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EMOTIONAL RELEASE

Memorial butterfly garden dedicated at Beth El to remember child lost to cancer

By JUDY BLUESTEIN LEVIN | JHV

Dozens of butterflies can be seen swooping, sunbathing and fluttering amid an array of dazzling shades of red, yellow and purple flowers outside Congregation Beth El in Missouri City.

The Reform synagogue near Sugar Land dedicated its new Ethan Perry Memorial Butterfly Garden before Shabbat services on Friday, May 26, in memory of a former congregant, who was in seventh grade when he succumbed to cancer two years ago.

The dedication service included poems, prayers and an emotional release of 36 live Painted Lady butterflies by Ethan's family, friends and congregants.

For Ethan's parents, Angie and Brian Perry, butterflies carry special meaning.

"As Angie and I have kind of walked through our grief for just over two years now, we have seen a lot of signs and a lot of butterflies," Brian told the JHV. "We have looked to nature and to its beauty – and butterflies are just one of those beautiful things."

The butterflies were shipped to the Perrys overnight, and each one came in its own folded-up piece of paper, imprinted with the words, "In loving memory of Ethan Perry."

"You slowly unfold the paper, and the butterfly is there waiting to spread its wings," Angie Perry told the JHV. "It's really a moment of reflection. Here you are: You're going to release this butterfly out into the wild, and it's going to fly away and do its thing and maybe some will stay in the garden."

Brian also found it a time for introspection. "You're standing there and you're holding a butterfly. It's really beautiful and it's a very personal moment," he said.

The garden was a labor of love for family friend Cyrus Walker, 14, who made it his Eagle Scout project at the request of the Perrys. Never hesitating, the teen embraced the idea, enlisting the help of Sugar Land Troop 1116, which prepared the soil, researched what plants to use and designed where to place the paving stones.

The multitude of blooming plants not only are host plants on which butterflies lay their eggs, but also nectar plants for them to feed on. What Cyrus is most proud of, though, are the stone bench and the plaque he helped design that states this is Ethan Perry's Butterfly Garden.

"I built it because when we were younger, Ethan and I were great friends," Cyrus told the JHV. "And, I enjoyed making it for Ethan."

The dedication also was part of Beth El's Shavuot service. Jim Paras, a docent at the Houston Museum of Natural Science, took a few minutes to inform the congregation about the history of butterflies and their remarkable transformation, both physically and spiritually.

Ethan was proud to become a Bar Mitzvah and, even being home schooled, he earned a place in the National Junior Honor Society.

Ethan also loved gaming, Rubik's Cubes, baking everything from brownies to challah and was learning to play violin. He was a huge fan of "Lilo and Stitch," and that's where the family got "Ethan's Ohana" from. Ohana means family.

"He was very friendly, athletic, inspiring, courageous, just unselfishly sincere – a beautiful child," said Brian.

Since their son's death, the Perrys have started Ethan's Ohana, a 501(c)(3) charity, which has raised funds for pediatric cancer research and has collected money to purchase hundreds of Rubik's Cubes to give to pediatric cancer patients.

They also placed a bench in the courtyard at their son's middle school, with the help of Big Love Cancer Care. Students have dubbed it "Ethan's bench."

For all these initiatives, it's *tikkun olam*, said Brian, that helps their family and friends along the healing process.

"At the high school that Ethan would have attended and [brother] Aidan, 20, graduated from, they created the Ethan Perry Kindness Award," Angie said. "It is a scholarship that is awarded once a year to an outgoing senior who exhibits the quality of kindness."

The award was the brainchild of Ethan's middle school orchestra teacher and is funded by the booster club and the Perrys.

"I think the most beautiful thing is that it's like [Ethan] gets to attend those schools, even though he didn't make it past seventh grade," Brian said.

Ethan was sick at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. Services were on Zoom, but that didn't stop Beth El from pulling out all the stops to support the Perry family. At one point, Cantor Renee Waghalter said there was a healing service for Ethan that



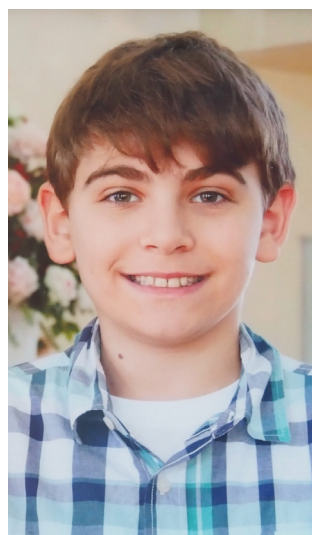
Angie Perry releases one of 36 butterflies during a May 26 dedication ceremony of the new Ethan Perry Memorial Butterfly Garden outside Congregation Beth El in Missouri City. JHV: JUDY BLUESTEIN LEVIN



Congregation Beth El Cantor Renee Waghalter with Aidan, Angie and Brian Perry. JHV: DANIEL BISSONNET



Judy Ostrow, Carol Cooper and Amy Okie were among congregants who released three dozen butterflies at Congregation Beth El in Missouri City on May 26, in honor of Ethan Perry, who succumbed to cancer two years ago. Joseph Okie JHV: DANIEL BISSONNET



Ethan Perry was 12 when he lost his battle with cancer.



Cyrus Walker made the memorial garden his Eagle Scout project. JHV: DANIEL BISSONNET



Angie Perry releases a butterfly in memory of her son, Ethan. JHV: DANIEL BISSONNET

drew 100 viewers from across the country. "I can remember sitting in my home participating and just feeling the power," Deb Paras, Beth El's vice president of Membership, told the JHV. "This congregation was behind Ethan and his parents 1,000%. Whatever their need was, we met it – and when they lost him, we all lost him."

After the butterflies were released, the group gathered for a picture. Aidan Perry was both pleased and surprised by the large turnout. "My parents had no idea how many would come. It's great to see how

many people are supporting Ethan," Aidan told the JHV.

After the dedication, Brian looked around, taking it all in. "It was amazing. I love to live in the moment, and I know that Ethan is looking down upon us and is smiling," he said. "As the butterflies flew off, I could see the look on everyone's faces – how infatuated they were with that beautiful moment."

To learn more about Ethan's Ohana, go to ethansohana.org or [Facebook.com/EthansOhana](https://www.facebook.com/EthansOhana).