

Texas Jewish Post

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Youth group visits Dallas on a 22-city tour

By Quia Querisma

Nearly all of the seats were taken at the 8 p.m. Shabbat service at the John Thomas Community Center. What made the June 25 service special was not only the message, but also the visitors on the front row.

The travelers of Etgar 36 were guests of the gay and lesbian congre-

gation for the second year in a row. Twelve teens led by 15-year veteran youth leader, Billy Planer had already hop-scotched through landmark cities in the south on a voyage to uncover what it means to be Jewish in America. The stop in Dallas took the teens through the city's landmarks including Dealy

Plaza, the Sixth Floor Museum and the Conspiracy Museum. Friday night service at John Thomas became an accidental tradition.

Last year was the inaugural voyage for Etgar 36, an educational journey that takes young Jewish teens from all over the country on a road trip across 17 states. Etgar is

Hebrew for challenge, and over the course of 36 days the group will visit 22 cities including Denver, Philadelphia, New York City, Washington, D.C., Las Vegas and Los Angeles.

On their first visit to Dallas, the group stayed an extra day and decided to visit Congregation Beth El Binah. It was a landmark evening because it was the anniversary of the day gays and lesbians were acknowledged as citizens under the law. Congregation Vice President and Ritual Director Nancy Jessula-Clark admitted she was apprehensive about giving a sermon about that topic, but she realized it was those kinds of experiences that the teens were meant to have.

"The goal of the trip is not to tell them what to think, it's just to get

is exciting. She also shares her trip-mates' enthusiasm in soaking up history.

"I have never learned so much about civil rights in my entire life," said 17-year old Danielle Ladin of Cooper City, Fla. "I really feel like I know more about that now. And I also learned about the history of Rock & Roll and how it's influenced today's music so much."

Word of mouth seemed to be Planer's strongest form of promotion. Though he traveled to different cities and would advertise anywhere he was allowed to, the enthusiastic stories from last year's group sparked interest among friends and neighbors.

While in California Planer met 15-year old Daniel Riff from Palo

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Etgar 36 participants with members of Congregation Beth El Binah.

them to think," Planer said of the cross-country voyage.

Even though it's relatively early in the trip, there are already a lot of issues for the teens to think about. By the time they reached Dallas they had already visited the Rosa Parks Museum in Montgomery, Ala. and the Rock & Roll Museum in Memphis, Tenn.

In Dallas they met with Operation Rescue, a pro-life organization. Planer's group will also visit a pro-choice organization. In Denver, the teens will have the opportunity to meet with both the National Rifle Association and a gun control group.

"I've learned things that I would've never had an opportunity to learn," said Josh Dubin, a 15-year old from Asheville, N.C. "We've been meeting with really interesting people and there's so many opportunities still ahead of us."

For 14-year old Samantha Hynes of Nashville, Tenn., the voyage itself

Alto. Riff was wearing a Northwestern University shirt and Planer told him that Chicago was a destination on the trip. After hearing more of what Etgar 36 was about, Riff was convinced and decided to sign on.

Every Friday on the trip, Planer's group visits a local synagogue. He intentionally seeks out different branches to expose the teens to all faces of Judaism.

The group received a warm welcome in Dallas and the expected question and answer session was replaced by casual conversations over warm artichoke dip and soft drinks. Jessula-Clark is deeply moved by Planer's purpose with Etgar 36.

"Here are these kids who know what they'll see and the people who they'll be talking to, and they don't shrink from getting out there and understanding where we came from and where we can't ever go back to," she said.

JULY 28 - AUG. 8

WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN
JULY 28	JULY 29	JULY 30	JULY 31	AUG. 1
7:30 PM	7:30 PM*	7:30 PM	11:30 AM 3:30 PM	1:00 PM 5:00 PM

AUG. 11 - 15

WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN
AUG. 11	AUG. 12	AUG. 13	AUG. 14	AUG. 15
7:30 PM	7:30 PM†	7:30 PM	11:30 AM 3:30 PM	1:00 PM 5:00 PM*

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