

Allentown



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Allentown, Pennsylvania, located in the Lehigh Valley, 50 miles north of Philadelphia, is historically significant as the place where the Liberty Bell was successfully hidden from the British in 1777 during the American Revolution.

The bell is inscribed with the translated *pasuk* from *Vayikra (Leviticus) 25:10*: “Proclaim liberty throughout the land unto all the inhabitants thereof.”

Liberty was the objective for Jewish im-

migrants who settled in Allentown in the late 19th century, joining relatives and friends from Russia to escape oppression.

According to Membership Chairperson Ilene Levin-Dando, Congregation Sons of Israel dates from 1903, but Orthodox *shuls* and *shtieblach* existed before that. “My grandfather was born in Allentown in the late 19th century; his father sent him to Israel to learn after his *bar mitzvah*, because he wanted him to have a real *yeshivah* education. We know there were several *shuls* ‘downtown’—in fact, the last

REAL ESTATE

Lovely single, 3- and 4-bedroom homes are available within the *eruv* from \$149,000 to \$200,000 and up. The neighborhood also includes many homes priced below that range, especially good-sized attached townhouses. There is a wide variety of available housing stock, all on beautiful tree-lined streets with easy access to the *shul*, the Jewish Day School, the Jewish Community Center and shopping, not to mention a renowned park system. There are also various options to rent, including a popular complex of townhouses that will be included in the *eruv* expansion. Rentals vary and are available within the current *eruv* and planned expansion. Three-bedroom units appear to be between \$1,200 & \$1,500 monthly; apartments rent for under \$1,000.

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Cost of Living

TUITION

Jewish Day School of the Lehigh Valley tuition:

Pre-K: **\$8,500**

Kindergarten: **\$10,100**

Grade 1: **\$11,220**

Grades 2 through 8: **\$12,250**

Financial assistance is available through the generosity of benefactors and the JDS Scholarship Fund.

FOOD

Chalav Yisrael milk is not available in Allentown but can be bought in Philadelphia and frozen. *Chalav Yisrael* cheese is available.

A gallon of Kedem grape juice is **\$4.49**, but around the *yamim tovim* it costs about half that price.

Getting there



From New York City:

90 minutes

From Philadelphia:

60 minutes



From Israel:

11 hours' flight to Newark



WEATHER

Allentown has four distinct seasons: a humid summer, cold winter, and short, mild spring and fall. The warmest month is July, with a daily average temperature of 73.4°F, and the coldest month is January with a daily average of 27.8°F. The average precipitation in Allentown is 45.35 inches per year.

one in town, Agudas Achim, merged with us during the last ten years.”

Today, fast-growing Allentown has a total population of 120,000, with about 5,900 Jewish people in 2,850 households. Congregation Sons of Israel is Allentown's largest Orthodox shul, with approximately 40 *shomer Shabbos* families. “We’re a warm, diverse, religiously growing community, looking to welcome other young *frum* families,” says Rabbi David Wilensky, originally from New York, who came to Allentown in 2009. Affordable housing, an active *frum* community and proximity to Philadelphia, New York and New Jersey are the drawing cards.

“I can’t really say enough about how nice it is to live here in Allentown,” continues Ilene Levin-Dando. “It is a beautiful area, and within moments of driving, one can find country roads, open land, as well as lots of shopping and major highways. In an hour you can be in Philadelphia or Highland Park, NJ, and in 90 minutes, in Teaneck, Monsey or the George Washington Bridge area, anywhere the relatives might be! Many of our members’ families come to visit often, and find it refreshing in many ways. Our *shul* is full-service, with daily *minyanim*. Shabbos morning has ‘junior congregation’ and groups for

kids, and there are *shiurim* and Daf Yomi daily. Rabbi Wilensky is currently teaching an ongoing adult education series entitled ‘Contemporary Halachic Issues from the Weekly Parshah.’”

There is a modern, state-of-the-art, attractive *mikvah*. The *eruv*, which currently includes a large area of what is known as West Allentown, is currently poised to include an additional wide swath of the community, including virtually any point accessible to the *shul* by foot.

Allentown is home to the Jewish Day School of the Lehigh Valley, a community school that educates K-8. For high school, students either commute to or dorm at one of the fine Jewish schools in the Philadelphia or the NY/NJ metropolitan areas.

“Many of our kids have gone from our school here to well-established Jewish high schools, and on to a year (or more) in Israel and further education. We’ve happily ‘lost’ several families to *aliyah*, and two boys from our *shul* are lone soldiers in Israel.”

Allentown’s Chesed Committee is very organized, doing things like obtaining housing for visitors and utilizing a “meal train” program online to furnish meals to families with new babies, illness, bereavement and newcomers to the community. Local Muhlenberg College provides kosher food to students and the general public alike, under supervision of the Lehigh Valley Kashruth Commission; this has attracted more observant students (the student body is about 35% Jewish).

Kosher food is readily and plentifully available in several large supermarkets. Two supermarkets include completely kosher bakeries. Fresh and frozen products, including meat and cheese, are available. The Kashruth Commission supervises the bakeries and several other local businesses, including a frozen yogurt

store, a seasonal ices store and an ice cream store.

There is also an independent organization entitled the Hebrew Family League, which includes the *mikvah* and the *chevrah kadisha*. Jewish Family Service is very busy with a food bank that can furnish kosher food and visits to Jewish residents, particularly the elderly. JFS has a full slate of programs for the community, providing counseling and other services. All in all, Allentown is an active Jewish community. Families interested in visiting Allentown are welcome to contact Ilene at levindando@yahoo.com. ●

To submit a community's story or to have your community featured here, please contact us at submissions@amimagazine.org.