

Jewish Longhorns flock to Chabad for vibrant energy, happening scene

By Daley Epstein

Juicy burgers were sizzling on the grill, but this barbeque wasn't a tailgate. At the West Campus-based house there were plenty of people boasting their letters, and the vibe was social, casual and comfortable. But you weren't at a fraternity house either. At Chillin' and Grillin' on Aug. 24, more than 100 students stopped by Chabad at The University of Texas at Austin for a back-to-school kosher barbeque. They came for the food, but stayed for the social scene as the laid-back, friendly environment is a hangout of choice.

What really draws students to Chabad is the incredibly welcoming atmosphere, accepting attitude and inexplicable comfort level the Johnsons — rabbi and rebbetzin — embody. Their home is our home, whether we stop by once a week or once a year. They ask nothing of us, and give us everything. They are incredibly relatable and are easy to talk to. Rabbi Johnson is a ball of endless energy and genuine enthusiasm. His optimism and excitement are contagious and he connects with students instantaneously. Maybe because he's a UT graduate himself.

"As an alumnus of UT, it feels natural to be here," he said. "Additionally, as much as we are giving



Photo: Emily Finkelman

From left: Carleigh Bornstein, Erin Reiter, Shelby Robalin and Talia Noorily enjoy all of the activities UT Chabad offers to students.

to them (the students), we feel that we are getting back so much."

Rabbi Zev Johnson and his wife Ariela have incredibly magnetic personalities. A stunning woman with a fantastic fashion sense and shoes we all covet, Ariela epitomizes both internal and external beauty. Even her external dress exhibits attributes of her character, as her trendy, incredibly modest style shows students it's possible to look great while dressing modestly

and appropriately. She is down-to-earth and up with the times, a loving mother and an unbelievably charismatic speaker. Ariela doesn't just deliver a speech. When she stands before a crowd, she weaves anecdotes and analogies into stimulating yet straightforward prose. She imparts practical yet inspiring wisdom, offering personal stories and experiences that are incredibly relatable. Her confidence is captivating, and her poise is unparalleled. Even before she fully sits down, you can hear the murmurs around the room. Always in awe, always the same words, "she is SUCH a good speaker."

Longhorn women got to benefit from Ariela's wisdom while participating in a quasi-spa night at this month's women's event. The event, "Spiritual Cleansing in honor of the month of Elul," helped participants learn to purify themselves in preparation for the new year.

"The Spiritual Cleansing event was a good escape as an all-girls circle," sophomore Regan Donnenfield said. "We made bath products and talked about the month of Elul." Donnenfield values Chabad's homelike atmosphere. "It's relaxing and a place where you don't have to be stressed out, and the warmth brings a different attitude to the week."

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