

For those of you who don't know me, my name is Chana Strauss and I am a board member of Mekor. We are so glad to have you all here -- it is so uplifting to be in this room tonight with such an incredible turnout. Ever since joining the Mekor community last year, I have been lucky to experience the warmth of this shul and everyone in it. We are going to be channeling that warmth more than usual this December. Tonight's Kabbalat Shabbat and dinner are the kick-off events of our special Community Month at Mekor! This month will be enhanced with shiurim, Shabbat across the city meals, a Hanukkah gift exchange, and more! Stay tuned for more information in your email inboxes and on Instagram (yes, we have an Instagram account!).

Given that this month is "community month", with its special emphasis on unifying our shul, I wanted to take a moment to give some context and to highlight the amazing things that go on here. When I moved here, I didn't know much about Mekor—some of you might feel that way even if you've lived here a while. I knew Mekor was a centrally located Orthodox shul, and that it was probably going to be the shul I attended regularly. What I didn't know was all of the incredible things that I would benefit from across the city as a result of Mekor's existence and Rabbi Hirsch's leadership. For example: I didn't know that Mekor was started as the result of a grassroots effort when Center City had very few Jewish amenities. I also didn't know that Rabbi Hirsch undertook the massive task of running a fully-fledged kashrut agency to give Kosher certification to now over 20 establishments in Center City. I didn't know (until I joined the eruv committee) that the eruv checking, scheduling, administration, and upgrades are handled primarily by Mekor members. I also didn't know that the Center City Mikvah would not have been built without the advocacy and funding of the Mekor community. I didn't know that Rabbi Hirsch has also invested innumerable hours to learn with and sponsor those looking to convert to Judaism and is an advocate and resource for those individuals along their conversion journeys. I didn't know just how diverse, welcoming, and thoughtfully progressive Mekor was. The list of what I didn't know goes on and on. But I know now, and I am so proud to be part of this amazing and unique community.

I want to thank Rabbi Hirsch for his incredible leadership, efforts and accomplishments in making Center City a thriving and comfortable place to be Jewish. The Philadelphia Jewish scene would be a fraction of what it is now without him.

Our shul cannot continue to function and provide all of these amazing initiatives without financial backing. If you would like to support all that Mekor does, we are running a special membership deal this month with discounted rates for those who have not yet joined the shul as official members or for those who haven't yet renewed their membership. The details can be found on the shul website – look for the “Community Month Membership” section (not the normal membership section). In addition to financial support, we also rely on volunteer community members to take initiative and help make things run smoothly. As

indicated by the over 100 people who signed up for dinner tonight and the MANY volunteers who helped set up, it's evident that that passion to build and strengthen our community is very much present here and we're excited to build on that for the future. If you are interested in getting involved or have ideas for how we can continue to provide great events and programming, please see ....