

Spotlight

A LIVING HISTORY / ON THE COVER



Garden Of Inspiration

Bask in the beauty of Beth Ahm's biblical landscape.

David Sachs | Senior Copy Editor
Brett Mountain | Photographer



At most synagogues, the prayer leader cajoles daily worshippers to be sure to arrive on time.

But at Congregation Beth Ahm in West Bloomfield, it's suggested congregants show up just a little early to meditate for a moment before morning prayers.

The attraction?

An outdoor garden that offers an enticing escape into the biblical Land of Israel.

The winding garden path adjacent to the synagogue takes visitors, old and young, on a journey through five highlights of Jewish history.

People enter at the lush Garden of Eden, stroll past Abraham and Sarah's open-sided tent, dampen the soles of their shoes as they escape Egypt across the parted Red Sea, step up to receive the Ten Commandments at Mount Sinai and complete the journey at the Temple's Western Wall in Jerusalem.

Lining the path are 19 examples of plants, flowers, trees and shrubs indigenous to the Bible (*Tanach*). Signs provide a biblical reference for each plant. In addition, beautiful mosaic murals explain each of the five biblical scenes. A detailed

brochure provides further insight.

The Bible Garden idea began with Dr. Doug Woll, a physician from West Bloomfield who wanted to create a memorial to his parents, Louis and Fay Woll, that also would serve to beautify the landscape of the synagogue. Doug's wife, Dr. Margo Woll, a dentist, is the newly sworn-in president of Beth Ahm.

The Woll family share a generational devotion to the congregation, going back to Doug's childhood days in Detroit when the shul was known as Beth Abraham. Doug's sister Mindy Dunn, who now lives

in Las Vegas with her children Brooke and Bradley, was also part of the household.

The creative process began in 2008 with a year of research and visits to bible gardens in California. A year ago, Doug hired Gary Roberts of Great Oaks Landscape in Novi to help design and build the garden. In addition, Beth Ahm Rabbi Steven Rubenstein and Executive Director David Goodman participated in the planning.

The five mosaic murals in the garden were designed and created by Gary's sister Gail Roberts, an artist in Tucson, Ariz. Gail, coincidentally, was a classmate



A Winding Stroll Through Five Highlights Of The Bible

1. Beth Ahm minyan member Dr. Paul Darmon of Farmington Hills meditates with his siddur on a sunny Sunday morning on a bench near the Garden of Eden display.
2. Abraham and Sarah's tent, open on all sides, welcomes small groups to commune on stools made of logs.
3. Beth Ahm President Dr. Margo Woll and Rabbi Steven Rubenstein pause near a mural and display depicting the parting of the Red Sea.
4. The carved tablets of the Ten Commandments are planted atop Mount Sinai.
5. Beth Ahm Ritual Assistant Nancy Kaplan of West Bloomfield gets a sense of the Western Wall in Jerusalem.



of Doug's at Detroit's Henry Ford High School and both Gary and Gail attended Congregation Beth Moses in Detroit, which later merged into Beth Ahm.

Ground was broken this past spring and the labor of love was completed just in time for Beth Ahm congregants to marvel at it during Rosh Hashanah. Already, a bris has been performed in the open space in front of the Western Wall; and Doug anticipates the venue could be used for small weddings, educational classes and other gatherings.

He anticipates that groups of religious

schoolchildren, both Jewish and non-Jewish, will take advantage of the learning opportunities the garden has to offer.

A Unique Experience

Bible gardens usually have one of two characteristics, Doug said. One type only displays plants mentioned in the Bible. The other type re-creates scenes from the Bible. "I wanted to do both," he said.

Doug wouldn't say how much he and Margo spent on the garden, but he admitted he got "caught up" in the whirlwind of the project and added more and more

features, exceeding their budget. "But we are very happy that it came out so beautiful," he said.

"Gary Roberts did a phenomenal job," Doug added, noting Gary's company also landscaped the Holocaust Memorial Center in Farmington Hills and the main gardens at Temple Israel in West Bloomfield.

"For the Western Wall," said Gary, "we brought in large chunks of stone — and chiseled, sandblasted and carved them.

"A garden like this hasn't been done elsewhere, according to the books I've

seen. It will have people walking through it and telling stories."

Rabbi Rubenstein said the aspect he liked most was Abraham and Sarah's open tent. "Welcoming strangers is a Jewish value that our congregation takes seriously," he said.

