

Rabbi: groundbreaking honoring Rebbe was needed despite coronavirus shutdow



Rabbi Igal Stell of Coral Springs gears up for the groundbreaking ceremony at the 770 Moshiach Community Center's building in Lauderhill. (Joe Cavaretta / South Florida Sun Sentinel)

Ten guests wearing gloves and masks attended the groundbreaking ceremony for the 770 Moshiach Community Center's new building in Lauderhill on April 5, the birthday of the late Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson.

"The Rebbe's birthday is very special, and we thought it was a necessity to continue with the ceremony on this day. It was very important to not only us, but the world as well," said Rabbi Mordechai Anati, spiritual leader of the synagogue.

Although the event was originally expected to draw 500 people and feature a carnival and many activities for both children and adults, it was scaled down to a much smaller outdoor event because of the coronavirus pandemic.

"If you're outside with the proper protection, I don't think this is more dangerous than going to Publix or Walmart, where I think you're more at risk because you're indoors," Anati said.

Schneerson is known in the Chabad-Lubavitch community, an Orthodox Jewish Hasidic movement in which this Lauderhill synagogue is a part of, as the Lubavitcher Rebbe. The design for the future building's exterior in Lauderhill is inspired by the Chabad movement's world headquarters at 770

Eastern Parkway in New York where Schneerson worked.

A flag is raised during a groundbreaking ceremony for the future building of the 770 Moshiah Community Center in Lauderhill. (Joe Cavaretta / South Florida Sun Sentinel)

Anati said the ceremony was also live streamed and estimated that thousands of people viewed it online. He noted that everyone who came to the event told him it uplifted their spirits.

Perla Lichi, founder of Perla Lichi Design which is overseeing the design for both the interior and exterior of the building and an event attendee, thought the ceremony was inspiring and emotional, especially with it being Schneerson's birthday.

"The rabbis had a goal of doing the ceremony on the Rebbe's birthday, even with the challenges we're facing today with the coronavirus. We had to practice social distancing where there were a few chairs eight feet apart."

Lichi said she is excited to be involved in this building's designs for many reasons.

"First of all, I love designing. It's my passion and I've designed a few Chabad's interiors, and doing this makes me more excited because I believe in the landmark idea and the whole concept of that. Also, the more I studied about the Rebbe, the more I realized that he inspires me."



Details from the planned interior design are shown during the groundbreaking ceremony at the 770 Moshiach Community Center in Lauderhill. (Joe Cavaretta / South Florida Sun Sentinel)

Anati hopes the the building can be completed and opened within a year if sufficient funds have been raised.

"This building is not only going to be a place of worship, but it will also be a place of outreach for everyone," he said.

Anati hopes to have a big celebration of this building in the future when it is deemed safe to do so.

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