



TEMPLE BETH EL

Rabbi Carolyn Braun

January 12, 2016

To whom it may concern:

I am delighted to write this letter of reference for Cantor Jeff Warschauer.

First, some background. We are a congregation of approximately 300 families in Southern Maine. Like many congregations, we do not have the financial ability to support both a rabbi and a cantor; but we love music, lay participation and team work. In 2014, I created an internship program that would enable us to hire a cantorial or rabbinical student in their last year. Jeff was the best candidate by far and we offered him a position. His task was to come 18 times from October to May, to help build community, to bring innovation into our services, to teach, to participate in any lifecycle events that occurred on his visits, to learn aspects of the Cantorate that were not covered in cantorial school, and to be a team member of our staff.

Jeff met and exceeded our expectations. His warmth, excitement, talent and passion had a positive impact on people of all ages. Our older members, in particular, enjoyed speaking Yiddish with him and loved his easy and inclusive, welcoming nature. Kids and families were attracted and responsive to this funny, sensitive and talented cantor.

It is not easy to come into a community such as ours and make an impression on such a diverse group of people. Yet Jeff has mastered the art of bringing people of all ages, religions, levels of observance and levels of musical knowledge, together to learn, to pray and to make music. On Sundays, after Hebrew School, he would lead a "Jewish Music Jam." Among the 25 – 40 people participating, there were infants crawling on the floor, their slightly older siblings keeping time on sticks and drums, professional level musicians playing their instruments, and middle school and high school students playing their violins, flutes, clarinets and trumpets. Also in the circle were singers – some who could hold a note and others who could not. Jeff arranged the music so that all his musicians could succeed and after a couple of false starts, the room exploded with really beautiful sounds.

שירו לה' שיר חדש

Sing a new song to Adonai... - Psalm 96:1



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I especially remember the 94-year-old woman who would push her walker across the street to the Jam, open the seat of her walker, take out her tambourine and play along. She also once stunned the group when, with Jeff's encouragement, she sang "Somewhere Over the Rainbow" as Jeff accompanied her on guitar. It was a moment when the Divinity touched each one of us, and I believe it was Jeff's musical talent, intuition and soul that helped the moment to happen. Jeff has a tremendous talent of bringing people together.

We do not use musical instruments on Shabbat, but he was able to create a similar feeling on Shabbat. I particularly recall a Shabbat/Rosh Chodesh where he and his musical partner and spouse, Deborah Strauss, had us rocking in four-part harmony to the Hallel Psalms. I know we could not have achieved that spiritual high without Jeff.

As a teacher, Jeff's passion, knowledge and ability to articulate his lessons are impressive. We threw him in with kindergartners, and he was very successful. In terms of Divrei Torah, Jeff was so convincing (I don't remember which Parasha), that a couple of members in the congregation decided to step up their involvement and join the Board of Directors so that they would have a bigger impact on our Jewish community!

Jeff also has a pastoral side to his personality that makes him a sensitive and compassionate listener and responder. I often noticed the ease and sincerity that he displayed to each individual, allowing them their dignity and a path for success, even when he was approached "on the fly."

Had our financial situation been different, we would have retained Jeff as a valued member of our staff and the community. We were fortunate to have him for the year. I highly recommend Cantor Jeff Warschauer to your community.

Please feel free to contact me with any questions.

Very Truly Yours,

Rabbi Carolyn Braun
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Temple Beth El, Portland, Maine

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