

# JEWISH YOUNGSTOWN AREA JOURNAL

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HANUKKAH EDITION 2025  
KISLEV - SHEVAT 5786

## HANUKKAH BEGINS AT SUNDOWN DEC. 14.

See pages 27-32  
for articles, memories,  
and more.



## CANDLE LIGHTING TIMES

November 28 ....4:38 p.m.	December 26.....4:42 p.m.
December 5 .....4:36 p.m.	January 2.....4:48 p.m.
December 12.....4:36 p.m.	January 9.....4:54 p.m.
December 19.....4:38 p.m.	January 16 .....5:02 p.m.



YOUNGSTOWN AREA  
JEWISH FEDERATION  
COMMEMORATES OCT. 7 ATTACKS.

*See page 21*

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## LISA'S LONG VIEW

### Light in the face of darkness

**A Message From Lisa Long**  
*Federation Chief Executive Officer*

Driving my 14-year-old son Henry north from his rural middle school this week, I saw something that broke my heart, again.

Spray-painted on the sign of a local business was a swastika.

It's not the first time we've made this terrible discovery. It's the second. The second time my child has discovered that hateful symbol so close to his school, his home, his world.

This time, as the two of us drove north toward the Federation's annual Holocaust Survivor program, the weight of that image crept into the corners of my eyes as I held back tears.

When we arrived at the program, more than 1,100 students from 14 different school districts filled Stambaugh Auditorium. They came to listen to a Survivor, to witness, to learn, to remember. And in that moment, sitting among those young people and their teachers, I felt something else stir inside me... hope. Hope that there are still people who will protect my children if they need it. Hope that education and empathy still matter. Hope that, even when darkness rears its head, light continues to spread.

As Hanukkah approaches, the light of nostalgia glows within me.

When I was growing up, more than half

the people in our town were Jewish. Hanukkah wasn't something we had to explain.

My parents placed our electric hanukkah proudly in the front window without fear. They hid our presents in the basement rafters (where my brother and I found them every year). Eight boxes appeared on the first night, one for each evening.

The year I got my very first CD, Michael Jackson's "Black or White," I didn't have a CD player. I convinced my parents to drive me to my friend Margo's house to listen to it. They could've saved themselves the trip by telling me that in one of the other boxes was my very first CD player and I just needed to be patient. I guess they knew that patience was never my virtue.

Hanukkah felt different back then. Our whole family gathered at my grandma's house, where the fireplace glowed with fake logs and the windows were sealed with saran wrap to keep the cold out. We exchanged one gift each, the one for the cousin or aunt or uncle whose name we'd drawn at Thanksgiving.

Years later, in Youngstown, I met Wendy Weiss and she shared her Hanukkah tradition, a way to make sure her kids felt that same joy and belonging we did when

we were kids. A way for our kids to share their traditions with their friends of other faiths... in that moment, the Little Long's Annual Chanukah Sleepover was born.

Every year, my kids' friends light their own hanukkah while Henry and Madeline lead the group in this reading from Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks:

"For though my faith is not yours and your faith is not mine, if we each are free to light our own flame, together we can banish some of the darkness in the world."

Then they spin dreidels and eat latkes and matzo ball soup.

I hope this warmth surrounds my kids each year so when they drive past hateful imagery or are confronted with kids at their school who greet them with the Nazi salute, they know those who spread hate are the minority. I know this to be true because Henry's best friend actually offered to grab paint and cover the hate after proudly proclaiming, "We should knock on that door and tell them, 'That's not nice!'"

That's light. That's courage. That's the world I still believe in.

May this Hanukkah bring light to all of us, and may we each be brave enough to shine it, wherever darkness appears.



## NANCY'S NOTES

### The meaning of family

**By Nancy Burnett**

As we enter into these early days of the year 5786, we encounter a period of national thanksgiving—a time to reflect on all that we have to be thankful for. First and foremost on my list is my family, which prompts me to think of the meaning of the word family. I am blessed to have children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren; and although we are scattered geographically, they are never more than a phone call away.

