Dear Chai members;

On behalf of the Board of Directors of the Neve Shalom Synagogue and the Jewish community in Suriname, I wish you and your families a Happy and kosher Passover!!

Passover in Suriname

Preparing for Passover in North America, Europe, Israel or Australia is a simple task – we go to our supermarket and buy the Matzot and Kosher wine (“the products”) we need. In Suriname, those products have to be imported from the USA. The products then have to be shipped by sea to Suriname, cleared with customs and delivered to the community on time, and that is not an easy task as so many uncertainties are involved. When the products arrive on time it is a relief for all.

Unfortunately, Suriname is in the midst of an economic crisis where in the last 2 years inflation was 87% and the local currency has dropped in value by 92% against the US dollar, making imports extremely expensive. In addition, the Suriname government restricts the use of foreign currencies is making the importing the products for the Passover Seder a real challenge.

We are so fortunate to have a couple of Chai members from the US and Canada who donated the funds to enable the community to import the products this year hassle free. Thank you so much for your generosity!

As always, we will report in our next newsletter on our community Seder.

Celebrating Sukkot, Hannukah and Purim

Sukkot was celebrated in our beautiful community Sukkah, attached to the synagogue.
The 2017 Sukkot service at the Neve Shalom

During Hanukah we lit the candles every night in many Menorahs

Our Purim celebration was a real success this year.
We gathered at the synagogue grounds, young and old, all dressed with costumes and after reading the Megilah we boarded a bus that took us on a magical tour around the city of Paramaribo. What a lovely experience!

The 2017 Purim party

Mapping the Jodensavanne (Jewish Savannah)

Since mid-September 2017 the Jodensavanne Foundation has had at its disposal an Akula 9000C Ground Penetrating Radar (GPR) for archaeological research. This instrument was financed by the Netherlands Funds-in-Trust at UNESCO as part of the project “Preparatory support for Jodensavanne, Suriname (Shared Heritage)”.

The Jodensavanne Foundation has been preparing for many years for the nomination to be inscribed on UNESCO’s World Heritage List. In order to increase the likelihood of becoming a World Heritage site, the foundation has to enhance the site management capabilities and to strengthen its draft nomination dossier.

The GPR collecting data near the remains of the Bracha Ve Shalom (“Blessing and Peace”) synagogue

Research needs to be intensified to collect more information in order to better understand the structure of the site. For instance, the mikvah’s as well as the original street plan and other unknown remnants of the settlement have yet to be discovered and thus confirming historical descriptions of the site.

A GPR is a geophysical instrument that uses radar pulses to image the subsurface. It is a non-destructive method that is used in geophysics to collect, record and analyze information about the earth’s subsurface. GPR is commonly used by archaeologists around the world.

On November 21, 2017 the GPR was tested at the presumed former 17th and 18th military cemetery of Fort Zeelandia in Paramaribo and on February 24, 2018 the GPR was used for the first time in the Jodensavanne. A grid was set out near the ruins of the Bracha Ve Salom synagogue along which data was collected.
The survey team will continue to work in the coming months in cooperation with archaeologist Irene Meulenberg of the Archaeological Service of Suriname. Once subsurface structures are identified by the GPR, targeted excavations can be done to reveal the structures adding information about the former Jewish settlement and its community, which then can be used for educational and/or tourism purposes. By knowing where new structures are they can be better preserved and protected.

A beautiful photography book about the history of the Jews of the Caribbean

Wyatt Gallery (a person not a place) is a US photographer who published the photography book: *Jewish Treasures of The Caribbean*. The book captures the little-known history of the Sephardic Jews of the Caribbean, as seen through the remaining historic sites in Barbados, Curaçao, Jamaica, Nevis, St. Croix, St. Thomas, St. Eustatius, and Suriname.
Relocated Sephardic gravestones in the Neve Shalom synagogue yard

These Jewish communities date back to the early 1600’s and are home to the oldest synagogues and Jewish cemeteries in the Western hemisphere. These modern day treasures beautifully exemplify the strength of the Jewish people as well as the surprisingly diverse cultural history of the Caribbean.

Now facing extinction, the Sephardic Jewish communities of the Caribbean were once so strong and influential that they helped fuel the success of the American Revolution, and finance the first synagogues in the United States, located in New York City and Rhode Island.

Once home to thousands of Sephardic Jews, these historic communities are now facing extinction. Only 5 synagogues remain and almost half of the original cemeteries are either falling apart, or have been lost to natural disasters, vandalism, pollution, and the elements of time. The few historic landmarks still in use, such as our Neve Shalom synagogue, are little known gems of the Caribbean and invaluable landmarks in the Jewish history of survival.

Through these photographs we witness the legacy of Judaism and a rarely explored facet of Caribbean history.

Please visit his book website to see the magnificent photos in a large format, and if you wish to purchase the book, you’ll support Wyatt with his other interesting projects.

http://www.jewishtreasuresofthecaribbean.com/

Final Comments

I’d like to thank the Chai members that helped us making the 2018 Passover Seder a special one;

A very special thank you to Jacob Wayne who donated $180 from his Bar Mitzvah money to the community. Jacob and his parents have never been to Suriname before but we feel that we already know them for a long time;

To the Jodensavanne Foundation for the article and photos;

To Wyatt Gallery who allowed us to use some of his beautiful photos in this edition;

To Joan Duym, Kim Jungermann and other friends for the lovely Purim photos.

To Lilly Duym for her on-going support for the Chai membership program and to Norma
Hutchison-Steinberg for her editing this newsletter.

Please let me know if you have any comments, suggestions or ideas on how to make this newsletter better. Please feel free to contact me at: jks1111@rogers.com

Jacob Steinberg