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Chabad of Northbrook dedicates new Torah in memory of young local

Julie Chattler's lightweight Torah to help special-needs kids participate

by Danielle Perlin

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On July 21, a scribe at Lubavitch Chabad in Northbrook, 2095 Landwehr Road, honored more than 100 people with Hebrew letters during the dedication of the synagogue's new Torah.

"The scribe is the expert, so [he is] writing on [people's] behalf," said Rabbi Meir Moscovitz, who said the joyous ceremony begins with the scribe finishing the last words on the Torah. "Then, after we complete writing it, we have a little procession, bring the Torah into the sanctuary ... then we take out [the existing Torahs that we have] to greet the new Torah."

The Torah, made up of the first five books of Moses, is "the sacred and central part of Jewish faith and connects us to our past and to our future," said Rabbi Baruch Epstein, with Congregation Bais Menachem in Chicago and a Chabad-Lubavitch emissary to Illinois, who was at the dedication.

Moscovitz said the miniature, lightweight Torah was made in memory of Airman First Class Julie Marlene Chattler, niece of Rabbi David Feder and Esther Feder, members of Bais Menachem.

"Approximately 10 years ago, someone in the community dedicated a Sefer Torah [or a Torah scroll] in the memory of his sister, and I inquired as to why he did this. And I felt it would be very meaningful to do it for my niece," Esther Feder said. "She was 28 years old when she passed [and] had not been married [or] had children. When the men are reading from the Torah, it's as if these other souls now are connecting their soul, so it's a way of carrying on [Julie's] memory."

Northbrook resident Bonnie Chattler said her daughter, Julie, joined the U.S. Air Force at age 26 and "embraced" Judaism as an adult. She was bitten by a tick in Texas 12 years ago, and the infection then became encephalitis, which she died of.

This Torah in her memory was specially made for the elderly and special-needs children because Julie worked with special-needs children.

"It's a very emotional day for me. She was active in the Jewish community on both her base and the town she was living in," Bonnie Chattler said.

She said the base where Julie worked when she became ill named the family advocacy center after her.

"I find this to be a very fitting memorial to [Julie]," Bonnie Chattler said.

The Feders secured all the financing for the Torah, which was in the area of \$40,000.

"It's a hand-written scroll [of] 248 columns and requires a really high degree of craftsmanship," said Epstein. "One of the significant rules is every letter must be perfect. If one letter is imperfect, it has to be repaired before the Torah scroll can be used ... think about somebody writing something with a quill and ink, as it's been done for 4,000 years, on parchment, without benefit of a computer or even a simple eraser.

"Because [this Torah scroll] is so small, it makes it more complex."



Rabbi Meir Moscovitz (with black hat) and his congregation at the Lubavitch Chabad in Northbrook, 2095 Landwehr Road, crowds around the scribe as he writes in the last Hebrew letters of their new \$40,000 Torah scroll. *photo: Danielle Perlin/22nd Century Media.*

Epstein said while it costs "an enormous amount of money," the Torah scroll will "last forever if you take care of it."

"If you think about its eternal use, it's not as significant as people spending \$40,000 on a car in the last 10 years," said Epstein.

He also said standard Torahs can be too big for people to hold as they get older, so this Torah scroll will allow people to participate who might otherwise not be able to.

Feder said this event is "very exciting" for the whole family.

"We have [a program called] Friendship Circle, which works with special-needs children ... when the boys come to bar mitzvah age, they're going to be able to have a lightweight Torah to lift and carry," said Feder. "There's just a whole full circle connection [with Julie], which is very beautiful."