



Hillel: The Foundation for Jewish Campus Life

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Hillel at Virginia Tech Takes First Steps Toward Building “Extreme Green” Hillel Facility *Jewish Student Architects To Lead The Project*

(November 6, 2007 • Blacksburg, VA) Hillel at Virginia Tech (VT) has purchased nearly two acres of land directly across the street from campus. Preliminary plans are underway to build a Hillel facility on the property which, ideally, will be designed by Jewish students aspiring to be professional architects.

“My hope is that our Jewish students will be able to make a senior thesis out of this project,” says Hillel Executive Director Sue Kurtz.

Currently, VT Hillel does not have its own space anywhere on campus. The executive director works out of her home and students gather in a Multi-Cultural Center which is shared with 500 other student groups on campus. Shabbat services are held off-campus at the Blacksburg Jewish Community Center.

A new gathering place, within walking distance, is now necessary to accommodate VT Hillel’s growing Jewish population. Kurtz reports that as many as 100 students are now participating in weekly Shabbat dinners and there are approximately 600 active Hillel students on campus.

Kurtz attributes the renewed interest in Jewish campus life to emergency funds, including a \$10,000 check from United Jewish Communities, which poured in following the April 16 tragedy. That money helped to fund community dinners where Jewish students came together to deal with their grief. The donations are also funding a visiting rabbi who comes to VT regularly to meet and counsel Hillel students.

“We realized there were far more Jewish students interested in Hillel than we’d known,” says Kurtz. “The generous donations allowed us to put on programming that welcomed the students in. Now, we’re ready for a space of our own.”

Kurtz, who lives nearby in an eco-friendly home made entirely of straw bale, says the new building will be “extreme green,” meaning it is designed to use fewer resources, more efficiently. “People hear that my house is eco-friendly and made of straw and they picture a shack,” explains Kurtz. “It’s far from that.”

Kurtz’s home, which she shares with her husband, son and daughter (a Junior at VT), is approximately 5,000 square feet. Yet it can be heated by a single match. Kurtz envisions the new Hillel facility will be similar in design, using solar panels for electricity, instantaneous hot water to reduce waste, and an efficient heating/cooling system.

Preliminary funding for VT Hillel’s new facility has come from late board member Malcom Rosenberg, Gralla Family Philanthropic and Lydia Marek.

For more information on the construction of Virginia Tech Hillel’s new house, contact Sue Kurtz at (540) 951-2060 or skurtz@hillel.org.

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