But the word family has a broader mean-

ing. We are all members of the human family and as such are commanded to take care of each other knowing that the dignity of difference is a core concept of Judaism. We are each individuals, yet the ways we unite in times of crisis or stress go beyond our biological relationships.

Families share memories; families share a sense of altruism extending beyond our nuclear family to friends, to neighbors, to communities, and from there to nations.

As I think of my own personal family, my thoughts extend to that wider definition which includes my relationships within the community. Just as the tree of life extends from its roots to the trunk to the limbs to the leaves, so do our lives extend outward and upward.

I joined the Youngstown area Jewish community in 2015 and was welcomed with open arms. Andy Lipkin, Melissa Bateman, and Neil Yutkin, of blessed memory, were the first to encourage me to become active with the Youngstown Area Jewish Federation, and I've never looked back.

My earliest activity was with Partnership2Gether. It was my first glimpse into the global outreach of our Federation. It afforded me the opportunity to travel to Israel and Hungary and Poland and see firsthand where some of our annual pledge money goes and what causes those donations support.

Here in our own community, the Youngstown Area Jewish Federation is composed of five agencies, each supporting local citizens from all walks of life and serving all age groups. Our programs include an

active, full-service community center (the JCC) with a community food service and an Early Learning Center. Heritage Manor and Levy Gardens support the aging population. Our family service agency (Jewish Family & Community) serves those with a variety of needs. We provide financial assistance to Akiva Academy and the religious school at Ohev Beth Sholom. Our Jewish Community Relations Council advocates for equality, tolerance, and resilience as it seeks to raise awareness in the political world of antisemitism, and our security department keeps us safe as we gather for events on campus and in the community.

We really are a cradle-to-grave institution. This season of thanks giving I truly am thankful for and proud of my "family"—all of them—and for my opportunity to serve my community through volunteering and my annual pledge. As our Federation Annual Campaign closes out another year, I am proud to add my financial contribution to support so many programs and people in so many ways.



ABOUT THE JOURNAL

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December 29 is the deadline for articles and ads for the Winter Issue. Submissions may be edited for length and/or clarity. The Jewish Journal does not assume the responsibility for the Kashruth of any product or service advertised on its pages.

The Jewish Journal is now accepting opinion columns. Send submissions to journal@jewishyoungstown.org as a Word document. Include name and contact information. Acceptance is at the discretion of the editor and may be edited for clarity.

Veterans recognized at Heritage Manor

Senior Living by Youngstown Area Jewish Federation celebrated veterans at an event on Veterans Day at Heritage Manor Skilled Nursing & Rehabilitation.

At the ceremony, sponsored by Heritage Manor and Southern Care Hospice, veterans from Heritage Manor, Adult Day Services at Heritage Manor, and Levy Gardens Assisted Living were individually recognized, given a certificate and pin, and saluted.

“We’re grateful for our veterans who have served our nation with courage, dedication, and sacrifice,” said Sarah Benson, of Southern Care Hospice. “Veterans Day is more than a date on the calendar. It’s a moment to pause, reflect, and express our gratitude to those who answered the call to protect our freedom.”

Austintown Fitch Color Guard presented the flag, Austintown Fitch Symphonic Band provided music, and Akiva students read a poem.

Phillip Floyd was also presented with his high school diploma by his wife Kim. He was drafted before he could receive it.

Veterans recognized were:

Army: Mia Barrington, Clarence Burnette, Richard Burton, Homer Eloph, Phillip Floyd, Gerald Gregory, James Hunt, Jenean Lamos, James Marco, Jeff McCary, Harold McDavid, Calvin Shelton Massenburg, MC Peterson, Ronald Rogers, Kenneth Sidelinger, Ronald Will, Richard Yankel, Thomas Yeager, David Turner, and Tony Setinsek

Navy: Godfrey Anderson – British Royal Navy, Harold Brock, James Gwin, Craig Hendrickson, Calvin Jones, Gregg Mansour, Stephen Marshall, Rick Ornelas, Robert Pazol, Thomas Phillips (SEAL), and James Stone

Marines: Edwin Berger, Angel Morales, William Tassian, Anthony Tisler, and James Young

Air Force: William Garritano, Jeffrey Mullett, Rich Roach, Chuck Shoenberger



Phillip Floyd, a resident of Heritage Manor Skilled Living & Rehabilitation, was recognized for his Army service. He also was presented with a high school diploma. He was drafted before he could receive it.



