

2013–2015 Torch Awards - Application

Section 1: Title

Club Name: Beth El Synagogue Men's Club
Current Contact: Peter Cheifetz / Bob Held
Program Name: Essen & Fressen

Section 2: Contact information

Person completing form

First Name: Robert
Last Name: Blitzer
E-Mail: roblitzer@gmail.com

Club President at time of Convention

First Name: Peter
Last Name: Cheifetz
E-Mail: vegas918@comcast.net

Current Club President

First Name: Bob
Last Name: Held (& Peter Cheifetz
E-Mail: cheifetz@gmail.com

Section 3: Category

Please choose up to two (2) selections. Please note, you can only win in one category. The co-chairs reserve the right to reclassify your program.

- Club Administration
- Community Outreach
- FJMC Other
- Fundraising
- Health and Wellness
- Hearing Men's Voices
- Jewish Observance
- Israel / Masorti
- Keruv
- Men's Club Shabbat
- Programming for Younger Men
- Shomrei Ha'aretz

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- Synagogue Service Project
- World Wide Wrap
- Youth Programming
- Shoah Yellow Candle
- I'm not sure, select for our club
- Best Overall Activities** **To apply for this award, please see specific instructions in “2015 Torch Award Overview,” available on FJMC website**

Section 4: Program overview

Brief Summary

The Essen & Fressen (E&F) cooking team provides the Beth El Synagogue community with an affordable means of holding catered affairs, helping to create a sense of community and the opportunity to increase fundraising for the shul and the Men’s Club. The E&F team prepares several kosher meals each year for the synagogue community (for events such as our autumn ‘Steakhouse’ and a ‘Super Bowl party’). We work with other groups in the shul to replace meals that had previously been catered by third parties with our in-house creations at better prices. We aim is to provide great food at an affordable price.

Detailed Summary

To attract large crowds at synagogue events, entry fees often needed to be reduced to at or below cost for catered affairs and occasionally needed to be subsidized. Meanwhile, our synagogue kitchens were underutilized, primarily being used to accept deliveries and heat up catered meals. One night, while heating up an overcooked, overpriced catered meal for a congregational dinner, some Men’s Club members thought aloud, “We can make better food than this... and we can do it for less money”.



Our Logo



Our Stamp

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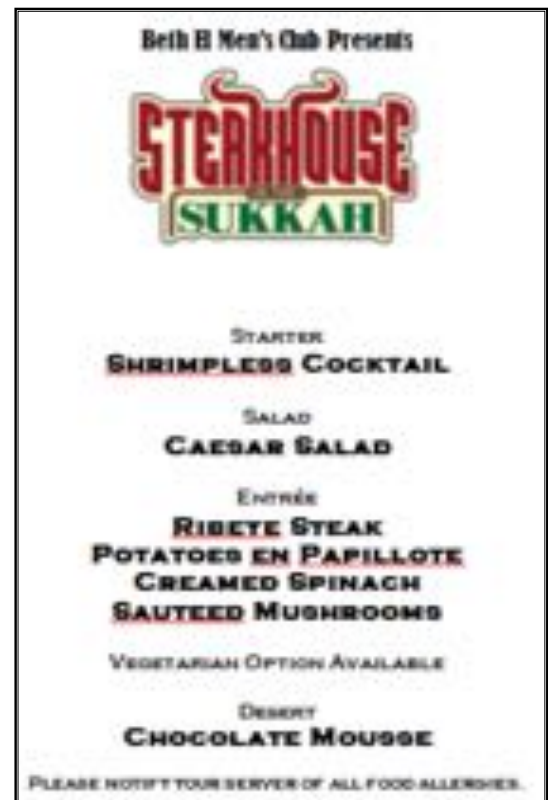
And so the Essen & Fressen cooking team was born. Named for *Essen*, the art of eating, and *Fressen*, the art of eating with gusto, our goal was to make great food, host fun events, and to do it all at a profit. This was an ambitious mission; it would mean nothing less than turning the kitchens around, planning, shopping, cooking, decorating, and cleaning. Not to mention chopping vegetables, that is, lots and lots of vegetables. The kitchen becomes a well-oiled machine right before an event, though it may seem chaotic to outsiders. Care, concern, and teamwork are paramount as chefs move around with hot food and sharp knives.