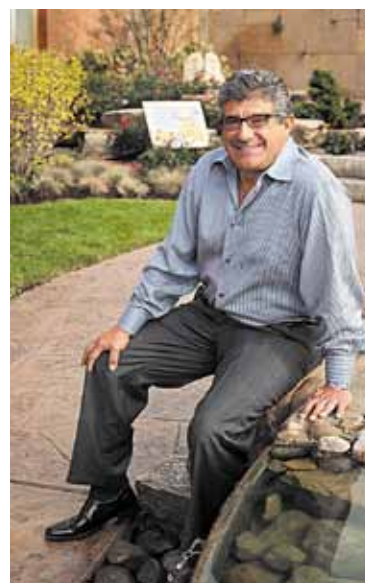
"It's a tremendous gift to the congregation that the Wolls have offered us," the rabbi added. "Doug's work has been tireless. It's a dedication both to the synagogue and to his parents' memory." □

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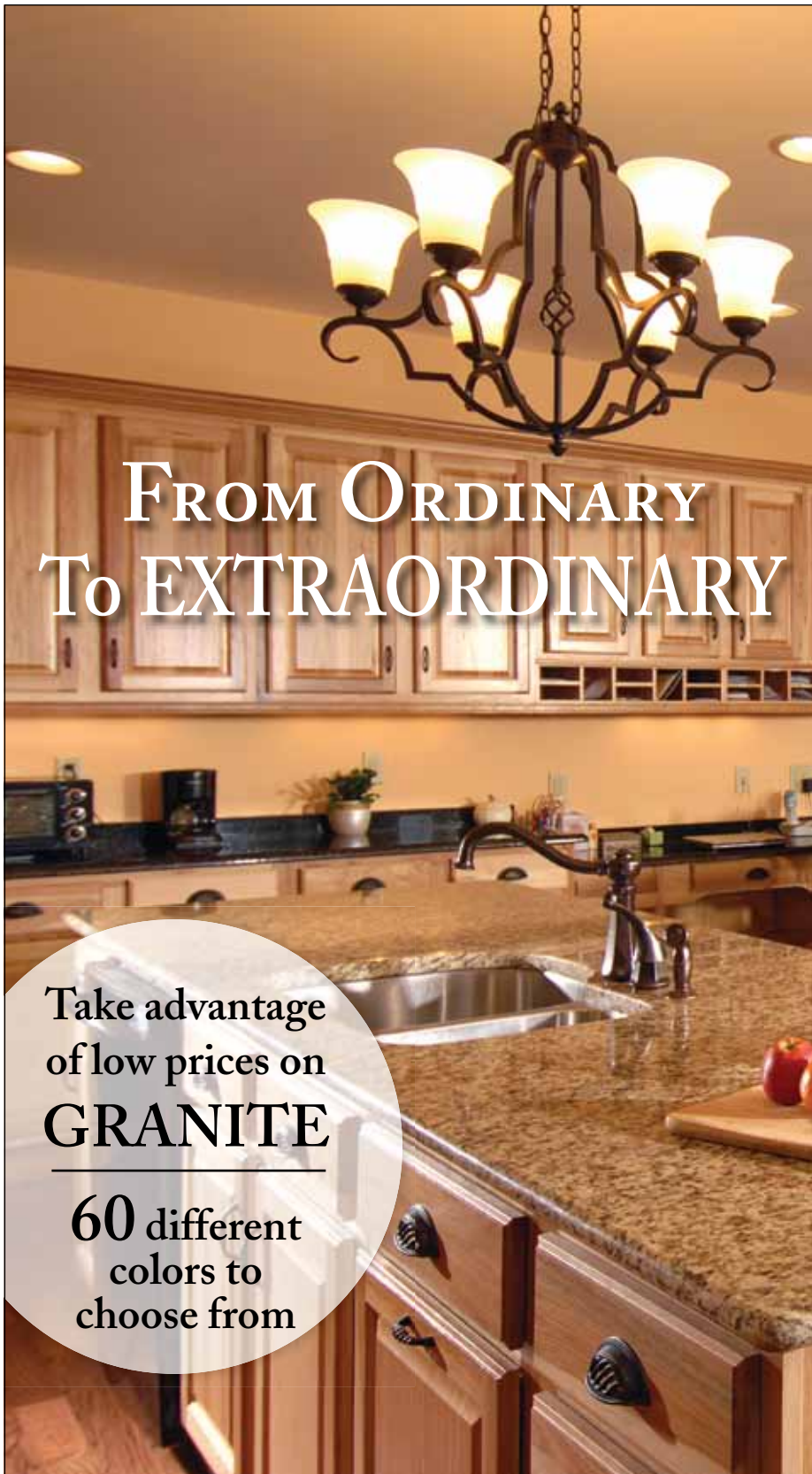


Above: Drs. Doug and Margo Woll with daughters Monica, 25, and Samantha, 27.

Below: Nineteen plants indigenous to the Bible grace the garden along with the biblical quotation where they're referenced – like this papyrus reed cited in *Isaiah 18:2*.



Above: Gary Roberts, the creative director of Great Oaks Landscape of Novi, sits next to a running waterfall that represents the parting of the Red Sea.



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