

Building an Eruv: An Eight-Year Project Completed

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On January 1 of this year, an eruv, encircling the Greater Boston Jewish community, was finally completed after eight years. One of the largest in the United States, it encompasses 18 square miles and serves the Orthodox Jewish communities of Boston, Brighton, Brookline and Newton.

Jesse Hefter of Brookline, who was solely responsible for the eruv's completion, explained that an eruv is specifically designed to allow Orthodox Jews to carry on Shabbat.

"Shabbat is an oasis in time that allows the Jew to free him/herself from the productive aspect of the week and enter a more

contemplative time of 25 hours," he said. "Like everything Jewish, the Shabbat has regulations that dictate how it is to be kept."

Hefter explained that lifting and carrying is one of the 39 activities that are prohibited on Shabbat. The word eruv comes from the Hebrew, meaning "to join together." Hefter said this applies to "all domains and combines them into a private domain which solely exists to move things around."

There are two things required to make an eruv operate. A wall or borderlike structure must exist to delimit the inside and outside of the eruv, such as the fences of the MBTA. In places where there are no fences, the eruv utilizes the concept of a doorway, joining the "gaps in the fence," Hefter said.

In this situation, the eruv uses existing cables, such as cable TV lines, without making any modifications to them, to serve as the lintel of the doorway. However, since these cables are always on the side of the poles, a *lechi*, or side attachment, must be put on the pole to serve as a doorpost, Hefter explained.

"The *lechis* define a continuous series of doorways down a street with very little wall, except the poles," Hefter said, adding that this is acceptable halachically (according to Jewish law).

Hefter said that he became involved in this project eight years ago after moving back to Boston from Houston with his family. "A friend told me on Shabbat that there would be a meeting at the Bostoner

Rebbe's [Congregation Beth Pinchas of Brookline] to work on revitalizing the eruv committee the next day. I came along and volunteered to take notes," Hefter said. "That was my biggest mistake. Essentially, it became something I did while working full time, having a family and being involved in

Jewish communal organizations. It was like going through an eight-year pregnancy," he said.

Rabbi Naftali Horowitz, of Congregation Beth Pinchas said, "Without Jesse Hefter, there would not be an eruv today."

As the *Rav Hamachshir* of the

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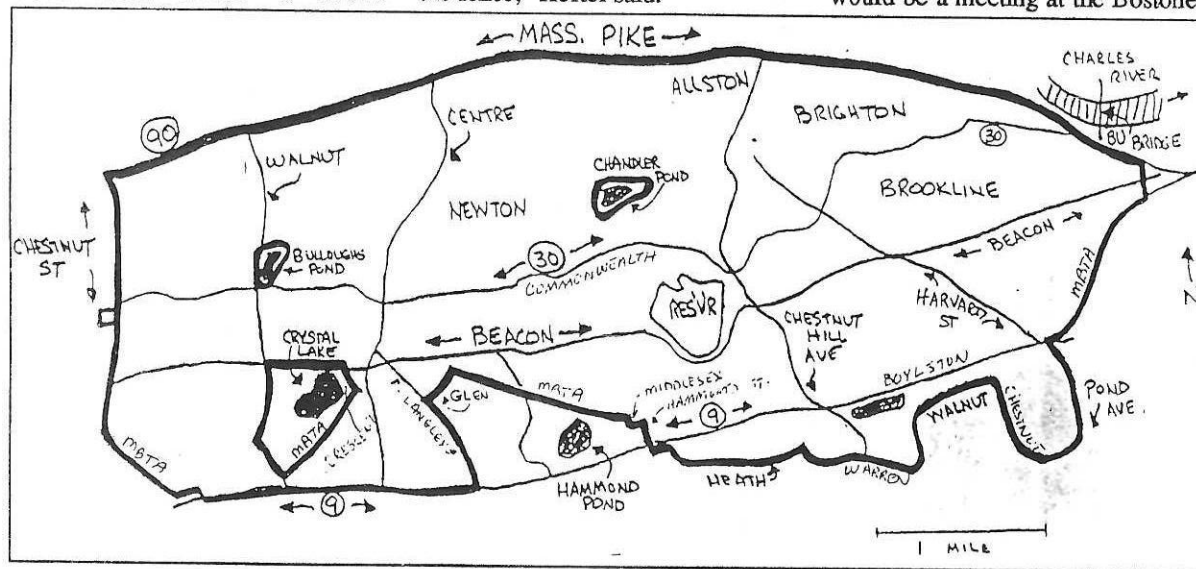


Photo by Allan E. Dines

JESSE HEFTER (above) stands next to one of the *lechis* of the eruv. BOUNDARIES (left) of the Greater Boston Eruv.