Adult Day Services at Heritage Manor client William Tassian was recognized for his service in the Marines. He shared his recruit photo from the 1950s.

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## Oakley named program director of Adult Day and Levy Gardens

Kristen Oakley recently took on the role of program director of Adult Day Services at Heritage Manor and Levy Gardens Assisted Living. She was previously activity director at Adult Day Services.

As program director of both facilities, she will elevate the activities offered not only for Adult Day Service clients but also the tenants at Levy Gardens.

She plans to bring new activities to clients and tenants that offer physical support through daily exercise routines and games such as bocce and bowling, as well as intellectual stimulation through trivia, word games, and current events to name a few. She will also provide emotional support through reminiscing programs, live music, manicures, group activities, and crafts. Spiritual needs will also be cov-



ered with Shabbat Services offered every Friday and Saturday along with transportation provided to visit the Temple. She will coordinate socialization with outings four times a month.

“My passion in life is to bring joy to others, to help them see the beauty in themselves and their surroundings,” Oakley said. “My new position as program director of these two wonderful facilities allows me to be a part of these individuals’ lives while keeping them engaged in life.”

Oakley graduated from YSU in 2008 with a bachelor’s in psychology and has been activity director certified since 2013. When she’s not working she can be found with her husband, Myles, and her son, Max. She enjoys painting, reading, and drinking coffee.

## Federation names director of assisted living

The Youngstown Area Jewish Federation named Fawne Moon director of Levy Gardens Assisted Living, part of the continuum of care offered by Senior Living by Youngstown Area Jewish Federation.

Moon was director of Adult Day Services at Heritage Manor, also part of the services offered by the Federation. She will now oversee both programs.

She brings more than 20 years of experience to the role. She spent 12 years as a school nurse, 11 years in long-term care, and one year as an infectious disease nurse.

“I’m excited and honored to have been chosen to lead Levy Gardens Assisted



Living,” she said.

Moon attended Penn State University’s Associate of Arts program and received her RN from Eastern Gateway Community College. She earned her RN-BSN from Franklin University in Columbus.

She and her husband live in Sharon, Pa. She has two sons and recently welcomed a granddaughter.

Senior Living by Youngstown Area Jewish Federation provides care for older adults at various stages of life at Heritage Manor Skilled Nursing & Rehabilitation, Levy Gardens Assisted Living, and Adult Day Services at Heritage Manor. To learn more, visit [yajf.org/seniorliving](http://yajf.org/seniorliving).



**SENIOR LIVING**  
by Youngstown Area Jewish Federation



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*Faith-based values fuel our compassion*

[yajf.org/seniorliving](http://yajf.org/seniorliving)



## Students and Levy tenants create together Fantauzzi retires from JFCS



As part of the Better Together program—a partnership between the Youngstown Area Jewish Federation and Akiva Academy—students joined Levy Gardens Assisted Living tenants, JCC art instructor Stacie Hunter,

and Federation Israel Engagement/Program Coordinator Liron Wolyniec Daniel to create seasonal fall crafts. Pictured from left are Shaniah Coleman, Dani Ferrell, Daniel Malkin, Sophia Kapon, and Natalie Pazin.



Vivian Fantauzzi, a clinical social worker for Jewish Family & Community Services, recently retired. She was with JFCS for more than 40 years and assisted the community by seeing countless individuals and families for counseling, resettled more than 400 immigrants, taught educational lessons at Akiva

Academy, facilitated the Parkinson's Support Group at the JCC, and more. Her colleagues recently wished her well at a retirement party. Pictured from left are Sherry Walker, Laura Haas, Marc Bye, Cathy Nehlen, Amy Such, Fantauzzi, Nicole Balog-Bickerstaff, Linda Kessler, Ken Bielecki, and Taylor Robinson.

