

Jews in Hanukkah celebrations

Holiday began sundown Friday

BY MEGHAN V. MALLOY
Staff Writer

AUGUSTA — Holiday lights of a different kind started appearing in windows last night, gently twinkling against the winter now.

But they aren't for Christmas. Rather, the light comes from the first candle lit on the menorah for Hanukkah.

The holiday is not as widespread as Christmas, but that is more reason for Jews to celebrate it, said Rabbi Susan Bulba Carvutto, of Augusta's Temple Beth-El.

"We're a minority. We're different," Bulba Carvutto said of the country's Jewish population, "but like the Maccabees, we should celebrate our differences."

The celebration has expanded in the last few years. Christmas in Old Hollowell now includes a Hanukkah celebration and children's activities. This year, the All to Go in Gardiner will host a latke cafe from 12:30 to 2 p.m. Sunday. Families are invited to bring their menorah and Hanukkah music.

"I've lived in Gardiner all my life," cafe organizer Susan Montell said. "In that time, I do not believe there has been a community Hanukkah celebration here. Every community should be able to do something."

Montell, a mother of four, said

she hopes the latke party will draw Jewish families and those of other faiths, too. She also would like the event to become an annual tradition.

"You don't want your children to be upset and ask, 'Why can't we have a tree?' or 'Why can't we celebrate Christmas?'" Montell said. "You want them to be proud of their heritage and traditions, and the only way to do it is to live it."

Hanukkah — derived from the Hebrew word "dedication" — is a Jewish celebration commemorating the rededication of the Temple of Jerusalem after it was destroyed by Syrian King Antiochus IV, 200 years before the birth of Jesus.

The Jews mobilized a liberation movement called the Maccabees who successfully deposed Antiochus and regained control of the temple. Despite having only enough oil to light the temple for a day, the flame burned for eight days; hence, Hanukkah is an eight-day celebration referred to as "the festival of lights."

Jewish families often attend parties with friends, observe the significance of the Temple of Jerusalem's rededication and some will exchange small gifts each of the eight nights.

But don't call Hanukkah a "Jewish Christmas."

"This is, rabbinically speaking,

Get ready for the **Festival of Lights** with these basic Hanukkah terms:

HANUKKAH (can also be spelled Hannukah, Chanukah or Chanukkah): Eight-night Jewish observance meaning "dedication." The holiday observes the rededication of the Temple of Jerusalem and the eight nights the Temple's eternal flame stayed lit, though there was only enough oil to light the flame for one night.



DREIDEL: Derived from the Yiddish phrase "to turn," this is a four-sided top used as part of a game. Gelt is sometimes used as currency, though candy is popular with children. Hebrew letters representing "all," "nothing," "half" and "put" tell the player what they must do with his or her gelt. For example, a person who rolls "half" would place half of their currency in a "pot." Once a person loses all their gelt pieces, they're out of the game.

GELT: Yiddish for "money," gelt is usually given to children in the form of small coins, or chocolate coins.



MENORA: Nine-branched candelabrum lit nightly to recall the eight nights the flame in the Temple of Jerusalem burned. One candle is lit the first night, two the second night, and so on until all eight are lit at the end of the holiday. A ninth candle is lit nightly to light the others.

MITZVAH: A good deed. Many U.S. Jewish congregations will celebrate "Mitzvah Day" on Christmas Day by volunteering at soup kitchens or other organizations.



LATKES: Shallow-fried pancakes of grated potato and egg, often flavored with grated onion. May be topped with a variety of condiments, ranging from sour cream to applesauce or sugar, or they may be served plain. The oil for cooking the latkes is reminiscent of the oil in the Temple's eternal flame.

Staff graphic by Sharon Wood

a minor holiday," Bulba Carvutto said. "It's not a reason to miss work or school."

As cultures change, however, "Hanukkah has become more important because we do live in a Christian society and it occurs around the same time as Christmas," Bulba Carvutto said. "That's not necessarily a bad thing, I suppose, but I think the

gift-giving aspect could be de-emphasized."

As Christians observe the birth of Christ on Christmas, many Jews in the United States, will practice Mitzvah Day — "mitzvah" the Hebrew word for "good deed."

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