

Local/Living

Deaths

7

Briefs

3

C

Members buy time for temple

B'nai Torah still in debt

By Wayne Tompkins
Staff Writer

The \$1 million B'nai Torah members raised in three emotion-filled hours Thursday night has momentarily rescued the suburban Boca Raton synagogue. But it will take months of talks with banks and an aggressive recruitment effort to assure its long-

term survival in the face of a \$4.5 million debt, board members say.

"I believe it was Winston Churchill who said 'This is only the end of the beginning,'" synagogue attorney and board member Ken Lipman said Friday. "It buys us maybe one year to get our house in order. It takes the patient off the critical list, but it's still in serious condition."

During Thursday's emergency meeting, nearly 400 people pledged amounts ranging from \$20 to \$50,000. A Baptist clergyman and his son each pledged \$1,000 and 6-year-old Brian Levy donated \$20.

Rabbi Murray Ezring even offered to resign, if members thought it would help. His offer was immediately refused.

The Conservative Jewish congregation's problems began last year

upon completion of its ornate \$4.5 million synagogue at 6261 SW 18th St. The congregation's leaders had gambled that the impressive building and the area's growth would attract new members. They were needed to help pay off a mortgage to NCNB Bank.

But the plan backfired, leaving the congregation \$4 million in debt to the bank and owing creditors an additional \$500,000.

Turn to Temple page 3C

Temple

From page 1C

The problem became critical in the last few months when fewer donations than expected were received from the congregation's 490 families. Last week, NCNB officials threatened to foreclose on the building if \$1 million was not raised by the end of the month.

B'nai Torah President Jeffrey Deutch said the synagogue's next strategy will focus on restructuring debts and an aggressive effort to increase membership.

"We'll be asking the bank to step forward and assist us in assuring our survival," said Deutch, a Boca Raton attorney. "If they don't, we'll be in deep difficulty again very quickly. Any assistance would involve restructuring loans

and lowering interest rates."

Another plan would challenge members to bring in one new member during the next three months, in order to double the current membership. The county's large number of unaffiliated Jews would be especially targeted.

In the meantime, Deutch is hopeful that the show of support will boost the confidence of creditors. Of the \$1 million pledged Thursday, \$600,000 came in immediately in the form of personal checks.

"Frankly, we had come to believe we couldn't do it without a handful of people writing six-figure checks," Deutch said. "But that didn't happen. What makes me most proud is that so many people pitching in smaller amounts did it. The sense of family and community Thursday night is something I'll never forget for the rest of my life. I view it as a miracle."