## Heritage Manor residents decorate sukkah Adult Day Services holds senior prom



Residents of Heritage Manor Skilled Nursing & Rehabilitation spent time decorating the JCC sukkah. Pictured is Bert Ehrenberg.



Adult Day Services at Heritage Manor held a prom for its clients. Each client brought a guest. They enjoyed dancing, refreshments, and photo opportunities. Pictured from left are Albert Williams and Rose Jordan.



## Grandpa

By Dave Stauffer

Youngstown Area  
Jewish Federation  
CFO

It's not often you get the opportunity to be both an employee of an organization and a customer. In 2025, I had that unique privilege—as CFO of the Youngstown Area Jewish Federation and as a family member benefiting from our Adult Day Services program.

A little background: In early 2024, my father-in-law—affectionately called “Grandpa”—came to live with my wife and me. At 87 years young, his dementia had progressed to the point where it was no longer safe for him to live alone. Fortunately, he was not a wanderer, nor was he at risk for falls. For most of 2024, he spent about seven hours a day alone while

we worked, as our schedules allowed.

While this arrangement worked for a time, we quickly realized the isolation was not healthy. Grandpa rarely spoke to anyone but us. In January 2025, we introduced him to Adult Day Services at Heritage Manor, hoping it would give him social interaction and stimulation. We were skeptical—but we could not have been more wrong.

We started with three days a week, and Grandpa loved it. He would come home talking non-stop about everything that had happened—from Bingo to the people he met, to how kind the staff were. During a check-in with our ADS director, Fawne Moon, I mentioned our struggle with helping him shower, as we are not trained caregivers. Fawne kindly

offered that the staff could handle showering and dental care—a relief we cannot put into words. A task that no daughter should have to manage for her father was now handled with care and dignity by the program.

ADS also supported his outpatient therapy at Heritage Manor. Grandpa would proudly share stories of riding the stationary bike longer than prescribed, eager to impress his therapist. He grew stronger and more confident in walking—though sometimes we had to remind him to use his cane! Staff also noticed issues with his feet, arranged for a podiatrist to treat them, and established a regular maintenance plan. He enjoyed breakfast and lunch daily and, after about two months, we increased his attendance to five days a week. Transportation was easy: He would come to work with me in the morning, and my wife would pick him up after work.

Grandpa truly embraced the program—he believed he had a job there and proudly carried business cards with his photo and information. By September, we had settled into a weekly routine that brought structure and joy to his life and allowed our family some flexibility and social time. Thanks to short-term respite stays at Heritage, we even enjoyed a brief out-of-town vacation in June.

Then, in October, things changed suddenly. Grandpa suffered a stroke and never recovered. He passed away at the end of the month, reunited with his beloved wife on the other side.

In the days since his passing, I have reflected often on what those months at Adult Day Services meant—not just for him, but for our family. What began as a hopeful experiment became one of our greatest blessings. Grandpa found community, purpose, and laughter. He was not just cared for—he was known, respected, and loved.

For my wife and me, the staff became partners in a journey that can be both rewarding and exhausting. They treated Grandpa like family and treated us with patience, understanding, and compassion. The peace of mind that came from knowing he was safe, engaged, and genuinely happy is something words cannot fully capture.

When I think about what our Federation and its affiliated agencies stand for—dignity, compassion, and community—Grandpa's experience is the perfect reflection of those values in action. I am proud not only to work here, but to have witnessed firsthand the profound impact this program has on families like mine.

To Fawne and her team at Adult Day Services—to the therapists, nurses, aides, and everyone who made Grandpa's last year full of care and connection—thank you. You gave him joy, and you gave us comfort.

And to Grandpa—thank you for reminding us, even in your final chapter, what it means to live with humor, gratitude, and love. We miss you deeply, but we are so grateful for the time we had together.



Parrot Hope Rescue visited Adult Day Services in September. Grandpa is pictured with one of the birds.

## Happy Hanukkah

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at Temple El Emeth

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located in the Temple Lobby for a  
safe shopping experience this  
holiday season

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## Heritage Manor named one of best nursing homes in country by Newsweek

Heritage Manor Skilled Nursing & Rehabilitation was named one of the best nursing homes in the country by Newsweek, and one of the top five small nursing homes in Ohio.

