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Local synagogue turns hate incident into artful security with new fence



The entrance of the Congregation Beth Israel's new metal fence sits on the corner of 14th and Hemlock streets Thursday, Dec. 18, 2025 in Chico, California. (Nathan Chiochios/Enterprise-Record)



By **NATHAN CHIOCHIOS** | nchiochios@chicoer.com

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CHICO — Congregation Beth Israel, a local synagogue in Chico, finished work on a stainless-steel fence after it was targeted in a hate incident in 2023, featuring artwork on the fence.

The idea for the new security fence started when the synagogue was targeted in a 2023 antisemitic incident, where a man vandalized its sign and set it on fire. Following this, Rabbi Lisa Rappaport, CBI's spiritual leader, said it was very distressing for the synagogue, but said members received an "outpouring of love and support" from the community that they didn't expect.

Six months later, the sign was rebuilt and unveiled at the annual Bagel Brunch. At this brunch, Rappaport said they talked about plans to upgrade their security fence, which she said had gotten "old and deteriorated." After hearing this, the Bell family, who are local to Chico, said they wanted to participate and help fund the project.



The sign of the Congregation Beth Israel rises above the new metal fence Thursday, Dec. 18, 2025 on the corner of 14th and Hemlock streets in Chico, California. (Nathan Chiochios/Enterprise-Record)

The project was designed mainly by David Halimi, CBI's first vice president, who has been a member for over 20 years. He holds a degree in mathematics and said he was always impressed by the golden ratio in triangles, and wanted to implement it into the design of the fence. He added that the golden ratio has "deep historical meaning."



"Some people say that Noah's ark was built using golden ratios," Halimi said. "The other beautiful thing about it is that one of the angles is 36, which has a profound meaning in Judaism. It's double of 18, and 18 is the symbolism for life, good luck and security."

Halimi also said he wanted to have an artistic element on the fence, and had Richard and Susie Sparkle, local Chico artists who donated the rebuilt sign, to help design the art. Symbols of the 12 tribes, which are the groups the ancient people of Israel used to belong to, were used on the fence, as Halimi said the tribes reach everyone and have symbolic meaning to them.



Designs are seen Thursday, Dec. 18, 2025 on the new metal fence of Congregation Beth in Chico, California. (Nathan Chiochios/Enterprise-Record)

"I came up with the idea of a stainless-steel, abstract version of the 12 tribes that are colorless, open and accepting to everyone, without having super religious writings on it as part of the design," he said.

The design process was very challenging, he said, as he said many technical constraints made all the artwork and designs very hard to achieve. While it was a long and challenging process, Halimi said he liked the outcome.

"It did definitely take a lot of love and time, but I'm very pleased with the way that it worked out," he said. "We had a good team of people to get it all manufactured and installed."

Now that the fence is complete, Halimi said it has defined the CBI's presence in their neighborhood.

"We've got a lot of compliments from the neighbors that we take such pride in our property," he said.

Among the team to create the fence was David Gayheart, a welder and owner of CalFab, a fabrication business based in Colusa. Gayheart said that, while the building process was long and his team had to navigate various restraints, he was delighted to be part of it.

"Every time that I've been to CBI, everybody there is so sweet, and I always leave feeling happy," he said. "I've never been around such nice people."

He also said the project was personal for him on a certain level, as he's worked with many of the members of CBI and said they don't deserve what's happened to them in the past.

"They're my neighbors. They're people that I've worked with," he said. "They're people that I've met at a personal level, and they don't deserve that. It just upset me."

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