

Kiever aiming to become a 'Jewish hub of activity'

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The First Russian Congregation of Rodfei Sholem Anshei Kiev – known to most as simply the Kiever Shul – is in the midst of a revitalization campaign that encompasses both its spiritual and physical aspects.

At the end of July, Rabbi Eli Cohen began working as the downtown Toronto shul's first full-time rabbi in recent memory. And on Sept. 15, the synagogue, in association with the Kensington Market Jazz Festival, will host an event called Fiddlers for the Roof to raise money for repairs to the historic building.

Adam Cohen, president of the Kiever, said it's important to keep all parts of the shul up to date and appealing "to communicate to people that the Kiever synagogue is alive and well and open for business and vibrant."

"We have an iconic heritage building that needs constant care and maintenance. But we're not just a historical landmark. We're a functioning congregation. We have regular services, we have regular activities," he added. "And so, we really wanted to have this public face both for the Jewish community, but also in partnership with the Kensington Market Jazz Festival to be part of the local community that we're such an important part of."

The event will consist of four fiddling acts playing in a tent in front of the shul, alternating with three acts inside the shul



A performance in the Kiever during last year's Kensington Market Jazz Festival. DAVID MOYAL PHOTO

that are part of the jazz festival. Adam Cohen said a lot of the fundraising has come through people sponsoring individual fiddlers. He added that entrepreneur Miles Nadal recently agreed to be a benefactor for the shul's revitalization campaign, though he declined to disclose the amount Nadal would donate.

The first fiddling act, starting at 11 a.m., will be Anne Lederman and Ian Bell's band Muddy York. Lederman, with her musical connections through her band and association with the Ashkenaz Festival, is also the artistic director for the fiddlers portion of the event.

Aside from Muddy York, the fiddling tent will also feature performances by Kousha

Nakhaei and Ava Rostamian, who will play traditional Iranian music with a focus on Jewish musicians at 12 p.m.; Mark and Marichka Marczyk, who are known for playing with Lemon Bucket Orchestra, Counting Sheep and Balaklava Blues, at 2 p.m.; and Swamperella, who play authentic cajun and zydeco tunes, at 4 p.m.

Inside the shul, Beyond the Pale will perform their blend of klezmer, Balkan and Romanian music at 1 p.m. Juno and Canadian Folk Music award-nominated Aviva Chernick will sing at 3 p.m., and the day of music ends with Broadway, a trio of Toronto singers, at 5 p.m.

"I think it's a beautiful idea to be able to use everything that's happening already in

that local area to help raise the profile of the shul and get more people interested in the shul," said Rabbi Cohen. "It's a great idea for fundraising and tapping into the music industry to promote the Kiever as a landmark in Toronto."

It's been a hectic beginning to Rabbi Cohen's tenure, but he said he's excited by what he's seen from the Kiever so far. He said it reminds him of Newtown Synagogue, the shul he presided over for 14 years in Sydney, Australia, which has "a similar crowd and similar vibe."

The Kiever "is a beautiful synagogue. It has heart, it has soul, and the people there are very committed to making sure that it survives into the future," Rabbi Cohen said. "It's not just something that they're looking to maintain as a museum. They're trying to reinvigorate it and revive it to bring back the life that it used to have. And so, that in itself was inspiring to me."

For Rabbi Cohen, events like Fiddlers for the Roof are just the beginning of the work he wants to do.

"There is so much untapped potential ... (and) an incredible opportunity to really increase the Jewish activity downtown. My idea is to have the Kiever become a real Jewish hub of activity, beyond just the services that we have, but also social activism, volunteering and things of that nature. You want to create this warm, welcoming and inclusive feeling for people. They can feel accepted and connected, even though they're downtown," he said. ■

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CORRECTION

An advertorial in the Canadian Jewish Life magazine published on Aug. 15 referred to Betty Rozendaal as a primary care doctor. In fact, the article should have called her a naturopathic doctor.

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