"Heritage Manor is honored to be recognized by Newsweek," said Eric Murray, executive director of senior living by Youngstown Area Jewish Federation. "I am grateful for the Heritage Manor team members that go above and beyond every day to provide a truly caring experience for our residents and their family members. I know how important quality programming is to the Federation, and we are pleased to be identified as one of the best nursing facilities in the country."

Nursing homes are recognized in three size categories: large (150+ certified beds), medium (100–149 certified beds), and small (50–99 certified beds). Heritage Manor is in the small category.

The evaluation is based on four data sources: Quality Metrics—data published by the U.S. Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services; a national online survey

of thousands of medical professionals and managers working in nursing; accreditation data on nursing homes provided by the Joint Commission and Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities; and Google reviews.

Heritage Manor is a 72-bed facility that's rated as a five-star nursing facility by the Center for Medicare/Medicaid. It offers long-term and short-term care, including all types of physical, occupational, and speech therapy. It is the only Veterans-Administration-approved provider of long-term care in Mahoning County. Staff-to-resident ratio is above state averages. Included is a 2,000-square-foot therapy gym, rehabilitation solarium, and therapy mock apartment. Rooms are private with private restrooms.

Heritage Manor Skilled Nursing & Rehabilitation is part of the continuum of care offered by Senior Living by Youngstown Area Jewish Federation. As well as Heritage Manor, it includes Levy Gardens Assisted Living and Adult Day Services at Heritage Manor.

## Laura Haas delivers keynote at world suicide prevention day event

Laura Haas, LISW, JFCS survivors of suicide support group facilitator, was the keynote speaker at the Mahoning County Mental Health & Recover Board World Suicide Prevention Day event. She shared her speech with the Jewish Journal:

Thank you all for being here today. It has been an honor to partner with the MCMHB over the past year to facilitate the grief group for those who have lost a loved one by suicide. Each 10-week series brings new hope and shows the resilience loved ones can find as they move through their journey of healing. Fifteen people locally have attended the groups and they have shown strength, empathy and compassion toward each other and more importantly to themselves. We have also had the opportunity to reach once local families who now live out of state and even out of the country.

My wish for today is to leave you with the belief that there is an ability to find and embrace the possibility of healing, hope, and resilience.

Losing someone we love is never easy. It's a loss that cuts deeper, especially when it happens suddenly and in a way that leaves feelings of helplessness, confusion, and even anger. When a loved one passes away by suicide, the grief can feel all-consuming. It's like a storm that sweeps through lives, leaving behind wreckage, a sense of disbelief, and an unanswerable question: Why?

And this question is part of the journey of healing. It's part of the human condition, our natural response to loss. But even in the face of this question, I want to remind you of one thing: Hope is still possible. Resilience is still within.

Hope is a fragile thing. Sometimes, it feels as if it's a thread so thin, so delicate, that it could snap at any moment. In the aftermath of a loss like this, when the world

has been turned upside down and everything feels uncertain, hope may seem out of reach. But hope is also incredibly resilient, just like we are. It has the ability to grow, even in the darkest of places.

When I think about hope, I think of it not as an abstract idea, but as a quiet, persistent force. It's the spark that survives even after the storm, the light that flickers in the corner of our hearts, no matter how much the darkness threatens to overtake it. In the midst of grief, hope can sometimes feel hidden, almost impossible to find. But I believe that hope isn't a feeling that is simply given to us. Hope is something we cultivate. It's a choice.

Hope is the belief that even though we may never fully understand why this happened, we can still live with purpose. It's the understanding that our loved ones are still with us, in the lessons they taught us, in the memories they left behind, in the way they shaped who we are. It's the realization that life, in all its beauty and pain, is worth living—no matter the obstacles we face, no matter the scars we bear.

Hope is in the small things that we often overlook—the sunrise, the warm embrace of a friend, the laughter of a child. It's in the ways we connect with others who share the pain and in how we begin to find meaning in the moments that seem meaningless. Hope can be a quiet whisper, or it can be a loud call to action, urging us to take the next step, to keep moving forward, even when we don't feel ready.

