

# Countywide Shabbat to bring together Jewish community

BY LINDA HUTCHISON

The Jewish Shabbat is a 24-hour period of rest, of refraining from work, getting unplugged from the world. At home, it begins just before sunset on Friday evening with lighting candles, reciting a blessing and enjoying a traditional dinner. It then continues into Saturday and can include synagogue services, lunch and a later meal and Havdalah ceremony, symbolizing the end of Shabbat and the beginning of a new week.

Now, for the second year in a row, San Diego Jews — or anyone interested in Jewish heritage — can plug into a countywide Shabbat celebration, the largest event of its kind in local Jewish history.

From Thursday, Oct. 22 through Saturday, Oct. 24, Shabbat San Diego 2015 will offer dozens of related events throughout San Diego. On Thursday night, those who like to bake challah, the traditional braided bread, can participate in mega challah bakes being held at the San Diego Jewish Academy in Carmel Valley and the Tifereth Israel Synagogue in East County. On Friday night, up to 10,000 people are expected to sit down at Shabbat dinners in community centers, synagogues and private homes.

Saturday's lineup includes a variety of activities, including lectures, study sessions and a hike. On Saturday night, a free Havdalah celebration and dinner will be held at the Town & Country in Mission Valley featuring Israeli singer David D'Or.

Shabbat San Diego 2015 has three main objectives according to Selwyn Isakov,



**Shabbat San Diego 2015 chair Selwyn Isakov and co-chair Robyn Lichter** COURTESY

founder and co-chair. First, for individuals to have their most meaningful Shabbat yet. Second, to build community unity through inclusivity and cooperation regardless of level of observance or political views. And third, to participate in global Jewish identity, pride and solidarity. In addition, Isakov would like to invite every one of the 50,000 San Diego Jewish households to a Shabbat dinner.

"The challenge of engaging everyone who has the slightest interest in their Jewish heritage in a beautiful community experience that will hopefully peak their intellectual curiosity to get more involved in the community on an ongoing basis is

what drives me to spend the time and effort making Shabbat San Diego as meaningful and exciting as possible," Isakov explained. Co-chair Robyn Lichter echoed this philosophy.

"I feel the passion and pride about keeping our heritage alive. I had no idea of how low the unaffiliated rate was nationally and in San Diego, and unfortunately it is on the decline. So my goals were and are to make a connection with Jewish San Diegans who have lost their involvement in anything Jewish and to offer and encourage them to find a spark in something Jewish that can reconnect them in any way," she said.

The idea for Shabbat San Diego struck Isakov and Lichter separately two years ago. They didn't know each other, but both were members of the Beth El congregation in Carmel Valley and both were born in South Africa and inspired by The Shabbos Project held there in 2013. Separately they mentioned the idea to their rabbi of bringing a similar celebration to San Diego and he connected them.

With only a few weeks to go, the pair organized Shabbat San Diego 2014. At first they met with a lot of resistance, according to Isakov. In South Africa, the Jewish community is mostly Orthodox. Here in San Diego, the Jewish community is diverse, both geographically and philosophically. Eighty-seven percent of Jews in San Diego are unaffiliated.

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## Shabbat San Diego 2015

■ **When:** Thursday, Oct. 22 to Saturday, Oct. 24

■ **Where:** Mega challah bakes, private and community Shabbat dinners, Saturday services and lectures at locations throughout San Diego. Free Unity Havdalah celebration Saturday, 7:30 p.m., Town & Country Conference Center, Mission Valley.

■ **In La Jolla,** two community Shabbat dinners will be held Friday, Oct. 23 in the evening at Congregation Adat Yeshurun and Chabad of La Jolla.

■ **Times and locations of all events at** [shabbatsandiego.org](http://shabbatsandiego.org) or (619) 233-7963.



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"We had to negotiate with organizers in South Africa because we knew we had to do things differently," he said. They received support from the San Diego Jewish Federation. "They are the central unit that held it all together," said Isakov.

Despite the challenges, Shabbat 2014 was a success and the pair got to work immediately planning this year's event, which they hope will attract more participants (up to

25,000). "Last year we had 10 committees and this year we have 52," said Isakov. Several of these new committees are reaching out to diverse groups, from military to LGBT. The event includes more than 250 volunteers and 120 partner organizations. In addition, many pre-events are also scheduled and listed on the website.

Isakov's passion for organization and serving the community began early. Raised in a secular family in Johannesburg, he immigrated to the United States in his 20s and earned an MBA at Wharton School of Business at

the University of Pennsylvania. He went on to found several private banks in Detroit as well as a financial investment group. Ten years ago he founded the San Diego Private Bank and he and his wife Hilary settled in La Jolla. "I believe in inclusivity and cooperation, irrespective of denominations, affiliations or religions. The mosaic of the Jewish people's disparate beliefs intrigues me and I like the concept of knitting these different cloths of beliefs and practice together as a quilt rather than imposing a blanket over differences." ♦