

Hanukkah lights up holiday season

History inspires 8-day celebration

BY SARAH BAKER
Senior staff writer

“*(The Jewish religion) survived overwhelming odds.*”

STANLEY M. ROSENBAUM
rabbi

Most students will hang colored lights and decorate a pine tree this season.

But others will celebrate a different religious holiday – and celebrate it well.

Hanukkah, the Jewish Festival of Lights, calls for eight days of vibrant celebration in late December.

The holiday, which is celebrated worldwide, observes the victory of the Macabees over the Greek tyrant Antiochus more than 2,000 years ago.

During that period, the Greeks were attempting to Hellenize the world by imposing their culture, language and tradition on everyone in Jerusalem.

Part of the Jews assimilated to the Hellenistic culture, but many of them refused to worship the pagan idols of the Syrians.

Some of the Jews fled from the country and found their Holy Temple defiled and decorated with pagan idols upon their return.

A war between the Jews and the Greeks ensued, and the Jews were victorious, ending the first recorded religious war.

The rededication of the temple by the Macabees followed, and the celebration of Hanukkah is held in honor of the Jewish victory.

But the celebration means more, according to Rabbi Stanley M.

Rosenbaum from Congregation B’Nai Jeshurun-South Street Temple.

“(The religion) survived overwhelming odds,” Rosenbaum said. “The battle was one that kept both the heart and soul Jewish.”

Although the number of Jews in Lincoln is small, between 800 and 1,000, the community still puts time and thought into its traditional celebration of the season.

Within the small community lie distinct differences in belief.

Jean Cahan, interim director of Judaic studies at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, said two Jewish communities are represented in the area: the conservative Jews and the reform Jews.

“They have differences on how they relate to tradition,” Cahan said.

She said the conservative Jews conduct most of their religious syna-

Jewish student group proposed at UNL

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Most everyone likes to go home for the holidays.

But not all college students can find the means to be with their family during the season.

In most cases, a group of peers or friends from the community or college help to make the season a little less lonely.

But that isn’t the case for many Jewish students at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

Jean Cahan, interim director of Judaic studies at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, said many Jewish students on campus live far from

home and aren’t able to spend the holidays with their families, which is the traditional way Jews celebrate the eight-day Hanukkah holiday.

No active Jewish organizations exist on campus to get students together to celebrate, Cahan said.

As a result, she is working to start such a group, in part to help Jewish students celebrate the holiday season.

“The group will give students a chance to celebrate with other Jews when they are far from home,” Cahan said. “There was a group, but it hasn’t been active for some time. I’d really like to revive it.”

Cahan estimated there are only about 50 practicing Jewish students on campus. One of those students recently approached her about start-

ing a Jewish youth group, also called a Hillel group, at UNL.

“A lot of campuses have groups like this,” she said. “The group would do secular activities together, but also would celebrate Jewish holidays together.”

Although the group has not officially been formed, Cahan encouraged interested students to attend an upcoming event that will relate to the Jewish community.

Jeffery Spinner, a UNL political science professor, will give a lecture on social justice Dec. 8 at 7:30 p.m. in the Great Plains Art Gallery.

For more information on becoming a part of the Hillel group, or about the upcoming speaker, call Cahan at (402) 472-2346.

gogue service in Hebrew.

The reform Jews incorporate more music and lead their services in English with touches of Hebrew throughout.

The two groups also differ on whether a child of a Jewish father and non-Jewish mother is recognized as Jewish. Reform Jews accept the child as Jewish, whereas conservative Jews recognize only matrilineal descent.

The reform Jews are also open to Jews marrying non-Jews. Conservative Jews are not.

Despite their differences, both groups observe many of the same

Hanukkah traditions.

Rosenbaum said one staple is the traditional game of dreidel, which is played by spinning a four-sided top marked with Hebrew letters. Both groups also consume many traditional foods and drinks, with some minor variations. Both light one candle on the menorah for each of Hanukkah’s eight days.

He said Hanukkah is traditionally recognized as one of the less important holidays in Judaism, but because of its close proximity to Christmas, it has become associated with gift giving and has grown in importance.

“Gifts are part of the way the holiday has been sociologically adapted,” Rosenbaum said. “The lighting of the menorah and family getting together for meals are the traditions, although those have spilled over.”

Cahan also said the essential Hanukkah traditions have been preserved, but the festival has a greater meaning.

“This is very much, in addition to the religious, a political holiday that celebrates the rights of minorities to have their own forms of expression and not to be oppressed,” she said. “It recognizes the freedom of religion.”

Jingle this.

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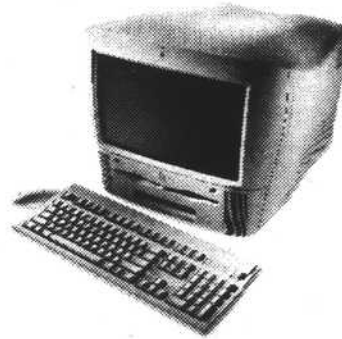
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