B'nai Israel Congregation
Auburn, New York

“As we stood looking at the Torah that our camp was being given, I thought of all the stories it could tell—not just the ones contained in its text, but the stories of generations of Jews who have chanted its words, learned its teachings, and danced with it on Simchat Torah. How may Kol Nidre chants has it stood silently witnessing? All that—and it is being entrusted to us.”

—Abigail Fisher, URJ 6 Points Sci-Tech Academy Advisor Council Chair

With the Jewish population dwindling and the members of the congregation moving away from the community, the leaders of B'nai Israel Congregation (BIC) in Auburn, NY made the difficult decision to close its doors. On hand to assist in this process was the Jewish Community Legacy Project (JCLP) and its partner organizations, the Union for Reform Judaism (URJ), United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism (USCJ) and Jewish Federations of North America (JFNA). Developing a meaningful plan for the future legacy of the congregation included giving new life to community assets; religious and historic artifacts.

For more than 100 years, generations of B'nai Israel Congregation members read from three Torah scrolls that now needed new homes. This USCJ-affiliated congregation chose to gift its Torah scrolls to a Reform synagogue in Davidson, NC, to the URJ’s Eisendrath International Exchange Semester in Israel program and to the URJ’s newest camp, 6 Points Sci-Tech Academy.

Two scrolls needed to be transported from Auburn to the Union for Reform Judaism headquarters in New York City and then to their new homes in Boston, MA and Israel respectively. A five-city, month-long Torah transport relay was orchestrated to move the sacred scrolls. Along the way, the journey became a message of hope and faith that could not have been anticipated.

The first leg of the relay was carried out by a non-Jewish couple who happened to be heading in the direction that the scrolls needed to go. When they went to B’nai Israel to pick up the scrolls they were treated to a history lesson that they say they will never
A long-time member of BCI opened the scrolls, shared the history of the congregation and the meaning of the Torah scrolls and other ritual objects.

“Thank you for letting us know where the journey will take these Torah scrolls,” wrote Peg Beck about her experience. “They carry the weight of centuries of faith, and the lives of the people who have read them and believed. We will carry with us now the memory of our small participation in that journey... We feel truly blessed.”

These Torah Scrolls are more than ritual objects, they are the legacy of a Jewish community and the hope for another.

“As a nascent camp community we are at the beginning of our journey to bring Jewish life, love and identity to a new set of Jewish children. Our dream to open 6 Points Sci-Tech is on its way to becoming a reality and now we can build it around Torah and its values.” — Abigail Fisher

The Marcus Foundation has funded JCLP since its inception in 2008. URJ now seeks to ensure that the Jewish Community Legacy Project itself has a future. To that end, URJ will serve as administrative partner beginning in mid-2014. Interested individuals and communities should contact David Sarnat at (770) 690-8230, david@jclproject.org, Noah Levine at (678) 429-8895, noah@jclproject.org or Merry Lugasy, 212.452.6742, mlugasy@urj.org.