There are days when hope feels like a distant memory, a concept that belongs to someone else. But I assure you, hope is always there, even when we cannot see it. Hope isn't just about waiting for things to get better—it's about actively seeking out the good, even in the most challenging



*Laura Haas continued on page 44*

# CR Electric Inc.



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## JFCS welcomes new guardianship manager

By Olivia Miller

This fall Jewish Family & Community Services welcomed a new guardianship manager to the team. Marc Bye has a different background than expected for a guardianship manager, but these unique skills have been helpful to him in his new role.

Bye was born in England and received his bachelor's degree in health sciences and his medical degree from the University of Bristol. He spent his residency in renal medicine and in palliative oncology. After his residency he worked as a physician in the emergency room.

"I think it's made me very well equipped for this position at least from the human side of things," said Bye. "I have always been good at relating to people, getting on their level, talking with them, and just sort of understanding the problems from their perspective. I feel quite privileged to be able to speak for some of these people who may not be able to express what they want."

Bye met his wife Allison, originally from the Austintown area, when she was an exchange student in Germany. They then became pen pals and were married after



several years long distance. Allison joined Marc in England for a time, and then they decided to come to the United States in 2019. After going through the green card process and becoming a U.S. citizen, Marc received his MBA from Youngstown State University.

Marc and Allison foster greyhounds and have proudly adopted two retired racers, Andy and Barry. The Byes are heavily involved in the Trumbull New Theater, where Marc is a board member, including the upcoming production of Jane Austen's "Emma" in January, directed by Allison.

Bye enjoys video games, puzzles, and spending time outdoors. He laments that he doesn't get to spend as much time outdoors as he used to but hopes to get back to hiking and kayaking soon.

"I am thankful to be a part of an organization that supports me so well and trusts me to look after these vulnerable adults," said Bye. "I'm finding a real sense of purpose with this job. It's challenging in the right way, and I feel satisfaction knowing that I'm doing important work."

## Orchestra performs at Levy



Tischler Klezmer Orchestra performed for Levy Gardens Assisted Living tenants and Our Gang members recently.

## Cards made for JBI Library patrons



Adult Day Services at Heritage Manor clients decorated Hanukkah Cards for JBI Library. The cards are for JBI patrons across the globe who are blind, have low vision, or who have a print disability. JBI provided the cards with braille and large print. ADS clients used creative art techniques, including puff

paint, stickers, and various types of fabric, to add tactile art. Levy Gardens Assisted Living tenants; afterschool and open studio participants; Youngstown Area Jewish Federation staff; and Our Gang also participated in the project. Pictured from left are Mary Judy, Judy McNear, and Ron Chilton.

Happy  
Hanukkah

from

Rick & Susan Sokolou



## Always ready: Magen David Adom steps up preparedness as Israel faces new threats

### Contributed article

On Oct. 7, 2023, Israel endured one of the darkest days in its history. The scale of violence, brutality, and deliberate targeting of civilians left scars that will never fully heal. Amid the chaos, Magen David Adom volunteers and staff led the emergency medical response, risking—and in some cases giving—their lives to save others.

As Israel's national emergency medical service, MDA is where Israelis of all ethnicities and religions turn to during life's difficult moments. So, when Hamas fired on MDA ambulances and murdered medics, the loss was felt throughout the nation.

Yet, after the grieving, MDA was determined to strengthen every part of its lifesaving mission. That determination has already driven tangible change. In the last two years, MDA has expanded its fleet with hundreds of new vehicles—including armored ambulances, Medicycles, mobile blood donation units, mass casualty trailers, and rapid response vehicles. They have trained more than half a million Israelis in CPR and first aid, creating a nation better prepared to save lives before professional responders arrive, while also significantly expanding the number of paramedics being

trained to join its ranks.

In 2024 alone, the MDA's Marcus National Blood Services Center collected and distributed nearly 300,000 units of blood, while pioneering groundbreaking field-ready innovations like freeze-dried plasma and whole blood transfusions that lowered battlefield mortality.

