

An All-American Eruv in Champaign-Urbana

One of my favorite Eruvin with which I help nationwide is the Eruv created in Champaign-Urbana. Rav Shlomo and Rabbanit Ahava Schachter serve as the Orthodox Union's JLIC couple on campus at the University of Illinois Champaign Urbana (home of the famous Fighting Illini) and work tirelessly to enhance Orthodox Jewish life on this campus. Their efforts to successfully create and maintain a high quality Eruv serve as a model to other communities worldwide.

The Creation Process

I received a call from Rabbanit Ahava in November 2016 and it was clear that she was quite determined to create an Eruv on campus. The first step was updating the Schachters on practical Eruv construction. I first shared a list of Torah material from which Rav Shlomo could hone his practical Eruvin knowledge before we met in person.

The Schachters then visited my Teaneck home in December 2017 where I provided a tutorial based on dozens of Eruv pictures that appear on a Power Point presentation created by my Talmid Charlie Wollman. I then showed them interesting in vivo portions of the Teaneck, Englewood and Tenafly Eruvin so they could see how the relevant Halachot are applied in the field.

Rav Shlomo then worked tirelessly to create a route for the Eruv and a detailed plan how to create the Eruv. Rav Shlomo called me constantly with poignant questions on how to apply our learning to the Champaign-Urbana scene. One of its challenges is the many cornfields that dot the landscape in this town, especially on its outer portions. We decided, upon direction from Rav Mordechai Willig, to draw the Eruv border at Curtis Road. The small corn fields north of this street may be considered part of the town and may be incorporated in the Eruv (based on a ruling of the Teshuvot Dvar Shmuel cited by the Bi'ur Halacha). However, the cornfields south of this street cannot be seen as part of the Dirah (habitation) and must be excluded from the Eruv.

I visited for two days in June 2017 to review the plan. I was satisfied with almost the entire plan. Only a few tweaks were needed. I then returned in

August 2017 for a gala ceremony during which we conducted a Sechirat Reshut with a high ranking official of Champaign County, publicly made an Eruv Chatzeirot for the observant Jews in the community and reviewed the tweaks to the Eruv.

The Eruv is inspected each week and every year I make a thorough in-person review of the entire Eruv. Rav Shlomo poses questions to me on a regular basis regarding the Eruv.

Achdut

Three Orthodox outreach organizations operate on the UICU campus – OU JLIC, Chabad and JET-Aish HaTorah. The Schachters strove and succeeded in making everyone feel comfortable with the Eruv and its Halachic standards. When the Eruv was finally dedicated in August 2017 with a gala ceremony in the Illini Hillel, each group participated.

Rav Shlomo created a very large Eruv to serve as much of the Jewish community of Champaign-Urbana as possible. In fact, the rabbis of the non-Orthodox congregations joined us at the August 2017 ceremony as well expressing their buy-in to the Eruv forged in a great moment of Jewish unity.

Broader Community

The mayor of Champaign Urbana Deborah Frank Feinen has been very supportive of the Eruv as a means of broader inclusion and diversity. The local utility company Ameren has been gracious as well.

Communities in North America rely upon the utility poles to create the Eruvin, with minor modifications made as necessary. The Schachters make every effort at good citizenship and community relations which is reciprocated by Ameren.

When a small portion of the area encompassed was missing utility poles upon which to base the Eruv, Ameren installed the poles. This turned out to be a win-win for when a few months later there was a power outage, the added poles which serve to bridge the gap in the Eruv, prevented a power outage in part of

the area. The newly completed grid allowed the power in one section to back-up the power in the affected other area.

Even the local mass transit company, the Champaign Urbana Mass Transit District, helped with the Eruv. Signage for a bus stop was installed in a location that was win-win for both riders and the Eruv. The signage doubled as a Lechi (portion of the Eruv) and sign for a bus stop!

Student Involvement

Rav Shlomo uses the Eruv as a means of student involvement and engagement. He enlists the students to be involved in the Eruv inspection and upkeep. For example, the perfect alignment of the Lechis and wire must be plumblined each year, which is a major undertaking. A dedicated cadre of students has joined Rav Shlomo in this considerable effort.

Not all students find it easy to sit for hours poring over a Gemara or Tanach. For many, though, involvement in a Torah field project such as an Eruv is an enjoyable way to actively connect to Torah learning. Ideas such as Tzurat HaPetach, Pi Tikra Yored V'Soteim and Mechitzot come alive and real while enjoying the many hours spent outside working on the Eruv. I know of at least one young man who was somewhat distanced from Jewish practice who returned to full observance due to his positive active involvement with the Eruv.

Conclusion – An All-American Eruv

I refer to the Champaign-Urbana Eruv as an All-American Eruv. It serves more than merely rendering the area into a Reshut HaYahid (private domain) in which it is permitted to carry on Shabbat. It serves as a beacon and model for an essential component for a fully dedicated and enjoyable Torah life. It creates an authentic community bond which serves to spiritually elevate the Jewish community both within and outside its boundaries.