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## 132 YEARS OF WALNUT ST. SYNAGOGUE



PHOTO: DARLENE DEVITA

CHELSEA – Architecture scholar Sam Gruber discusses the historic Walnut Street Synagogue at its Founders Day festivities on Sept. 17. See next page.

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PHOTO: DARLENE DEVITA

The sanctuary of the Walnut St. Synagogue on Founders' Day



PHOTO: DARLENE DEVITA

Founders' Day participants enjoy the Walnut St. Synagogue's historical exhibits

# Walnut St. Synagogue celebrates 132 years with Founders' Day

By Carol Clingan

Special to *The Advocate*

CHELSEA – The venerable old building rang with the excited chatter of people who hadn't seen each other for a long time. The glorious sanctuary, a famous Sam Katz ark as its centerpiece, was filled with more people than in recent memory. The entire middle floor was filled with artifacts and objects from this synagogue and many others that have closed over the years.

On Sunday, Sept. 17, more than 250 people gathered to celebrate the 132-year-old Walnut Street Synagogue. In addition to various municipal and organizational partners, the core of the group was descendants of the men – and they were men – who founded the congregation. Through genealogical research, they had been identified and

received packets of documents about their ancestors.

Rabbi Moshe Liberow remembered leading High Holyday services a few years ago. The worshippers were scattered around the sanctuary, which struck him as odd until he was told that they were sitting in the seats, many of them still marked in bronze, where their grandparents sat. That spirit of belonging and connection is what brought 62 descendants from 12 states, ranging in age from 12 to 90, to remember their predecessors and pledge to continue their legacy.

While the tone of the day was nostalgic, as attendees and speakers shared their memories, the focus was firmly on the future. President Ed Medros led the program and introduced the two major speakers: Sam Gruber, an internationally known scholar of synagogue architecture; and Norman

Finkelstein, a homegrown student of local Jewish history. Both speakers presented context for the story of the synagogue and made the case for preserving and reviving the National Historic Register site.

The first annual Herb Kupersmith Hineini award was presented to its namesake for all he has done over the years to sustain the congregation. Another lifelong member, Harold Mindel, shared his moving memories of life at the synagogue. Finally, songwriter Sheldon Young sang a song written specially for the occasion.

Looking forward, Medros presented a vision of a historic building that would serve as the home of not only worship space but also cultural activities and a museum of local Judaica. Plans for this are in the early stage, but the Founders' Day event was the launch of a campaign to restore and revitalize the building.

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