

For Immediate Release
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Reclaimed Wood Lets Media Congregation Build Eco-Friendly Gaga Court



Hebrew School teacher Alex Dresner and students enjoy Congregation Beth Israel's new, eco-friendly gaga court. (photo by Mark Cary)

When Media, PA-based Congregation Beth Israel asked for an eco-friendly alternative to pressure treated lumber, the answer was waiting in the wood yard at Manayunk Timber.

Beth Israel was ready to build a wood-sided court for gaga, a dodgeball-like game imported from Israel. But pressure treated lumber can leach harmful chemicals into the soil, while untreated lumber would soon need to be replaced. Years of planning and fund-raising were at stake.

Connections from his family woodworking business led Beth Israel member Andy Bennett to Manayunk Timber, which sells wood salvaged from 19th century Philadelphia buildings and from trees recently downed by storms or during construction. The yard at 5100 Umbria Street in Philadelphia held a stock of black locust, a native hardwood so naturally durable it is traditionally

used for fence posts and railings. Manayunk Timber prepared more than a half-ton of wood for Beth Israel, providing a chemical-free, locally-sourced solution that will withstand years of fierce gaga competition.

“The options at the time were white oak or black locust,” said Bennett. “I chose the black locust because of the available log thickness and the attractive grain of the wood. When you buy pressure treated wood from the lumber yard the cost savings is about 1/3 but the return on investment is priceless when going green. Other options of environmentally friendly wood would have cost about 25% more. Not only do you get a more environmentally friendly option but the wood is much harder, the grain is prettier, and you get a full thickness of 1 1/2". The 1 1/2" lumber at the local lumber yard is really only 1 1/4" thick.”

“Steve [Ebner, the owner] at Manayunk Timber was great at helping to plan the quantity of wood needed and the sizes the trees would yield,” said Bennett. “This helped us plan the actual size of the court. They cut the wood to size, to the thickness needed, and planed the faces to a usable tolerance.”

Manayunk Timber converts high quality, old growth timber into custom lumber for restoration, renovation, wood working, and new construction. The company also produces timber frame buildings and custom furniture. Offerings include pieces made from historic beer tanks of old growth tidewater red cypress, white cedar, and redwood salvaged in 1985 from Ortlieb’s and Schmidt’s breweries.

Because it harvests local wood, Manayunk Timber uses very little energy in transporting the raw material to its yard and turning it into unique, beautiful lumber with minimal waste. The company has operated since 1984 and is Philadelphia’s only saw mill offering exclusively sustainable lumber.

“We were delighted to find a chemical-free wood that met our needs and was beautiful as well,” said Helene Cohen, the principal of the Hebrew School. “Using reclaimed lumber from a local mill ensured the project had the minimum environmental impact, making the gaga court an object lesson in how quality and sustainability can go hand-in-hand.”

The gaga court is part of Beth Israel’s continuing commitment to environmental responsibility. Other projects have included a major renovation of the synagogue’s heating system, more efficient lighting systems, expanded recycling, participation in the interfaith teen program Walking the Walk, and incorporation of environmental themes in community action, education and religious programs. Beth Israel has recently joined GreenFaith, an interfaith program for environmental leadership that will touch all aspects of the congregation and its membership.

Congregation Beth Israel is the second oldest congregation in Delaware County and the oldest Reconstructionist congregation in the Philadelphia metropolitan area. It moved to its present location at 542 South New Middletown Road in 1997. For more information, visit www.bethisraelmedia.org.

For more information about Manayunk Timber, visit www.manayunktimber.com, email phillypine@aol.com, or call (215) 834-4299.