

MAGGIE AND SHERRY'S GUIDE TO B'NAI MITZVAH PLANNING

Although Sherry and I had experience planning weddings and other parties, neither of us had ever planned a *bar/bat mitzvah*. So the two of us buddied up and helped each other through our daughters' *b'not mitzvah* providing each other with lots of help and emotional support. We each made some mistakes, but plenty of successes, and we thought I would be a good idea to write down some of our "helpful hints" for the next batch of *b'nai mitzvah* parents.



RULE #1: Do not wait until the last minute to take care of anything you can do in advance. Your last minutes will be filled with more things than you can imagine.

RULE #2: Get yourself a notebook and keep it with you at all times. If you see something or hear of something that gives you an idea, write it down, along with the source and the price.

To help you plan, the following is a guide for foods commonly served at a Kehillat Israel kiddush following a *b'nai mitzvah* plus some ideas about setting up, cleaning up, and closing up, as well as some party information. NOTE: The food quantities are based on experience serving 120 people, so adjust quantities as needed.

You can have the Kiddush catered, or you can do it yourself—**But with help.**

FOOD

- Don't forget: KI has a dairy kitchen so no meat or poultry products.

- Eight dozen bagels. Ask to have them sliced. The plain, poppy seed, onion, and sesame seed varieties seem to be most popular. Raisin or sweet bagels don't go well with tuna or lox. Whose bagels? Big Apple or Bruegger's are about the only places and they don't deliver, so you will have to pick them up Saturday morning.
- Five to six pounds of cream cheese. Gail Richmond used nine pounds., but she mixed them into spreads—three pounds mixed with scallions, three pounds mixed with salmon, and three pounds plain. But if you just cut it into blocks, five pounds should be plenty.
- Four to five pounds of lox. Sam's Club has the best prices, or you can get it from Trader Joes. Kroger in Okemos (I don't know about the others) carries lox trimmings cheap, but they are not so pretty.
- Lox Trays—Romaine lettuce leaves sliced cucumbers, red onion, tomatoes (about 10 total), and black olives.
- Tuna Salad—two of the giant cans from Sam's or Gordon's and mayonnaise to mix with it. Also some chopped celery and onion if you like.
- Egg Salad—use about three to four dozen eggs. A food processor makes it quick.
- Salad or else veggies and dip—three pounds of baby carrots, two small containers of cherry tomatoes, one bunch of celery, and one long cucumber (plus broccoli and/or cauliflower if you like it). This will be plenty. One standard container of dip is enough.
- Three to four pounds of sliced cheese.
- Large jar of pickled or creamed herring is sufficient (or none at all).
- Kugels—two or three of them, in 9 x 13 pans. I had 6 of them, and plenty left over.
- Some people add quiches or a variety of salads.

- Fruit Plate—two cantaloupes, two pineapples, two to three quarts of strawberries, and three to four pounds of grapes is plenty.
- Desserts—four or five. Popular are cheesecake, carrot cake, brownies (4 or 5 dozen), and cookies (5 or 6 dozen). You may want to ask the parents of the other *b'nai mitzvah* kids to bring desserts.
- Don't forget challah, wine, and grape juice (plus the little cups to put it in—from Gordon's Food Service).
- Drinks—Ten 2-liter bottles of pop, and five or six bottles of juice. Put out a couple of pitchers of ice water and a couple bowls of ice cubes. Bring in bags of ice depending on the weather.
- Coffee/Tea—only small amounts are usually taken, but in cold weather this might be more popular. Bring your own coffee and tea as well as cream and sugar.

SERVING

- Paper plates—both large (for the meal) and small (for desserts), cups, napkins, plasticware (remember extra forks for dessert). Sam's Club or Gordon's is a good place to purchase these items. (NOTE: We do not use KI's paper and plastic supplies for *b'nai mitzvah*.)
- Be sure to bring some food storage bags and containers for leftovers. It's a nice gesture to offer some of your leftovers to whoever may be helping in the kitchen
- There are eight green table cloths and a number of white ones under the cabinet to the left of the kitchen sink. If you do use them, you need to take them home to launder them and bring them back pronto. Dish towels, too. You should check in advance to make sure they are at the KI kitchen. You can also bring in your own table cloths.

