

ZBT Shabbat at Chabad: The best frat party of the year

By Daley Epstein

The core values of fraternity life don't typically include Kabbalat Shabbat and Shabbat dinner, but they do at the University of Texas. Zeta Beta Tau fraternity sponsored the Sept. 23 Shabbat dinner at Chabad at UT. This is a recurring tradition that current fraternity members, alumni and the Chabad community value. The eighth ZBT-sponsored Shabbat proved a success, as the largest on-campus Shabbat experience at UT attracted over 200 students.

"The Best Frat Party of the Week Starts Before 10 p.m." proved true, with the Chabad house packed by 8 p.m. In typical fraternity fashion, ZBT's pledges came early to set up the event, spearheaded by senior Nace Allen. But they weren't alone for long, as the rest of their brothers flooded in soon after, accompanied by friends as well as other Chabad regulars.

"This Shabbat is a highlight for many," Rabbi Zev Johnson said. "For some Jewish students, it is their only Shabbat and Jewish experience of the entire year. For many students, it allows them to experience the beauty and enrichment taking place at Chabad at UT, and it connects them to future events, whether it's Israel programming, Torah classes or Chillin' n Grillin."

Restarted by alumnus Alex Prescott and perpetuated with the help of Todd Aaron, ZBT advisor and member of the UT Chabad Advisory Board Committee, ZBT Shabbat has become a signature event of the fall semester. Generations of Texas ZBTs emphasize the importance of Judaism in the fraternity's traditions, as Aaron explains.

"Myself, Robert Goldberg, Bill Koen, Dan Prescott and Robert Solimani, we're the advisors. It is our goal to not only be the number one Jewish fraternity at the University of Texas, but also to create and maintain strong Jewish roots. And by doing that, we observe the Jewish holidays and we sponsor a Chabad Shabbat each semester."

Alex Prescott emphasized the importance of group coherence in implementing the tradition. "I might have been the catalyst of ZBT Shabbat, but there are lots of people who deserve credit," he said. "Noah Meicler, Itai Ronen and Aviv Schor were so important in bringing their pledge brothers during the initial stages. They deserve tons of credit for all of their help and their continued support to ensure the relationship has not ended. Also, Todd Aaron and my father [Dan Prescott] were hugely important with both financial help and alumni support dur-



Pictured here enjoying the evening are Adrian Allen, Dallas; Andrew Epstein, Los Angeles; Ben Grotta, Houston; Rabbi Zev Johnson; Zach Levenson, Denver; Brian Rosen, Chicago; Jeremy Stafman, New York; Bradley Stahl, Austin; Josh Weiss, Tucson; and Blake Willeman, Chicago.

ing the initial stages of this idea."

Strong ties between ZBT and Chabad were evident throughout the night, as ZBT members with a range of Chabad connections stood up to say a few words. The opening welcome came from Noah Meicler, a senior from Houston.

"[Meicler], who leads some of our Israel programming including our large Birthright Israel experience, proudly extolled the virtues of ZBT and their largesse in representing the

consistently largest Shabbat experience on campus," Rabbi Zev said.

Meicler credits the Johnsons for being a moral compass and well of inspiration to him and his peers.

"I love Chabad, because Zev and his family provide a sense of security and help to encourage and inspire me. Their passion for instilling involvement within Jewish youth is rivaled by none," he said.

Rabbi Zev enlightened the crowd with lesser-known insights into ZBT

origins. The fraternity's 15 founders, rabbinical students at the Jewish Theological seminary in New York, called themselves ZBT because the initials stand for "Tzion Bemishpat Tipadeh," Zion will be redeemed in peace. He connected it to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's recent speech to the U.N., which quoted the Lubavitcher Rebbe in emphasizing the importance of bringing light and into a place of darkness and standing up for Israel and truth. Rabbi Zev complimented Texas ZBT on their particular dedication to these values.

"ZBT at UT has been a largely proud and Jewish organization for many years," he said. "Over the past three years, they have consistently sponsored Shabbat once and sometimes twice a year. They donate not only the costs of Shabbat generously, but their time and energy as well."

Aaron noted the contrast between Chabad's presence during his college years and its recent transformation.

"Back in my day, which was '80 to '84, you could say Chabad was a little-known Orthodox sector that wasn't warm or inviting to anyone who wasn't Orthodox," he said. "But Rabbi Zev has done an amazing job relating to the students; they really relate to him and his wife." The transformation was a communal effort.

"It's an absolute mitzvah what all the donors who've built that place have provided to the University of Texas," Aaron said. He lauds the Johnsons for personally impacting his family, saying, "A lot of people don't really real-

CHABAD

continued from p. 18

ize what Chabad stands for. I certainly didn't, but I appreciate what they did for my son. I'm a firm supporter of everything he [Rabbi Zev] has done." L'dor V'dor, the next generation echoes Aaron's sentiments.

Senior Eric Cohen delivered an engaging Dvar Torah to the crowd. He spoke about *Nitzavim*-standing tall- for Judaism, challenging his peers to continue the night's energy and participation for the rest of this Shabbat as well Shabbats to come.

UT law student Nathan Baum spoke for the second time at Chabad, drawing an additional law school crowd as well as family visiting from Dallas and Ohio.

"It was terrific," Jack Baum, Nathan's father, said. "Our immediate family and the broader Chabad community seemed to have a great time, and the evening offered a balance between a traditional Shabbat, learning and family. That seems to be a winning combination."

Baum spoke about *Vayelech Moshe-*

just as Moshe moved forward with his accomplishments even on the day of his death, we too should be continuously moving forward in life in success. Ultimately, the choice to do so is in our hands.

With an atmosphere described by Rabbi Zev as "palpable Jewish pride," the night was filled with singing, dancing, schmoozing, socializing, eating, inspiring and more. Chabad's goal to "instill, or rather bring out the natural pride found within every Jewish student," was actualized at ZBT Shabbat.

"The amazing thing about Chabad to me is that it's a very warm and inviting atmosphere," Aaron said. "We have some very reformed Jewish members who would only step into their temple once or twice a year, and protest doing even that. But because of their freshman year experience at Chabad, they are now regular attendees of Shabbat."

"It was a great night," Meicler said. His words are corroborated by students' actions, as many stayed until almost 1 a.m.

As Rabbi Zev succinctly put it, "To sum it all up in one word: EPIC!"

Daley Epstein is a sophomore at UT-Austin.

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