

Deirdre Gillieson is among the Temple members who have signed a Letter of Intent for Temple's Life and Legacy program.

"I was not born Jewish," explains Deirdre. "I attended a Chabad in Florida a few times, and attended Temple Israel a few times."

While she had married a Jewish man, Brian Peter Kay, who'd been raised Orthodox, she perceived that he was not supportive of her converting. However, shortly before her husband died three years ago, he told her that he had changed his mind and wanted a Jewish funeral. "We changed all the funeral plans. I chose Temple Israel because it was the only synagogue that I knew of that might do this," she says. "Rabbi Morais agreed to do the funeral, and so I was able to tell my husband he would have his Jewish funeral."

From her first arrival at Temple, "I wanted to give him his due as a Jewish man," she says. "I don't think I missed saying Kaddish for one whole year. He has his plaque in the Temple, and a proper Jewish headstone, and gets put in the yizkor book every year."

When Deirdre joined Temple Israel as a new widow, she was grateful to find "the people at Temple warm and wonderful and comforting."

As time went on, she joined the choir and became involved in the Temple Library. She also took the Insight to Judaism course from Hillel Taub and Rabbi Mikelberg. She says she has had her Beit Din conversion to Judaism, but not yet her ritual bath.

"People at Temple Israel have a real sense of community and believe in giving to others and being supportive," she says, delighted that she has made some good friends. "I appreciate more than anything else here that religion is taken seriously but not at the expense of fun."

In her spare time, she is interested in her family tree, and has traced her family back to Scotland in the 9th or 10th century. She loves music and singing, and is an avid reader of historical fiction. A statistical project manager when she was working, she is good with money and figures.

A program of the Harold Grinspoon Foundation, Life and Legacy assists communities across North America, through partnerships with Jewish Federations and Foundations, to promote after-lifetime giving to build endowments that will provide financial stability to Jewish day schools, synagogues, social service organizations, and other Jewish entities. Through training, support and monetary incentives, this four-year partnership program motivates Jewish organizations to secure legacy gifts, steward donors, and integrate legacy giving into the philanthropic culture of the Jewish community.

“Temple Israel needs new blood to come and enjoy what it has to offer,” says Deirdre. “It also has a challenge in that the building has aged. I thought, I’ll give some money and maybe it can be used for that purpose or at the discretion of the Board. I’m not a youngster any more,” she smiles. “They’ll get their money soon.”