

# Festival of Lights brightens dark winter days

Holiday celebration unites Jewish community of Jackson.

By Danielle Shapiro

One of the most popular Hanukkah songs starts: "Hanukkah oh Hanukkah, come light the menorah. Let's get together; we'll all dance the hora." It's a catchy enough tune; most Jewish youngsters know it cold by grade school.

Members of Jackson Hole Jewish Community, or Chaverim, will dance the hora and light the menorah during a potluck Hanukkah party Saturday in the fellowship hall of St. John's Episcopal Church. The revelry begins at 6 p.m. on Saturday. Attendees will dine on a catered dinner that includes latkes, or fried potato pancakes, and are asked to bring a side dish, dessert, wine or any other beverage. Chaverim board members and staff encourage anyone who is either Jewish or interested in Judaism to come.

Designed as a social gathering, the event will include music by the Chaverim cantor, Judd Grossman, traditional dancing and entertainment for children. One such activity will include playing dreidel – a simple gambling game and the subject of another well-loved children's song: "Dreidel, dreidel, dreidel, I made it out of clay."

The Hanukkah party is not new. In the December newsletter, Chaverim Board President Rose Novak wrote that "celebrating Hanukkah is the oldest tradition in Jackson – thanks to Brent Blue."

Dr. Blue started hosting the Hanukkah party in his Indian Paintbrush home in 1982. He continued the tradition for about ten years until attendance reached roughly 150 people. His house was just not big enough.

"The house was packed," he said. "People were eating in the bedrooms!"

The festivities have always been primarily about socializing. Given the small Jewish population in Jackson, Blue said it was a "way for Jewish folks in the county to get together."

Though the Jewish community has grown in the past 15 years into a more formal congregation with monthly Shabbat services, High Holidays celebrations, religious school and adult education, it large-



NEWS&GUIDE FILE PHOTO

**A menorah lights a Hanukkah celebration in 2002. Those of the Jewish faith or those interested in Judaism are invited to celebrate the Festival of Lights on Saturday at St. John's Episcopal Church.**

ly started with the Hanukkah party. In the early days, Blue remembers having to order Hanukkah candles from wholesalers because no one in town sold them.

"The parties have been successful; the Jewish community is thriving now," he said. "I used the party as a marker to have my rugs cleaned! I wouldn't mind having them again."

Hanukkah, which began this year on Dec. 7, is one of the most important Jewish holidays. Often called the Festival of Lights, Hanukkah celebrates the Maccabean triumph over the Syrians and the recovery of the Temple in Jerusalem. The Syrian King Antiochus ordered that the Jews reject their religion, but the Maccabees refused and fought back. Victorious, the Jews wanted to light the

Temple's eternal light but only had enough oil to last one night. Inexplicably, the oil lasted eight days. Lighting the menorah for eight days now commemorates that miracle.

For modern American Jews, Hanukkah is also a time to celebrate and give gifts in the traditional holiday spirit.

"We will light the menorah as a group event," said Chaverim Administrator Victoria Hess. "There will be lots of chitchatting. It's nice to have a party this time of year. By continuing the tradition, it helps to build a community."

An R.S.V.P. is requested to 734-1999 or [info@jhjewishcommunity.org](mailto:info@jhjewishcommunity.org). The party costs \$12 for adults and \$5 for children, seniors or anyone needing a break.