Our first program was a steak dinner in the synagogue Sukkah, marketed as “Steakhouse in the Sukkah”. Over 70 people enjoyed a kosher meal starting with a “shrimpless cocktail” and Caesar salad followed by an entree of ribeye steak, potatoes *en papillote* (in a pouch), sautéed mushrooms, and creamed spinach (Yes, it was pareve, and delicious!) A vegetarian option was also available. Dessert was a chocolate mousse that was decadent!

The skies opened up that year and we had to move indoors out of the Sukkah, but the following year we served the meal in two venues: the Sukkah and the social hall. At \$36 a head, it was easily half the price of the same meal at a restaurant, and we turned a moderate profit.



The flyer for the first Steakhouse



The menu printed on half a paper and framed for the table.

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Part of our goal has also been to help other groups in the synagogue run events in a cost-effective manner. In 2013, we catered our shul's 'Italian Murder Mystery' fall fundraiser with thirty pounds of pasta (three different varieties), three different sauces, meatballs, and desserts including tiramisu and biscotti. As a special treat and a donation to the synagogue, we made a Cello bar with four different flavor alcohols: limoncello, raspberry cello, orange cello, and peach cello. Instead of having the meal catered at significant cost, we kept the budget under \$11 per person and helped make the fundraiser a success.



The framed menu for the Murder Mystery Fundraiser



Top: Decorations for the Murder Mystery Fundraiser

Bottom: The poster for the cello bar donated by Essen & Fresen and the Men's Club



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From left: Dom, Marshall, Corey, Bob, Peter, Mike, Gayle & Stuart

Front row: 200 pieces of pareve tiramisu

Since then we've also cooked for Shabbat dinners organized by the membership and programming committees, again keeping costs well under budget, making Friday night dinners profitable for the first time. We've repeated the steakhouse several times and varied the menu each time. Even with the recent spikes in the price of kosher meat, we've managed to keep the price of the event low and still turn a profit.

We now also host an annual Super Bowl party, which means combined with the World Wide Wrap, we now have two major events on the same day!



Super Bowl Flyers with Menu



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Essen & Fressen Productions have become events that people look forward to. The good will provided by the Essen & Fressen brand has enhanced the image of the Beth El Men’s Club. It has also provided a venue for club members to prepare fine kosher meals, a quintessential way to involve Jewish men in Jewish life!

Essen & Fressen works for several reasons. Foremost, we work together as a team. There is no one leader of the group, no head chef. We see each other as equals. Yes, many of us have professional culinary experience, but that is not necessary. We all get along and have a lot of fun when it comes to cooking, preparation and serving. We do not claim to be perfect, but we improve every time we run another event. We have added a few members over time, but we try and introduce them slowly. They start on setup or cleanup, but are moved up to food prep when we know they are comfortable in the kitchen amid our controlled chaos.

Essen & Fressen has built a name and a brand for itself, and wants to make Beth El more of a warm and welcoming environment while fundraising for the synagogue, and the Men’s Club. In addition, we are building up the culinary excellence of the synagogue, improving the condition of the kitchens, and most importantly, having fun.

Program Planning / Timeline

Task	Committee/Assignee	Due Date
Planning	Essen & Fressen	Approximately 3 months prior to event
Advertising	Flyer - graphic designer; Additional PR - President	Approximately 3 months prior to event
Shopping	Essen & Fressen	1 day to 3 months (depending upon cooking calendar and item)
Dry Run (if needed)	Essen & Fressen	Usually 2 weeks prior to event
Food Prep & Cooking	Essen & Fressen	1 month before for items that can be frozen; 1 week before for items with a longer shelf-life; 0-3 days prior for more fresh ingredients
Event Day Preparation	Essen & Fressen	Day of the event
Debrief	Essen & Fressen	1 week after the event

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More details:

- Planning

The first step in any event is to hold a planning meeting approximately three months beforehand. At the planning meeting, we come up with a menu, budget, the price to attend, and a cooking schedule. Based on the menu and estimated attendance, we develop a shopping list which includes quantities. Following the meeting, we finalize and circulate the schedule and shopping list and begin to get comparative prices to figure out which market we will buy our ingredients and any additional supplies or equipment we will need. Once we know where we will buy these items, we divide up who will go shopping at each store in order to avoid double-purchasing (see below).

- Advertising

Three months out is also the time to design the flier, since we want it to be in at least two editions of our shul's monthly newsletter, the Shalom. Typically, it takes 1 to 2 weeks to design the content and artwork in each poster, in consultation with a Men's Club member who is a graphic artist.