Recognizing the war's impact on the youngest and most vulnerable, MDA's Sussman Human Milk Bank collected more than 3,300 liters of donated breastmilk to feed infants whose mothers were kidnapped, injured, or serving on the front lines.

And this past June, when Iranian ballistic missiles hit heavily populated areas in Israel, its new levels of preparedness were again tested. Despite major property damage and the need to extract patients from the rubble, most of the injured received quick, effective treatment—thanks, in no small part, to the fact that MDA medics were ready for any eventuality.

"No matter what happens, we can assure the people of Israel that Magen David Adom will always be there—prepared and ready to save lives," said MDA chief of staff Uri Shacham.



There are many ways to support Israel and its people, but this Chanukah, no gift is more transformative than one to Magen David Adom, Israel's emergency services system. Your support of MDA isn't just changing lives — it's literally saving them — providing critical care and hospital transport for everyone from victims of heart attacks to rocket attacks, and every emergency in between.

**Donate today at [MagenDavidAdom.org](https://MagenDavidAdom.org) or call 866.632.2763.**



Israel's Emergency Services System

**Make your plans now to be featured in the 2026 Hanukkah Business Spotlight section. Contact the editor to be first on the list.**



## Chanukkah and other current events



**Rabbi Seth Sternstein**  
*Temple El Emeth*

What is Chanukkah? What were the internal issues which the Jewish people of the second century BCE faced, and what were the external issues? Chanukkah, essentially, was the revolt of Jews who remained loyal to Judaism against the Greco/Hellenistic influences of the day. These loyal Jews faced internal pressure from Hellenizing Jews, who were quite comfortable abandoning Jewish practices, such as ritual circumcision, and kashrut, and substituting for them Greek practices, such as exposing the entire body in sporting matches, eating swine (and sacrificing them in honor of the Greek gods!), thereby aban-

doning Jewish sensibilities, in general.

These loyal Jews also faced external pressures from Antiochus IV, who wished to pit traditional Jews against Hellenistic Jews, and thereby weaken Jewish resolve to take back control of Jerusalem, which had become polluted by Greek “culture” and Greek interference. Antiochus took increasingly harsh measures against Jews who refused to honor his “divinity.” He also replaced the High Priest, Joshua, with Menelaus, someone who had offered Antiochus a large bribe. In brief, in those days, Jews were divided into two competing camps: those who wanted to import more and more Greek practices and political influence into Israel, and those who saw these cultural influences and political developments as a growing threat to the character and stability of Jewish life.

Ultimately, the Maccabees successfully defeated the Seleucid Greeks and their noxious ways, and their overbearing political influence.

It is ironic, perhaps, that I write these words on the very day that Jews, here in America, are facing both internal threats and external threats. Zorhan Mamdani, just today, has been elected as mayor of New York City. Most political analysts to whom I have turned for reliable analysis in the past are extremely concerned about what a Mamdani victory means, first, for the Jews of New York, and second, for the Jews of America. Mr. Mamdani is known for his anti-Israel positions, and antisemitic rhetoric. He reminds me, to an extent, of the villain of the Chanukkah story. Antiochus believed that the Jews (at least those who were loyal to Torah values) were an obstacle to his consolidating power. As noted, he was an external threat to the Jews of his day. I do not want to stretch the comparison too far, but, I will admit that I am concerned about the external threat to our community that Mr. Mamdani poses. Our eyes must be open.

What is especially distressing is that,

according to the Times of Israel, a CNN exit poll finds that one-third of New York Jews voted for Mamdani, thus assuring his victory. Some assimilated and eager-to-please Jews of the first century supported Hellenization. As noted, they voted against Judaism and Jewish sensibilities, in an effort to imitate Greek culture, and curry favor with the politicians who surrounded them.

Perhaps we have, this Chanukkah - this holiday of lights - a similar situation. I hope my fears will prove unfounded. But, my hope is this. History proves that the unholy alliance of Jews and Seleucid Greeks was unsustainable. The Maccabees won, and today, we love to celebrate that fact. Just as we overcame the problems of the second century BCE, so, too, will we overcome the problems of the 21st century CE. And, when we do, we will emerge into the bright light of redemption.

