

Synagogue restoration not free

BY VICTOR G. MIMONI

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It may be the Free Synagogue of Flushing, but the major restoration project to preserve the architectural masterpiece certainly isn't – the congregation has to raise about \$500,000.

That's considered the minimum required to make structural repairs to the 1927 Neo-Classical Revival structure at the corner of Kissena Boulevard and Sanford Avenue in downtown Flushing.

The impressive temple features massive portico supported by four ionic pillars topped by a pediment inscribed with the words of Isaiah, "For mine house shall be called a house of prayer for all people."



Photo Courtesy Free Synagogue of Flushing. Hand-crafted stained glass windows from Czechoslovakia are threatened and the congregation of the Free Synagogue of Flushing is asking for help in the renovation of the Temple, now on the State and National Registers of Historic Places.

The sanctuary is punctuated by green marble pilasters and stained glass windows crafted in Czechoslovakia. Over it, a broad dome features a stained glass window in the oculus, designed around a Star of David.

Over the years, leaks in the roof and age threatened the windows, and the structure itself. "There's no telling what problems may be uncovered during the work," said a spokesperson, adding "\$500,000 is a conservative estimate."

The Synagogue was added to the State Register of Historic Places this summer and to the National Register of Historic Places in October. The listings make the temple eligible for various public preservation programs and services, including a number of grants.

Synagogue officials plan to apply to several organizations for funding, but Board members fear it may not be enough. The synagogue hopes to raise most of the money on its own, and officials say it could take up to three years.

"This work is critical if we are to preserve the cultural legacy of Free Synagogue," said Allan Goldberg, first vice president and a member of the congregation for the past 22 years. "From an architectural standpoint, our synagogue is a national treasure, and it would be tragic to lose the magnificent stained glass windows," he said.

"A contractor has already started to remove the windows, and they are being stored in Philadelphia, where an expert in stained glass restoration will embark on the painstaking task," the spokesperson said.

Founded in 1917, the congregation is an early example of the "Free Synagogue" movement and has a history of offering events, usually free, open to the entire community.

Interfaith dialogue breakfasts, featuring Muslim, Hindu and Sikh speakers; an interfaith choral festival; the temple's renowned "Judas Maccabaeus" Chanukah concert and classes in Judaism aim to foster understanding among different religious groups, mark their calendar.

Requests for pledges have been sent to the congregation. Synagogue officials are also planning fund-raising events and are hoping the general community will support their efforts.

For more information, call 718-961-0030 or visit www.freesynagogue.org.