

Humanistic Judaism group celebrates holiday honoring environment

WHITE PLAINS — The Westchester Community for Humanistic Judaism gathered Saturday to celebrate a Jewish winter holiday that honors nature and protection of the environment.

The non-theistic Jewish group celebrated Tu Bi'Shevat — a **tradition** associated with the planting of trees in Israel and coming of the spring — with a seder, or ritual feast, held at the Community Unitarian Church. The holiday is also called the Jewish festival of "the new year of trees," or arbor day.

The Seven Species of the land of Israel, which are commonly incorporated in dishes for the holiday, are wheat, barley, grapes, pomegranate, olives, figs and dates.

The group celebrated with song, meditation and a vegetarian pot-luck luncheon including traditional dishes such as challah, noodle kugel, vegetable kugel, cheese blintzes, fruits and nuts.

Rabbi Frank Tamburello, who led the program, said the holiday was revived in the 1960s during the global ecology movement. It focuses on the importance of caring for the environment and encouraging the planting of trees, he said.

"Society is so technology-oriented," he said. "We seem to have lost our touch with the natural."



Rabbi Frank Tamburello describes the significance of pomegranates in Judaism on Saturday at the Westchester Community for Humanistic Judaism's Tu B'Shvat seder and vegetarian potluck in the Community Unitarian Church in White Plains. (Xavier Mascareñas/The Journal News)

Tamburello said the luncheon was to remind the community of its responsibility to the environment and to honor nature.

"It's so important to remember that we are a part of the Earth and to teach the younger generation about all of these things," he said.

Community member Gloria Aronson-Weinberg of Mamaroneck said the holiday also reminds them of the "connection to each other and formation of community.

"I support continuity for the community and the celebration of Jewish **history** and tradition," she said.