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NEWS RELEASE

Sept. 29, 2009

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CAMPUS JEWISH GROUP TO ERECT RELIGIOUS STRUCTURE

MISSOULA –

A Jewish student group at The University of Montana intends to build a three-sided religious structure in the grassy lot between Jeannette Rankin Hall and Don Anderson Hall. The 8-by-12-foot sukkah will stand on campus for one week starting Friday, Oct. 2.

The UM chapter of Hillel: the Foundation for Jewish Campus Life will set up the sukkah. Sukkah is a Hebrew word that means booth or hut. The simple building helps commemorate the seven-day holiday of Sukkot, a celebration in which people – both Jewish and non-Jewish – give thanks for the harvest by joining together with friends to celebrate the earth's bounty.

"People will eat meals and study in the sukkah," said Ariel Barrett, president of UM's Hillel chapter and a senior in anthropology. "We also plan to have groups of students staying in the structure overnight. It will be prominent on campus, so it makes people curious."

Barrett said her group had set the sukkah up on the UM Oval in recent years, but it was vandalized several times.

"We want to do a better job of educating people this year," she said. "Last year the structure only made it two days. After it was vandalized, it wasn't stable, and the wind and bad weather took it down."

Barrett doesn't know why the sukkah has been tampered with in the past. She hopes the vandals were just looking to make mischief and didn't understand the significance of the sukkah.

“We just want to emphasize that it’s for religious purposes,” she said. “A lot of people don’t know that.”

According to Jewish practice, the walls of a sukkah can be made from any material, but the roof must be organic. Palm fronds, branches, bamboo and wood are the most common roofing materials. The amount of shade inside the sukkah must exceed the amount of sunlight that enters through the roof.

Barrett said this year’s sukkah will be made from a wood or vinyl lattice. She said everyone is welcome to stop by, learn about the structure and share fellowship. An information sheet about the structure will be inside.

She hopes the structure’s new location will lessen the chance for vandalism. In addition, Danielle Wozniak, a UM social work assistant professor, has mobilized students and members of campus departments willing to stay in the sukkah overnight, when vandalism is more likely to take place.

“This is the first time we’ve done that,” Barrett said. “A lot of people are excited and willing to help out.”

Those wishing to volunteer to stay in the sukkah can e-mail Barrett at ariell.barrett@umontana.edu or Wozniak at danielle.wozniak@mso.umt.edu.

Hillel provides opportunities for students to explore and celebrate their Jewish identity at more than 500 colleges and universities. Barrett said the UM chapter has about 20 members.

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