

LOCAL

'Florida boy' named local rabbi

By DAVID A. SCHWARTZ
STAFF WRITER

David Baum, a 29-year-old South Florida native and May graduate of the Jewish Theological Seminary was named Congregation Shaarei Kodesh's first rabbi last month.

Nicole Katz, the Conservative synagogue's 35-year-old president, admitted Baum is young. "He's an old soul," she said. "He's got a lot of wisdom, patience and understanding."

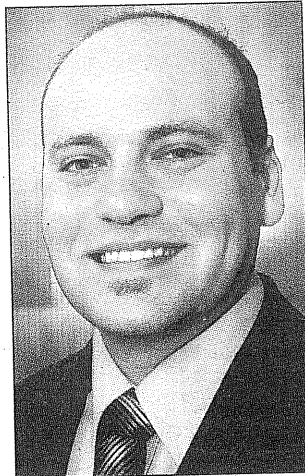
Baum, who was born in Miami and spent his teenage years in Plantation, graduated from Plantation High School and earned a degree in psychology from the University of Florida. He and wife Alissa late last month became the parents of Avraham Jacob Baum,

their first child.

"I'm a Florida boy," Baum said during a telephone interview last week. "It's amazing to come home and do my life's work here."

The rabbi said he wants Shaarei Kodesh to be a "purpose driven" congregation. "There's a purpose for a shul here," he said. "Supporting the people in the community, feeding the hungry, social justice, providing a home in West Boca, to help people to navigate in this complex world" are only some of the reasons for the synagogue's existence, he said.

Baum said he also wants to build a "relational institution" where people will meet with each other to "find out what motivates them, what is their passion." A passion could



Rabbi David Baum
Staff photo/Matt Dean

be Jewish cooking, he said, or journaling, social justice, Jewish prayer, studying Jewish text, the Torah or the Talmud, or sports (the synagogue has a softball team, he noted).

"Shaarei Kodesh means gates of holiness," Baum said. "There's more than one gate to holiness."

Baum said he would be involved in Shaarei Kodesh's Hebrew school, teaching once or twice a week. "My plan is to be a presence in the classes so that the students can get to know their rabbi."

He said he gains inspiration from Torah study. "I gather once or twice a week with rabbis and congregants. It's something that keeps me going." He also engages in learning sessions over the Internet with Rabbi Yoni Kaiser-Blueth of the University of Florida Hillel, where Baum did his rabbinic internship last year. The sessions, he said, teach and develop his "rabbinic voice."

Baum said he wants to build relationships with area rabbis to "strengthen our Jewish community." He has met with the rabbi from Chabad of West Boca, which is next door to Congregation Shaarei Kodesh, and soon will meet with the rabbis from Congregation B'nai Torah, he said.

He said he also wants to build connections to the clergy in the area's churches and mosques. "We have much more in common than we do differences and we can build on that," Baum said.

Katz, who was a member of the search committee, said Baum is fresh, energetic and has a new outlook. She said she likes his "relationship oriented" approach and philosophy that the congregation ex-

perience Judaism as a family.

He's a good fit for the 160-member families that are about evenly split between young, middle age and senior, Katz said.

"He gets it. He understands what it means to be part of a community," said Amy Grossblatt Pessah, 40, a search committee member and former synagogue president.

Baum understands that Judaism is "a mutual path that we're on together," she said. "His values and his vision very much mirror the congregation's values and visions. We really feel very lucky."

Rabbi David Baum will be installed as Congregation Shaarei Kodesh's rabbi at 9 a.m. on Sept. 6. Call the synagogue office at 561-852-6555.

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