

**Based on the Story by
Mark John Hunter
in the Weekly Choice
Saturday, April 5, 2025**

In Proverbs it is written:
"She (Wisdom) is a tree of life
to those who grasp her. And
whoever holds on to her is
happy." The Beth-El Temple at
125 South White Street in
Alpena is an oasis for Jewish
people in northern
Michigan. Each person must
find their own path to the
spiritual through wisdom they
attain.

Ken Diamond, president of
the Beth-El Temple said it is the
only Jewish temple from Bay
City to the Mackinac Bridge and
east of U.S.75. A congregation
of 20 families have led their
own services for decades. Due
to its small membership there is
no rabbi, but Guest Rabbis lead
several services in the
summer. The Temple attracts
Jewish people and others for
many miles around.

Beth-El means House of
God. Kathleen Lutes explained
there are three traditions of
their faith: Orthodox,
Conservative, and Reformed.
The Alpena temple welcomes
all traditions, and those of other
faiths to attend services.
Kathleen asks, "What
denomination is God?"

People Making A Difference in Alpena



**Ken Diamond, Kathleen &
Tim Lutes on Stairs at Temple
Beth-El**

Ken Diamond, Cecile Pizer,
Kathleen Lutes, Tim Lutes met
me in person at the Temple.
Annie Saretsky joined us by
zoom. They told me so
much about the Temple's
history. You can learn about
the Temple, its history and
many details I cannot cover in
one story by looking at the
web site,
TempleBethElAlpena.org (which
is being updated)

In 1867, it is believed Julius
Myer settled in Alpena. He was
a successful clothier and later
served as president of Alpena's
Hebrew Benevolent Society,
founded in 1875 for the
purpose of "buying a burial
ground." By 1887, there were
about forty-five Jewish adults in
Alpena. In 1891 the Society
purchased a clapboard and tar
paper building located at
Hitchcock and White Street,
moved it down the street to its
present location at 125 South
White Street. This became the
Temple. In 1925 the basement
was dug and stain glass
windows were added.

Robert Haltiner wrote a
book about Alpena called "The
Town That Wouldn't Die." This
can be said of the Alpena
synagogue. In 1988, due to the
loss of members, the Temple
board proposed that the
building be donated to Besser
Museum. Member Art Guren
vehemently opposed stating, "A
Jewish presence must be
maintained in Alpena." He was
later the Temple's
president. Cecile added that
Art and his wife Judy kept the
Temple going.

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Tim Lutes identified failing, rotting wood in the basement windows, so he got involved. The Alpena community supported the Temple in its exterior restoration in 2017. Grants came from the Community Foundation, Besser Foundation, and the Comstock Fund (First Congregational United Church of Christ). This was combined with a grant from the Ravitz Foundation.

Annie recalled the 1950s and 60s. The children learned Hebrew from a book titled, "Rocket to Mars." The men, including Annie's uncle, Herman Saretsky taught Hebrew. The women taught songs. Annie loved the ice cream socials attended by the public. They had a fundraiser to plant trees

in Israel. "So many people who were not Jewish came for a fundraiser for a hospital in Israel." She says, "There was so much joy in this building in those days." The Ram's Horn was blown during services by Annie's father, Saul Saretsky.

There are so many connections to the Alpena community from this synagogue. If you are of a certain generation, you might remember Saul Saretsky was a drummer in local bands. His father, Morris Saretsky started Morris Auto Supply. If you went to school in Alpena, another Temple member, Lois Fivenson may have come to your school to teach about the Jewish tradition. Isadore

Isackson, an Alpena attorney, was a Hebrew scholar. Isackson was the City of Alpena attorney, who died in 1988. His name is still part of his law firm's name, Isackson, Wallace & Pfeifer PC.

Kathleen is a past president of the Temple. She married Tim and moved to Alpena in 2005. She said, "I love this synagogue. This is my home."

A video tour of the building is on the web site. The Temple can be contacted at 989-595-3544, email at TempleBethEl49707@hotmail.com. If you hear of a potluck at this Temple, go. The basement has a full kitchen and dining area. A library, artwork and copies of documents fill the basement walls.