

Bezodis hired as Shir Tikvah EA

By **ROCKNE ROLL**
The Jewish Review

One of Portland's most experienced synagogue administrators is back in the saddle.

JoAnn Bezodis, the administrator for the Oregon Board of Rabbis, is now also the Executive Administrator for Congregation Shir Tikvah in Northeast Portland. Bezodis takes over for outgoing Executive Director Ruthie Prasil.

"Rabbi Ariel Stone called me and asked me if I was in a position to be able to come help them out because they recently had quite a bit of office turnover," Bezodis said.

Rabbi Stone and Bezodis have previously worked together with the Board of Rabbis – one of Bezodis' primary jobs with OBR is managing the Introduction to Judaism class put on twice a year, which Rabbi Stone teaches a session of. It was this class where they first meet in 1997, which Bezodis took on her way to converting to Judaism.

"We both had dark hair back then," Bezodis said of herself and Rabbi Stone.

By 2002, Bezodis was working at Havurah Shalom. In 2006, she started at Congregation Neveh Shalom, first as Program Director and later managing the cemetery, coordinating external communications, working at Foundation School. Bezodis eventually served as a clergy assistant and building administrator.

"A lot of folks who go this path," Bezodis said of choosing Judaism, "take it with gusto."

She also continued her education, receiving a Masters

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Rensin assumes chaplaincy

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Jewish Community Chaplaincy is back!

Rabbi Sarah Rensin has been named Portland's next Jewish Community Chaplain, succeeding Rabbi Barry Cohen, who departed for Houston earlier this year. The role is now housed within Jewish Family & Child Service and will be part-time; Rabbi Rensin will continue her other part-time employment with Royal Hospice.

"Her dedication to serving those in need and creating programs for spiritual-care support make her a valuable asset to our community," JFCS Executive Director Susan Greenberg said in the announcement of Rabbi Rensin's hiring. "Her vision aligns with our community's commitment to meeting the spiritual care needs of the most vulnerable and providing education in non-traditional settings."

She's been serving informally in the role already – helping field requests for services, along with Rabbi Abby Cohen, in the time since Rabbi Barry Cohen's departure while the structure of the chaplain role was under review. It's work she's long been motivated to do.

"I knew that I wanted this position from the beginning," Rensin said.

Chaplaincy had been a path she looked to pursue since entering rabbinical school, first at the Ziegler School of Rabbinic Studies before transferring to the Academy for Jewish Religion – California.

"I decided that I wanted to do chaplaincy when [my brother] died," she explained. "I just felt kind of compelled to do it."

Rabbinic studies, chaplaincy training, and dealing with her brother's passing proved to be overwhelming, so Rabbi Rensin focused on her ordination, then accepted a position at The Jewish Day School of Metropolitan Seattle. Chaplaincy work still found her.

"I started getting calls from the community saying, 'Hey, we, we have a person in spiritual distress. They'd like to talk to a rabbi. Can you come see them?'"

Rabbi Rensin completed her chaplaincy training with the Department of Veterans Affairs and dove into hospice chaplaincy, first in Washington state and, starting in 2020, in Portland. Since moving here, she's also led an artist residency program at Congregation Beth Israel.

Rabbi Rensin has also become an advocate for medical aid in dying for individuals with terminal illnesses and continues to



Rabbi Sarah Rensin (Courtesy photo) work with the end-of-life resource nonprofit Compassionate Choices.

"Because of experiences I had in Washington, I became a huge advocate for medical aid and dying, and I was actually present for several people who completed medical aid in dying," Rabbi Rensin said, "and I learned from them."

Taking on her new role this month, she's hitting the ground running. Having lived in Portland for five years, building relationships inside and outside the Jewish community, she has something of a head start.

"Being housed at Jewish Family & Child Service, it gives me an opportunity to be available as a rabbi and the chaplain to the community," she said. "It's taken me three years to build the relationships I have now allow me to do this job more efficiently than if I had to build the relationships from scratch."

She also took a moment to pay tribute to her predecessor's contributions to the role.

"It's on account of [Rabbi Cohen's] work that people know what this job is and what it can provide," Rabbi Rensin said, "and I appreciate everything that he's done and put into place."

Rabbi Rensin can be reached at rabbisarah@jfcs-portland.org or 503-226-7079 x740.