- It is *essential* to recruit people to help prepare and serve food. Kugels, tuna and egg salads, and desserts can all be made by you or others, as well as veggie trays and lox trays, and brought in the morning of the event.
- You can hire someone to help with serving and clean-up at the synagogue. Angela Rynicki has done this several times now (phone 203-8103). She is very capable, but one person cannot do it all. She will need someone to help. We paid Angela \$15/hour plus a tip. She can arrange for a helper.
- Someone needs to pour the wine and juice into the little cups. Someone will also need to bring a kiddush cup of wine and challah into the sanctuary at the end of the service. Two more people need to pass out the little cups of wine and juice as the congregation leaves the sanctuary.
- Ask someone to watch the trash cans and to empty them before they get too full. This means taking out the trash can plastic liner, tying a knot in it, putting a fresh bag into the can, and schlepping the full bags to one of the dumpster bins.
- You should plan to come to KI on Friday to put out tablecloths and flowers in the social hall and place prayers books on every other chair in the sanctuary. Friday night service attendees sometimes place the books back in the cupboard, so leave a note for the service leader to remind people to leave the books out. You can bring your food, drinks, and paper products to KI before Saturday as well, but make sure your name is on them.
- If the weather is warm and you think people might eat outside, check to see if the picnic tables and benches as well as the white plastic chairs need cleaning.
- *Kippot* need to be ordered about two months in advance. There are many places on the Internet to order them (such as A-1 Skullcap), and some have more colors/styles than others. Most require a minimum of five dozen which is plenty. Don't put them out until Saturday morning.
- Programs—try to find some from previous *b'nai mitzvah* to use as a guide. Start working on this as soon as you decide who will be doing what

during the service. You don't want to be running to Kinko's at the last minute! Don't put the programs out until Saturday morning. Remember, there may be a service on Friday night, so the sanctuary might be in use then.

- Talk with Lori W. about two weeks prior to the big day about how you want the social hall set up. There are several, mostly similar floor plans already drawn up. They usually have three long tables set up with ten chairs each for people to sit. Arrange the food tables so that there are two lines. A "T-shape" by the windows works well. You can set up the tables in front of the kitchen for desserts. KI has several more tables now and chairs you can set up if you want additional seating in the social hall.
- Opening and Closing—make sure you know who will open the building and who will lock it up for you. Also make sure all the windows are closed. Extra chairs and tables should be put back in the storage room before you leave. Don't forget to empty and unplug the coffee maker.
- Most people have some sort of flower arrangement in the sanctuary. KI has plant stands. People usually put one plant on either side of the *bima*. Smith Floral is not far from KI and has supported KI by purchasing ads in the Purim Spiel booklet.
- Make sure you have someone take pictures at the rehearsal since cameras *are not permitted* during the service (or at any time at KI on Shabbat).
- You should make arrangements for child care during the service if you expect young children.
- Don't forget to ask a couple of people to serve as greeters to welcome and help people unfamiliar with KI.
- If a large crowd is expected you may want someone to direct traffic/parking.

PARTY

- www.party411.com has a forum for *b'nei mitzvah* planning for the truly obsessed. It will make you glad you live here and not out East! Actually, there is a wealth of different websites that address *b'nei mitzvah* planning. Just do an Internet search.
- Location—almost any place can work, but unless it is at your house you will need to reserve well in advance. Some people choose the date of their *b'nei mitzvah* in part based on the availability of their preferred party location. Sherry and I both used the Hannah Community Center in East Lansing, and we highly recommend it.
- Invitations—printing your own seems to be very popular, but you can use www.invitationsbydeborah.com. We didn't use her, but she has a good discount on all the books.
- If you are not sure whether or not to invite someone—go ahead and invite them. If you don't, you will probably regret it later. You can expect about 20% regrets. And while Lori will print a general invitation in the newsletter to all congregants, most folks will not come unless they receive a written invitation.
- We (Maggie & Sherry) each have a collection of water carafes (purchased at a dollar store). Let us know if you would like to borrow them for your party tables.
- If you want a DJ for the party, Dave Wyatt with “For a Song & Dance” has a tape of Israeli dance music, and Robin Willner has worked with him to teach Israeli dancing. Neil Alexander of Ann Arbor is excellent, but more expensive than a local DJ (and WAY more expensive if you want his entire Klezmer Fusion Band). Neil is so good, though, that in my opinion he is worth the cost. Neil has a full DJ service but also sings (he has a beautiful voice) and plays the guitar and teaches Israeli dancing. Oh, and for his day job, he's a physician.

- Sohn's Linens rents plain, white, round tablecloths for \$2.75 each. Colored cloth napkins (opened flat) or placemats in the center of each table with flowers or a plant make an easy and inexpensive centerpiece.
- Have a wonderful time planning this special day. It will be over before you know it. If you have questions not answered in this guide, you can ask—email is easiest.

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- Other helpful websites

<http://www.1-800-dreidel.com/>

<http://www.zionjudaica.com>

<http://www.a-zara.com>

<http://www.miriamjudaica.com>

Crafts & fabrics

All sorts of things

Kippot and *tallitot* from Israel

Judaica Supplies