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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## **Bet Shira is 1<sup>st</sup> area Conservative Synagogue to Offer Live Streaming**

MIAMI, Sept. 5, 2011 – When Jews through South Florida celebrate Rosh Hashanah this month, Bet Shira will become the first Conservative congregation in South Florida to stream the sound of the Shofar online, live, over the internet.

Through [www.betshira.org](http://www.betshira.org), anyone can now access a link and enjoy Bet Shira's services live, in real time, thanks to a generous donation by long-time congregants Betty and Roberto Horwitz.

"Being sick or incapacitated should not be a reason to be disconnected from Jewish life and one's community, especially in today's day and age," said Betty Horwitz. "From our point of view, community is what binds us to our common tradition and our present. Community is what helps us understand our place in today's day and age."

One year ago, Steven Shere, a founding member of Bet Shira, was seriously ill and not able to come to the synagogue to enjoy services with his family or his community. The patriarch of one of Bet Shira's oldest and largest families, he was devastated and his family was heartbroken.

When Bet Shira's Cantor Mark Kula learned that Shere and several other homebound Bet Shira members could not come to synagogue to hear the stirring *Kol Nidre* and *Avinu Malkenu* melodies on Yom Kippur, the holiest day of the year for Jews, he suggested a quick fix: connect them to services through the families' cell phones. Describing the challenge of arranging open cell phones on the bimah, Kula remarked, "It wasn't a perfect fix, but it was appreciated."

Shere's daughter, Melissa Beek, called the experience "exceptionally moving. My father was so grateful to be connected to our family and community through the prayers he had heard his whole life. Like my great-Grandpa Max always said, 'Singing is the sign of a happy heart.' Listening to Cantor Kula sing made my father's heart full."

When the Horwitz's learned about the cell phones on the bimah, they were touched. Right after the holidays, Roberto called the Rabbi and Cantor with the idea for the live streaming project and offered to sponsor it.

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“For someone to be isolated from his community on Yom Kippur would have been intolerably sad,” noted Bet Shira’s Rabbi Brian Schuldenfrei. “We felt that if we could do something about this situation, then we should.”

The synagogue’s staff and lay leadership worked together to bring live streaming to Bet Shira. “Special thanks are due to the Horwitz family, for their vision and determination in making this *mitzvah* (good deed) happen,” said Kula.

Though relatively new, live streaming is a fast-growing way for listeners and viewers to watch everything from sporting events and concerts to political broadcasts and now, religious services. Bet Shira’s services will now be available online in dorm rooms, hospital rooms, living rooms, and more.

Rabbi Schuldenfrei commented that embracing live streaming technology “is very consistent with how we see ourselves building our synagogue. We want to remove obstacles that inhibit people from making connections. We want to make their entry into our community as easy as possible.”

While live streaming is not a substitute for physically attending services, it certainly enhances and strengthens existing connections to the synagogue community. As always, Bet Shira invites members and non-members alike to come to the synagogue to experience a sense of community, enjoy religious services, and participate in an array of programs for all ages.

“The world is changing and so is technology,” Schuldenfrei concluded. “When our temple was destroyed in Jerusalem 2,000 years ago, the rabbis took a geographically-bound religion and made it portable. The sanctuary located in the temple in Jerusalem was now in our souls and our hearts. Wherever we Jews have lived, we have taken our religion with us and this has helped us to survive. And this is what we’re doing now, with live streaming.”

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