Little Synagogue ignites huge interest in Jewish culture

The Board of Directors of The Little Synagogue Project Society gather with some representatives of Heritage Park. Left to right: Jeanette Pyle (Manager Funding Development, Heritage Park), Emanuel Cohen (Director, TLSSOPPS), Leslie Levant (Secretary, TLSSOPPS), Sheli Berchovici (Director, TLSSOPPS), Dr. Ralph Gurevitch (Director, TLSSOPPS), Trudy Cowan (Vice President, TLSSOPPS), Irena Karshenbaum (President, TLSSOPPS), Alida Visbach (President & CEO, Heritage Park), Shuna Switzer (Treasurer, TLSSOPPS), Jack Switzer (Director, TLSSOPPS), Betti Weiss (Director, TLSSOPPS), Daryl Fridhandler (Director, TLSSOPPS), Ellen Gasser (Public Programming Coordinator, Heritage Park). Photo courtesy of Ron Switzer.

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ing projects ever undertaken}

The Prairie has been one of the most creative and unify-

ing projects ever undertaken. The restoration of the original Montefiore 

Institute, organizers have to be very pleased with how the overall project has turned 

out. Not only was the restoration project highly successful, the news gets even better. 

At its recent annual gen-

eral meeting on September 21 the Little Synagogue on the Prairie Project Society 

was told by park officials that the charming, bright-

ly painted Montefiore 

Institute has been the top 

attraction for the past two summers at Heritage Park. Alida Visbach, president 

and CEO of Heritage Park, said that at least 700,000 people have visited the Little Synagogue over the past two summers. 

The success of the exhibit has inspired Heritage Park to organize additional Jewish 

heritage programming at Canada’s largest pioneer museum. The first such proj-

ect takes place on November 28 for the park’s Festival of Lights Celebration where the 

public can enjoy cocktails and Klezmer music, a Kosher- 

style dinner and participate in traditional Chanukah activi-

ties. Visbach said if this event proves successful, Heritage Park would consider other Jewish themed programming throughout the year. 

One of the goals behind the synagouge restoration proj- 

ect was to give Calgarians from all walks of life a bet-

ter understanding of Jewish customs and traditions. With so many Calgarians, includ-

ing school groups, making the visit to the Montefiore 

Institute, organizers have to be very pleased with how the overall project has turned out. The original building has not only been preserved, but 

it tells its story every day to the thousands of people who pour through Heritage Park, where they learn something about Judaism and the role the Jewish community has played in the development of Alberta. 

The only sad note in all this is that the Little Synagogue on the Prairie Project Society is winding down its affairs. It’s mandate fulfilled brilli-

antly, the organization is shutting down and a new group within the Calgary Jewish community will be designated soon as the custo-

dian and partner agency with Heritage Park to ensure con-

tinued maintenance and pro-

gramming at the Montefiore Institute for generations to come.

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