

Students prep for Jewish festival

By Micah Wintner
COLLEGIAN STAFF WRITER

Students began building a 10-by-10-foot hut made of bamboo walls on the outside patio of the Pasquerilla Spiritual Center on Tuesday.

This hut — commonly known as a sukkah — is a symbol of the Jewish holiday of Sukkot.

Sukkot is the festival of the harvest, and a sukkah represents the temporary shelters Jews erected in the desert after their exodus from Egypt, said Aaron Kaufman, executive director of Penn State Hillel.

Kaufman said it's important to provide students with the opportunity to build a sukkah, a tradition in the Jewish religion.

"It's an opportunity for students to fulfill the commandments and for students to learn about traditions," Kaufman said.

Hillel will also host a Sukkot program on Monday, which includes cookie decorating, Havdalah candle making and shaking the traditional lulav — a frond from a date palm tree — and the etrog, or citron, Kaufman said.

Havdalah is a Jewish ceremony that marks the end of the Sabbath



Asit Mishra/Collegian

Elizabeth Moser, Hillel associate, decorates a sukkah, a 10-by-10-foot bamboo hut, outside the Pasquerilla Spiritual Center on Tuesday to celebrate the Jewish harvest festival known as Sukkot.

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Aaron Kaufman
executive director of Penn State Hillel

and the beginning of a new week.

Adam Nudelman said he was happy to lend a hand in building the sukkah.

"It was either this or homework, and this is obviously much more useful," Nudelman (freshman-engineering) said.

Nudelman said a sukkah is essential to celebrating Sukkot, and without it, "you lose a huge amount of meaning."

Traditions associated with the holiday include decorating the ceiling of the sukkah with hanging fruits and eating a meal inside of it.

Sarah Dafilou, a member of

Hillel's student board, said groups of four or five students are more than welcome to have dinner in the sukkah.

Dafilou (sophomore-biochemistry and Jewish studies) said Hillel works hard to bring Jewish life to campus.

Last year Hillel brought a Holocaust resistance fighter to Penn State, which gathered an audience of about 80 people, she said.

She hopes to bring in another Holocaust survivor to Penn State this year.

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Officials: Scheduling holidays proves tricky

By Alexa Agugliaro
COLLEGIAN STAFF WRITER

Sherif Elmaghribi said he'd have a better Ramadan if the university allowed days off for religious holidays.

"Last year when I took off, the university was really accommodating about excusing the absence, but I was still responsible for making up a lot of work," Elmaghribi (sophomore-business) said.

Elmaghribi said he understands that both Jewish and Muslim holidays change every year — it would be a lot to ask of the university to cancel class.

University Registrar spokeswoman Karen Schultz said figuring out how many days to allow off in one academic year is a "balancing act."

She said Penn State is unique in that it has a fairly ambitious academic calendar based on 150 hours of instruction per week for 15 weeks.

If there is any variation in other school's calendars, she said, it is most likely because they have longer class periods per day.

The only national holidays that are officially acknowledged by the university are Labor Day, Memorial Day, Fourth of July and Martin Luther King Day, Schultz said.

"For the time being, university policy is that students are able to miss class and participate in

religious observances without being penalized," said Robert Pangborn, vice president and dean of undergraduate education.

Pangborn said Penn State is fairly similar to its Big 10 counterparts in terms of how its academic calendar is structured.

"There is a wide diversity of potential holidays and so it would be very difficult to select certain ones," he said.

Originally, Penn State did not acknowledge Martin Luther King Day until students pushed to have the day off, Schultz said.

Students said it was an important day on which they could celebrate and participate in community service, Schultz said — students felt that if classes were in session, they couldn't fully take part in activities.

But some Penn State students said they're feeling the burden of having to miss classwork because they don't have canceled classes on religious holidays.

Penn State Hillel President Michal Berns said the issue of whether to have off for holidays like Rosh Hashanah is both complex and sensitive.

"At the end of the day, it forces students to choose between observing a religious holiday or missing important class work," Berns (senior-media studies) said.

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Republicans block bill to lift 'don't ask, don't tell' policy

By Anne Flaherty
ASSOCIATED PRESS WRITER

WASHINGTON — Senate Republicans on Tuesday blocked legislation that would have repealed the law banning gays from serving openly in the military.

The partisan vote was a defeat for Senate Democrats and gay rights advocates, who saw the bill as their last chance before November's elections to overturn the law known as "don't ask, don't tell."

With the 56-43 vote, Democrats fell short of the 60 votes needed to advance the legislation. It also would have authorized \$726 billion in defense spending including a pay raise for troops.

Senate Democrats attached the repeal provision to the defense bill in the hopes that Republicans would hesitate to vote against legislation that included popular defense programs. But GOP legislators opposed the bill anyway, thwarting a key part of the Democrats' legislative agenda.

Now, gay rights advocates say

they worry they have lost a crucial opportunity to change the law. If Democrats lose seats in the upcoming elections this fall, repealing the ban could prove even more difficult — if not impossible — next year.

"The whole thing is a political train wreck," said Richard Socarides, a former White House adviser on gay rights during the Clinton administration.

Socarides said President Barack Obama "badly miscalculated" the Pentagon's support for repeal, while Democrats made

only a "token effort" to advance the bill.

"If it was a priority for the Democratic leadership, they would get a clean vote on this," he said.

Democratic Sens. Blanche Lincoln and Mark Pryor of Arkansas sided with Republicans to block the bill. Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, D-Nev., also voted against the measure as a procedural tactic. Under Senate rules, doing so enables him to revive the bill at a later date if he wants. Republican Sen. Susan

Collins of Maine had been seen as the crucial 60th vote because she supports overturning the military ban. But Collins agreed with her GOP colleagues that Republicans weren't given sufficient chance to offer amendments. Reid allowed Republicans the opportunity to offer only one amendment to address GOP objections on the military's policy on gays.

Collins said she planned to vote against advancing the bill unless Democrats agreed to extend debate so that her colleagues could weigh in on other issues.

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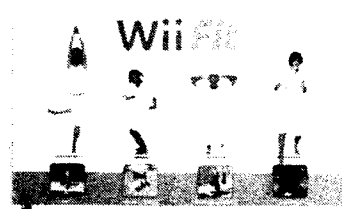
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