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Local rabbi, cantorial soloist want to help you stop on Shabbat before you go

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Rabbi Erica Burech (left) and Cantorial Soloist Emily Kaye pose with Pee-Noo-Key at the Ina Levine Jewish Community Campus in Scottsdale.

Courtesy of Jewish News

After returning home to her small Ohio town from a wonderful Jewish summer camp experience in Pennsylvania's Pocono Mountains, Rabbi Erica Burech remembers the moment when, with tears in her eyes, she told her mother how much she missed the camp and longed to be there still. Her mother told her not to cry because the solution was simple: Marry a rabbi and life can always feel like Jewish summer camp.

"I laughed at her and said, 'I'm going to be a rabbi,'" Burech said.

She was eight years old at the time, and even though ordaining women rabbis was a new reality for Reform Judaism, Burech was certain of her future career path and never wavered afterward.

"I always knew it was a calling for me," she said.

A year ago, Burech started a unique Shabbat experience open to anyone interested in joining her. Together with Cantorial Soloist Emily Kaye, her brother-in-law's sister, she leads a Shabbat service in her Paradise Valley home once a month called Shabbat Stop&Go.

During her tenure as the spiritual leader of Phoenix's Congregation Merkaz Ha-Iyr (which closed its doors in 2020), Burech learned that a little can go a long way. The congregation met twice a month and it "really felt like a big bang for the buck," she said.

Shabbat Stop&Go has a similar strategy. Once a month, she “goes all out” beginning with a nosh, followed by a camp-style Shabbat service and dinner.

The name says it all. “It’s Shabbat — time to stop, take a breath, create holy space, have dinner and then go,” she said.

This is not a synagogue, nor do Burech and Kaye ever want it to become one. There are no members, and though some people have started coming regularly, they like the flow of unaffiliated new people who are just trying something out.

They do ask each attendee of the Shabbat service to pay \$20 to help cover the cost of food, the off-duty police officer Burech hires to provide security and necessities that come up, such as musical equipment for Kaye and the volunteer band that accompanies her. The siddurim were donated to Burech by Congregation Lev Shalom in Flagstaff.

The duo plan to keep the once-a-month Shabbat calendar they’ve had for the last year. When Jewish holidays come along, they try to pair them with the Shabbat service. Sometimes, it doesn’t work as neatly as that. For example, they hosted a Passover Seder last year for more than 100 people but it didn’t fall on Shabbat.

Next month, Shabbat Stop&Go will host High Holiday services starting with Eruv Rosh Hashanah on Sept. 15, the first-day morning service on Sept. 16, a Kol Nidre service on Sept. 24 and the following day’s Yom Kippur morning service on Sept. 25.

Burech and Kaye have deep roots in Greater Phoenix’s Jewish community. Burech, who never wanted to be a pulpit rabbi, moved to Arizona with her husband whom she met at Hebrew University in Jerusalem. She taught at Pardes Jewish Day School and Jewish education has always been her specialty. Meanwhile, Kaye began as a Jewish song leader at 15 and was a cantorial soloist for several of Greater Phoenix’s Reform synagogues over the years.

The two know each other well because Burech’s sister met and married Kaye’s brother. They first worked together when Burech ran Congregation Beth Israel’s religious school in Scottsdale. She hired Kaye as the song leader and always hoped they’d work together again.

Kaye called Shabbat Stop&Go “an addition to the community, where people can come and meet other people they wouldn’t meet at their regular synagogue because people are coming from all different places in the Valley.” Because it’s no longer her full-time job, she can now sing for the “pure love and enjoyment” of it, she said.

Burech described Kaye’s singing voice as “angelic and spiritual,” something that causes her “neshama (soul) to just soar.”

Most people who come to Burech’s house have learned of the service through word of mouth or social media. People have relayed funny stories to Burech and Kaye of meeting someone out of the blue and finding out that they too have attended a Shabbat Stop&Go service.

At a baby-naming ceremony during the Aug. 18 Shabbat service, the baby’s mother told them that she had recently met someone at a breastfeeding event and when she discovered the woman was Jewish, she asked if she belonged to a synagogue. “No,” she responded. “But sometimes I go to Shabbat Stop&Go.”

Burech has an Old English Sheepdog named Pee-Noo-Key — Hebrew for cuddle, soothe and spoil. He is a therapy dog she takes with her when she volunteers twice a week at Child Crisis Arizona, an organization providing emergency shelter, foster care, adoption and counseling to vulnerable children and families. When she takes him in public, people can't help but be drawn to him. That's how she met an Israeli woman in a Hallmark store. While petting the dog, Burech told her about Shabbat Stop&Go and the woman came the next month.

"We're just enhancing people's Jewish experience," Burech said. People come when they're "looking to shake things up and enhance their neshama. Judaism is about moving your soul and growing." **JN**

To learn more, visit [ShabbatStopandGo.com](https://www.jewishaz.com/community/local-rabbi-cantorial-soloist-wa...at-before-you-go/article_652dbeea-4363-11ee-a97d-9b38ce987df6.html).