

Local Jews celebrate Purim

By Leslie Hutchison
Record-Journal staff

WALLINGFORD — Frivolity and merriment filled the Beth Israel Synagogue Saturday night during the congregation's annual Purim festival that's described by some members as a bit like a Jewish Halloween.

Costumes and noise-makers (called graggers) were in abundance during the event that celebrates the downfall of Haman, who, as told in the Scroll of Esther, was an arch-enemy of the Jews.

Congregation President Alida Cella said Purim repre-

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sents an inspiring story that provides for a rowdy celebration. During the reading of Esther's story, every time Haman's name is mentioned, the congregants boo and make noise to stomp out Haman's cruel legacy.

The Purim celebration also calls for gift-giving, a large dinner and drinking of alcohol.

"It's a cut-loose kind of holiday," said Rabbi Bruce Alpert, of Beth Israel. "There are no inhibitions. It is truly a joyous holiday."

Nine-year-old Garrett Stancuna, who attends E.C. Stevens School, was dressed as a medieval knight. "I liked saying 'boo' and making noise," he said. His 7-year-old sister, Chloe, said she was happy with the purple balloon she was given.

"This has turned into a holiday that's centered around children," said Alpert. "They thought ahead about their costumes." Cella said that in Israel, everyone dresses up for Purim. "Bus drivers, waitresses, everyone."

At the Wallingford celebration, costumes included dragons, pirates, jesters and, of course, Queen Esther.

The congregation of Beth Israel has met in their North Orchard Street synagogue for more than 100 years, said Cella. About 60 families are members, she added.

"Some rabbis really get into it by showing their creativity and writing song parodies," Alpert said.

Following the reading, the crowd moved downstairs for a potluck dinner and the serving of pastries called hamantashen. The triangular shaped sweets represent Haman's hat or pocket, according to tradition. Eating a hamantashen can represent the crushing or destruction of Haman, Cella said.

Alpert said Purim comes at a time when people feel pent up from the winter.

"It gives you energy for Passover, which is such a huge holiday," he said. "In one month it will be Passover, it is exactly four weeks away," Alpert said.