- Shopping

In general, dry goods (e.g. flour, sugar, pasta, canned beans) can be purchased in advance. We try to take advantage of sale prices for these items at one of our local supermarkets. We also utilize personal memberships to warehouse clubs and our synagogue's membership to Restaurant Depot. Foodservicewarehouse.com is a good place to buy equipment and other kitchen necessities.

To maintain freshness, fresh fruit and vegetables are purchased from a local farmer's market as close to the event as possible while still leaving time to prepare them; however, some fruit, especially avocado, has to ripen for several days before an event. Meats are best fresh, not frozen, and are generally purchased as close to the event as possible. Specialty breads, such as mini hamburger rolls used for sliders, are usually ordered from the only local certified kosher bakery and picked up the day of the event to maintain freshness.

Each event usually requires 2 to 3 shoppers to cover the variety of stores needed for the quality, price and quantity of the food we need. The shoppers stay in close contact with the team by email and phone before, during, and after each trip in order to communicate what items they intend to buy, to determine if substitutions can be made, and to identify items that they were unable to find.

- Dry run

For more elaborate events, we sometime prepare a practice meal for the Essen & Fressen team and our families usually 2 weeks in advance of the event. This gives us a chance to fine tune the recipes or to see what did or did not work in terms of the logistics of cooking. It's also a great opportunity for a boisterous and informal dinner party.

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- Food preparation and cooking

Most events fall on weekends, and the bulk of the preparation occurs in the week leading to the event. We try to complete as much of the cooking as early as possible to avoid a last minute rush. The Sunday before an event is a big cooking and prep day, and team members usually show up several evenings during the week, too. Once, we dedicated an entire evening to cutting up and marinating several dozen whole chickens so they would be ready to cook on the day of the event.

Produce is usually processed on the day of the event itself. Meat entrees are cooked as close to the event as possible. Some dishes, such as meatballs or franks-in-jackets (a real crowd-pleaser of an appetizer!) can be prepared well in advance and frozen either uncooked or partially cooked. Some baked goods, especially desserts, can be made well in advance and freeze well.

- Shabbat cooking restrictions

For Friday night dinners, we need to finish all cooking before Shabbat starts. While we are allowed to keep food warm in the ovens, there is a risk that the food will dry out if it is left in the ovens too long. We have learned that meats, in particular, can be cooked right up until sundown and then wrapped in foil and placed in standard insulated picnic coolers. This keeps the meat warm until we are ready to serve it and prevents it from drying out.

Saturday evening events pose slightly different problems. There is no time during the day to prepare food, so the preparation must be complete by sundown Friday. On Saturday, though, any actual cooking must take place following Shabbat. For the murder mystery fundraiser, to cook thirty pounds of pasta in in one hour, we started 2 large pots of water boiling as soon as Shabbat ended and always kept a pot boiling until everything was served.

- Event day preparation

In addition to preparing the produce and cooking, the day of the event is the time to set up and decorate the venue. Table coverings, cutlery, plates, cups, and decorations must be set out. Depending on the format of the event, either individual place settings or buffet lines must be set up. Menus and/or signs identifying the dishes are set out.

We try to involve as many shul-community members as possible. Members of the youth group often assist as servers, so we train (and feed!) them. For more elaborate meals, we also prepare a sample plate to show how each item will be arranged on the plate. Finally, don't forget to prepare the desserts!

- Debrief

Following each event, we have a meeting to discuss our successes and areas of improvement. One thing we make sure to review is whether we had the right amount of food. We take what we learned and use it to improve our next event.

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Section 5: Certification

I certify that my club has not won a Gold Torch Award for essentially the same program in a previous year. (Previous silver and bronze winners in this category that submit an enhanced application only qualify to be considered for a Gold Torch award.)

Certification: Initials: RB_____

Section 6: Pictures



The Essen & Fressen Team in the kitchen during our first steakhouse
(from left: Corey, Peter, Gayle, Bob, Dom, and Perry)

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Bob and Corey grilling the steaks



The plate (clockwise from the top: potatoes en papillote, steak with cabernet sauteed mushrooms, and creamed spinach)



The menu placed on each table



Steaks on the grill

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Then NNJR president Dave Mandell speaking at the steakhouse, watched by Peter, and Rabbi Jay Kornsgold

Section 7: Video

TBD