

FIVE TOWNS HERALD

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Awareness of security is up in the Five Towns

By **Jeff Bessen**



VANESSA PARKER/HERALD

Congregation Aish Kodesh, on Woodmere Place in Woodmere, is creating a program to train some of its congregants as security people.

Five Towns synagogues are using training and technology to help better protect their property and their members.

[Congregation Aish Kodesh](#), in Woodmere, was awarded \$75,000 in federal money through the [U.S. Department of Homeland Security's Nonprofit Security Grant Program](#) last year. Dr. Efrayim Nudman, the temple's president, said that forced-entry-resistant technology, security-modified doors, an alarm system and surveillance cameras will be installed when the "quite complex and slow" grant compliance process is completed.

Nudman said that such actions are prudent in these perilous times, with Islamic terrorism and ant-Semitism on the rise throughout the world and organized or lone-wolf attacks becoming more common.

"The leadership of Aish Kodesh, as well as the leadership of many other congregations and schools in the area, have woken up to this reality and are taking proactive steps to protect themselves," Nudman said. "We see it as our duty to make sure that our congregants are as safe and protected as they can possibly be, while attending services on our shul."

[Shalvehet High School](#), a yeshiva for girls housed in the Temple Hillel building in North Woodmere, received a federal grant about five years ago, said Rabbi Steven Graber, the synagogue's spiritual leader. The temple installed security cameras and an intercom system to communicate with people who want to enter the building and with onsite security guards.

"Every religious institution has had to ramp up its security since 9/11, and maybe they should've before," Graber said. "It's not just about terrorism, it's about crime. People have gone into institutions to steal. We have to be more aware of security issues, and we have for the safety of our congregants."

In need of training

Paul Goldenberg, a security expert for [Secure Community Network](#), the national homeland security initiative of the Jewish Federations of North America and the Conference of Presidents of major American Jewish organizations, said that before synagogues "throw an indiscriminate amount of money at the problem," they should conduct what he called a "security gap analysis" to understand what they really need. Emphasis should be on education and knowing what to do, he said.

"Cameras, alarms, locks are part of doing business in the 21st century," Goldenberg said. "More importantly, you should execute plans. Have an evacuation plan. Know how to recognize suspicious behavior. The technology is important, but training may make you aware of something, and training may keep you alive if or when you have a bad day."

Goldenberg said that the Secure Community Network's goal for the next two years is to roll out model training initiatives in which every synagogue partners with local law enforcement, institutionalizes training and makes it part of its culture. "Cameras do nothing more than benefit the police investigation," he said. "If you see something, never hesitate to say something."

The Jewish Community Relations Committee-New York, a nonprofit resource network for the Jewish community in the five boroughs as well as Nassau, Suffolk and Westchester counties, maintains close contacts with local law enforcement agencies, the FBI and the Department of Homeland Security, said Michael S. Miller, the organization's executive vice president and chief executive officer.

"According to various sources, there are currently no known credible threats against Jewish institutions in the metropolitan New York area," Miller said. "At the same time, when we look at events around the world and here in the United States, we conclude that Jewish institutions are at a heightened risk, and recommend that they take prudent steps to protect their constituencies and their buildings." (See box.)

Congregation Aish Kodesh is developing a volunteer program to train some of its congregants to serve as security personnel inside and outside its building on Woodmere Place during services, Nudman said. The volunteers would connect with those at other synagogues implementing similar programs, he said, adding that the shul is also developing "standard operating protocols" in case of an actual threat.

"There are no guarantees, and there is no way to fully prevent an attack," Nudman said. "We can and must, however, do everything in our power to prepare ourselves for that eventuality, so that we minimize any possible damage and loss of life."

Jewish Community Relations Council of New York recommendations:

Form a security committee focused solely on safety, security and emergency preparedness.

That committee should work with local law enforcement and organizations like the JCRC to monitor ongoing threats, assess their vulnerabilities and develop security policies, procedures and other responses. Members of the committee and staff should attend training sessions to learn best practices that can be applied to their organizational setting.

Develop a close, ongoing relationship with local police.

If there is an incident, the local police are likely to be the first responders. The JCRC recommends that organizations invite their local police to familiarize themselves with each facility and regularly report scheduled (e.g., services or school arrivals and dismissals) and special events.

Arrange for a risk vulnerability survey.

Local police departments can also survey the premises and make recommendations leading to a more secure facility, and there are alternative sources for no-cost or low-cost assessments. Ideally, an expert will look at the building, the grounds and the institution's security policies and procedures and make specific, feasible recommendations. JCRC also offers some self-assessment tools at www.jcrcny.org/securityresources.