralph Lauren representative asked her to supply the yarn.

“It was a mouth-dropped-open moment when I realized who I was talking to on the phone,” she said. “It was a neat experience.”

Gifford Youth Achievement Center students hear from local officers

Christina Tascon
YourNews contributor

VERO BEACH -- The Gifford Youth Achievement Center, in a continuing effort to educate students on life skills, invited retired Indian River County Sheriff deputy Leroy Smith and officer Donald Hart of the Sebastian Police Department to give a seminar on “10 Rules in Dealing with the Police.”

“Officers Hart and Smith are here to talk to you about proper interactions with police,” GYAC executive director Angelia Perry told the older students known as Dream Chasers. “We want you

to recognize these techniques to use when stopped by the police to make sure you go home safely.”

Officer Smith began by reading a list of names who have been in the news because they have been killed by police. Most were African American and under 25 years of age which made the topic very relevant to the students at GYAC.

The incidents had all escalated into an officer shooting through fear of being harmed, a mistaken identity or by an incorrect guess that the person had a weapon.

“Whether the officer is wrong or not, our goal in talking to you today is to get

you home safe,” said Smith. “Afterwards you can tell your parents or an adult what happened and it is up to them to go into the Sheriff’s Department and file a complaint if they so choose.”

Hart and Smith shared a video which demonstrated the correct procedures when pulled over or stopped by police. The video showed how gesturing wildly or acting belligerently could escalate the situation.

After questioning students on their rights, they found that many did not know when they could refuse searches or refuse to talk to police. Most thought that when an officer asked them to stop and talk or to let them search their body, car or property that they had no choice. That is not the case.

Although refusing could make things tense, it was important to say no using quiet tones and by exhibiting calm body language. Students were told that even when police seemed to act unfairly or rude, they needed to always keep in mind that the job was highly stressful and complicated which put these officer’s lives on the line every day.

“It is your actions that can determine the outcome of each situation no matter how the police act,” Hart said. “Always stay calm and speak in quiet, polite tones. We just want you to be safe and get home.”

This is the second seminar this year at the GYAC to have students learn from officers and also become more comfortable with local Law Enforcement Officers.



Sebastian Police Department officer Donald Hart and retired Indian River County deputy Leroy Smith talk to the Gifford Youth Achievement Center students about dealing with the police. CHRISTINA TASCAN

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