

Renewal of Congregation Agudas Achim's Chevra Kadisha

In November 2010, I joined Congregation Agudas Achim's (CAA) *Chevra Kadisha*, and two years later was appointed by Danny Fleshman, the chairman of the congregation's cemetery committee and Rosh of the men's *Chevra*, to be his assistant. When Danny died suddenly in February 2014, I became chairman of the committee and Rosh of the *Chevra*. Although I had participated in several *Taharas* since joining the *Chevra*, I was aware that my knowledge was limited and that my men's *Chevra* was small (seven members), and aging.

Shortly after Danny's death, Joe Steinberg, the immediate past president of CAA, saw something online about the Gamliel Institute's North American Conference to be held in Miami that year in March. With my rabbi's support, I attended the conference, and returned to Austin armed with a store of knowledge and a plan for reinvigorating both the men's and the women's *Chevras*.

On June 19, 2014, I conducted the initial recruitment/orientation program for CAA *Chevra Kadisha*. My rabbi, Neil Blumofe, and I selected 23 men and 22 women to send personal letters to, inviting them to the session. Our hope was that about half of the people would actually attend. In fact, we had 25 attendees, nine of whom were current members to the *Chevra*. To my surprise 13 of the women we invited attended, but not one of the men! Instead, three men attended because their wives attended and wanted their husbands to be there with them. Of those 16 attendees (13 women and 3 men), all volunteered to join the *Chevra*. As a result we have 26 women and 16 men in the *Chevras*.

Although Rabbi Blumofe and I initially planned to conduct another recruitment program after the High Holy Days, we changed focus after we convinced K'vod v'Nachum to hold the 13th North American Gamliel Conference at CAA on February 2015. The concentration now is on encouraging everyone on Gail Tosto's community *Shmira* list (which has over 250 members) to attend the conference and consider joining their congregation's *Chevra Kadisha*.

Nevertheless, our plan is to continue recruitment and training for CAA's *Chevra Kadisha* with an annual program to be conducted after High Holy Days every year. We will also use the annual community 7 Adar banquet to encourage *Shomrim* to join the various *Chevra Kadishas* in Austin.