



Donovan Berthoud/Herald

**SARI LEVINE, 5**, added a crown to her temple's Torah with the help of Master Torah Scribe Neil Yerman.

## Temple congregants enjoy 'once-in-a-lifetime' experience

By **PETER BELFIORE**

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Temple Avodah congregants were treated to a special occasion on April 2. With the help of master Torah restorer and scribe Neil Yerman, they had the opportunity to press a loaded quill to their synagogue's Torah and add a bit of themselves to the holy document.

As part of a fundraiser for the temple, people who donated were able to add crowns, or intricate lines, on top of certain letters in, what Yerman estimates, is a 130-year-old document. The practice is permissible in Judaism, but the crowns can only be added to seven out of the 22 letters in the Hebrew alphabet.

While there are certain rules — no part of a letter can never touch a neighboring one — congregants were free to draw their crowns however they wanted to. The idea is to dedicate the addition to something or someone," Yerman said. "It's a visual expression of a deep feeling involving prayer and blessing and memory," he added.

The design of the crown is almost entirely subjective. "On some of those letters you'll see almost like a fountain or maybe a flame," said Yerman. "They're

not thinking, they do it instinctively."

"This was a unique experience — a real defining moment in our lives," said Laura Koss-Feder, a congregant at Temple Avodah who took part in the event. She said it was particularly meaningful that her son Jeremy was able to add something to the scroll, the same one he had read a few months prior for his bar mitzvah.

"This is a significant life experience, one that families will never forget and one that is truly rare with so much importance," said Rabbi Uri Goren, of Temple Avodah, in a statement. "There are many ways to donate to the temple, but this is one that will have everlasting meaning for families for generations to come.

Fundraiser co-chairs and temple congregants Robert Keilson and Sheila London organized the fundraiser, which raised more than \$100,000 for the temple. Keilson said they came up with the idea after neighboring synagogues had held similar fundraising events. By having congregants write in the Torah themselves, they added a unique twist. While practices such as these are not totally unheard of, Keilson noted: "I don't think it's overstating it by saying it was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity."