

# U.C. bayit has new paint, new roof — new management

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Of the Bulletin Staff

A group of Jewish community activists has forced a non-profit corporation and taken over a well-known student residence — the Berkeley Bayit — from the Union of American Hebrew Congregations.

The UAHC will continue to provide programming and support, but Berkeley Bayit Inc. will own and manage the property at 19 Hillside Court, renovate it and take on its \$210,000 mortgage.

"The students are the reason for what we're doing," says Leonard A. Cohn, president of Berkeley Bayit Inc. "They're our inspiration to keep the bayit [house] going."

Rabbi Morris M. Hershman, director of UAHC's Northern California Council, agrees that the new corporation means a bright future for the Reform residence.

Noting that of all the Reform houses founded on campuses throughout the country, the Berkeley Bayit "is the only one that has continued uninterrupted for 30 years," he believes it is because "the property remained constant."

Other houses were rented by the student-residents, he explains, and since student populations turn over very quickly, they tended to be very unstable.

"Because of the vision of community leaders 10 years ago, this property was secured. They purchased it, presented it to the

UAHC, and now the UAHC has gotten it back."

Cohn, a UAHC national board member and past president of the Northern California Council, was one of those original leaders. He says he first got involved because his son Barry, who back then was a junior at U.C. Berkeley, was interested in an intense Jewish living experience.

The rewards have been greater than expected. Cohn's son — like many Bayit alumni — went on to serve the Jewish community, first with the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith and then, until a year ago, with the Jewish Community Relations Council.

Not only that, his future wife also lived at the Berkeley Bayit.

"They've been married four years and we now have a grandchild," Leonard Cohn reports, adding that Debbie Cohn currently is associate director of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee.

One member of the new BBI board, attorney Karen Goldberg, also is one of the original Berkeley Bayit graduates. The other board members are Aaron Gersberg, Tom Lowenstein, James Sammel and Shirley Bertak.

Their first task, which already has begun, is to institute a two-pronged fund-raising effort — fix the mortgage and the renovations.

"We've raised about \$30,000 for renovations," says Cohn, who can be reached with tax-deductible donations at his home at 376-5443. And "we're just getting ready to kick off the second part



Photo by Mike Hershman

Leonard Cohn stands outside Berkeley Bayit on Hillside Court.

of the fund raising, to retire the mortgage."

Meanwhile, a \$32,500 grant from the Koret Foundation has

enabled the new non-profit corporation to begin work on the historic building even while it attempts to match that sum.

That work includes rewiring, a new roof and new paint on the Julia Morgan-designed house, which was built in 1907 and, according to Hershman, is a registered historic landmark.

Despite all his attention to the physical structure, Cohn is very clear that the priority is content.

"The real strength is what goes on there from a programming point of view," he says. "There are all kinds of functions." For example, the students have an open Shabbat once a month.

Hershman notes that the building's large living room, dining room and vestibule make it possible to accommodate a large number of people.

"They might have a havdalah or an ice cream social, lectures, programs and discussions," he says. "Some months ago, 30 or so Jewish students and an equal number of Armenian students discussed genocide issues that were before Congress at that time. Things like that happen all the time at the bayit."

The students determine the programming, he says, and "the UAHC implements, supervises and supports it. The program at the bayit is intended to provide a connection to the Jewish community [and] enrichment for the students. It's a very open, stimulating intellectual environment."

As for religious practice, again the students decide. For example, since the beginning, Hershman reports, the residents have kept a kosher house so that all Jewish students can be welcomed there.