

Jews from around Latin America find home in NYC

MARIANA CRISTANCHO-AHN, Associated Press Writer
Published: 08:35 p.m., Friday, September 17, 2010

VIEW: LARGER | HIDE

1 of 3

PREV NEXT



In this Aug. 27, 2010 picture, from right, Daniel Grauer, of New York, Carolina Lopez, of Boston, Mass. and Daniel Sultan, of New York talk as they and others including Rabbi Mendy Weitman, second from left, wait for the start of the Jewish Latin Center's Friday night service in New York. Rabbi Weitman is the founder of the Jewish Latin Center in New York. Founded in September 2009, it now has nearly 700 members. Photo: Tina Fineberg / AP

MORE NEWS GALLERIES



Oktoberfest 2010: Day 2 pictures



Oktoberfest 2010: Opening day in Munich



Oktoberfest turns 200, 2010 opening ceremony



Comments (0) 0 tweets Share
Larger | Smaller
Printable Version tweet
Email This
Font

NEW YORK (AP) — Deborah Apeloig arrived at the Chelsea Synagogue in Manhattan for a recent Shabbat service, greeting other women with a kiss and taking a seat with them away from the men.

The rabbi welcomed them to the service in English and Spanish, before beginning prayers in Hebrew.

A year ago, Apeloig, the Venezuelan granddaughter of Polish Holocaust survivors, was searching for a place where she could connect more deeply with her religion and meet other Latin American Jews living in New York City.

"I missed having a synagogue where I could I feel at home," said Apeloig, 26.

She had gone to several synagogues since coming to New York about two years ago, but none seemed as welcoming as those she had attended back in Venezuela.

MORE NEWS



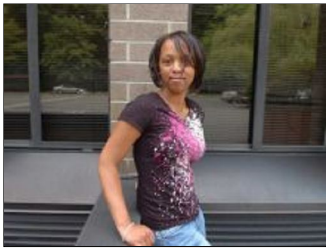
Jews in Greenwich celebrate their

FROM OUR HOMEPAGE



Man leads cops on chase, jumps into river

highest holiday



Teen hopes tragic story will help local students 'think first'



Fire official: Lightning sparked Cos Cob fire

Then she learned about the [Jewish Latin Center](#), which had its first anniversary in August with a celebration for Shabbat, which marks the beginning of the day of rest for Jews before sunset on Friday and ends by sundown Saturday.

In September 2009, Rabbi [Mendy Weitman](#), who was born in Brazil, decided to create the center as a space for the Latin Jewish community of New York to gather. It is temporarily being housed at the Chelsea Synagogue while Weitman seeks a permanent home for it.

Other Latin American social Jewish networks already existed, but the rabbi's initiative added a spiritual touch. The center — which performs both religious and social activities — has about 700 members who said they have found a home there.

"I always felt we had a common problem, that people were looking for a synagogue, a community with Latin warmth and that they couldn't find it," said Weitman, who has been based in the U.S. for the last six years. "Latin American Jews come from countries with strong communities and want to be members of a community."

There are no official figures on the number of Latin American Jews in the United States. There are some 495,000 Jews living in Latin America, according to the

Argentina-based [Latin American Jewish Congress](#), with the largest Jewish communities in Argentina and Brazil.

Jews from Latin America first began arriving in what is today's New York City in 1654, when a group of 23 Sephardic Jews escaped from Portuguese rule in the Dutch colony of Recife in Brazil and came to New Amsterdam.

On a Friday in late August, the center organized a celebration with about 200 Latin American Jews.

The night began with the traditional prayer that begins the Sabbath.

Rebeca Rubinstein, a Venezuelan Jew, lit a couple of candles in a ritual carried out by women only, marking the formal start of the Sabbath. Attendees followed the rabbi's prayers in the Siddur, the prayer book. For about an hour, men and women sat separated by bamboo screens, the men wearing yarmulkes and most women in elegant skirt suits.

After finishing the recitation, the screens were removed and men and women greeted each other warmly with hugs. Later they went into a room where a kosher meal was offered. It began with the ritual washing of hands and the blessing of the wine, Kiddush, and the passing around of braided bread known as challah.

Among the dishes offered were hummus, Israeli-style cucumber and tomato salad, matzo ball soup, fish, chicken and chocolate mousse for dessert. Between dishes, the attendees danced and sang songs in Hebrew like the popular "Hava Nagila." The celebration lasted until about midnight.

"The anchor is religion, but over time, we feel like we are part of a community," said [Ariel Fischman](#), 31, Apeloig's husband and a Mexican of Russian and Polish Jewish ancestry, speaking in Spanish. "You can come to a party or to watch a soccer game and all these people that you didn't know before become your friends. ... We don't have to gather only for religious purposes."

Online:

Jewish Latin Center: <http://www.jewishlatincenternyc.org/>

Latin American Jewish Congress: <http://www.congresojudio.org.ar/>



Sanchez outduels Brady, Jets win 28-14



Oktoberfest's opening day

G  
H  
N  
S  
B  
E  
L  
O  
C  
I  
J

LATEST NEWS

[Metro North service suspended by fire](#)  
12:38 p.m.

[Brant, Seymour call off divorce](#) 12:34 p.m.

[Friendship Circle helps kids connect](#)  
11:36 a.m.

[THE DISH: Actor Charles Grodin steps out for ECAD](#) 10:45 a.m.

[Cops: Suspect brandished 2 machetes in CVS robbery](#) 06:51 a.m.

Printable Version

Email This

0 tweet

Share

Please Register or Sign In to add your comment.

**Echo 0 Items**

**Hot Penny Stock Picks - Free Alerts**

Find stocks that move up 700% Make huge  
FreePennyAlerts

**Moms Asked to Return to School**

Grant Funding May Be Available to Those Who Qualify.  
SeeCollegeDegrees

**Ads by Yahoo!**

© 2010 Hearst Communications Inc.

**HEARST** newspapers