A Happy Chanukkah from my home to yours.

**Volunteer**

### Build the Future of Israel

Be a force of hope, resilience, and restoration while gaining personal growth, unforgettable memories, and lifelong friendships.

After October 7th, a wave of solidarity from Birthright Israel alumni and the global Jewish community swept across the world. People didn't ask if they should help — they asked how. Birthright Israel answered. Through our Volunteer in Israel programs, in partnership with the Jewish Federations of North America, Jewish adults (ages 18–50) can join 8–14 day experiences supporting Israeli communities — from agricultural work and food distribution to rebuilding and hands-on aid. Over 10,000 have stepped up. Will you be next?

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 Select “Classic Volunteer”

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## A cappella group performs at TEE



*The Ohio State University a cappella group "The MehsugaNotes" delighted the audience at Temple El Emeth Oct. 26 with a concert of Israeli, Yiddish, and popular songs. A dessert reception followed the concert.*

## Simchat Torah at Temple El Emeth



*Lisa Mirman (left) and Alice Franklin celebrate.*



*Gregory Alper, who was honored at El Emeth as Chatan Bereisheit on Simchat Torah, leads the Torah parade. Aaron Duval was also honored as Chatan Torah.*



*A spaghetti dinner at El Emeth preceded Simchat Torah services.*

## TEMPLE EL EMETH EVENTS

**El Emeth Sisterhood will hold a Pre-Hanukkah brunch** at 11 a.m. Dec. 4 at the Temple. The Judaica Shop is fully stocked and will be open for Hanukkah shopping that day. Members should RSVP to the Temple by Dec. 2.

**The Liberty Food Pantry will have its food distribution** Dec. 5 from 9:30 a.m. until 12:30 p.m. To volunteer call the Synagogue office and your name will be passed on to the pantry chairs.

**Rabbi Sternstein will have a book review** Dec. 9 at 1:30 p.m. at the Synagogue. He will review the book "For a Time Such as This" by Rabbi Elliot Cosgrove. Copies of the book will be available at the Temple to purchase for those who are interested. Cake and Coffee will be served.

**A Family Hanukkah Dinner and Party** is planned for Dec. 16 at 6 p.m. Everyone is asked to bring their own Menorah to light; reservation forms can be found in the temple Bulletin, in the office or online in News you Can Use. There will be music and entertainment by Origami artist Michael Roy.

**Shabbat evening services** are held Friday evenings at 5:45 p.m. and Saturday mornings at 10:00 a.m. Guests wishing to attend are required to register in the Synagogue office beforehand.

Please call the Synagogue office for specific times and details of events and services. Security is present at all events and will check names of people attending at the entrance. Members and guests are asked to RSVP for all dinners and special events by calling the Synagogue at 330.759.1429.



## TEE holds sukkah decorating party

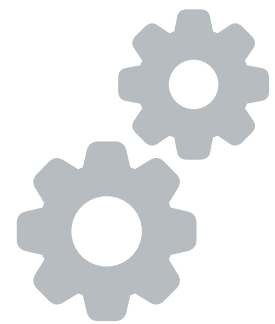


Temple El Emeth held an adult sukkah decorating party in early October. Pictured from left are (front) Tirtza Kohan, Ronna Marlin, Kim Knofsky, Sherri Clayman, Nancy Wagner, Phyllis Friedman, Marilyn Berchuck, Andrea Duval, Lisa Mirman, Elyse Silverman, (Back) Rick Marlin, Jodi Stoyak, and Stephan Stoyak.

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Friday  
4pm - 11pm

Saturday  
11am - 11pm

Sunday  
11am - 7pm



## They tried to educate it out of us



By Yankel Golden  
President & Rabbi  
Children of Israel Congregation

Throughout history, the Jewish people have faced countless enemies who sought our destruction. As we were leaving Egypt, we encountered the nation of Amalek. In more present times, we were faced with the horrors of the Nazis and many others who wanted to destroy our physical bodies. Yet, every year, we pause to commemorate a different kind of war—one not fought with weapons but with ideas.

The goal of the Greeks wasn't to erase the Jewish people, but rather to redefine them. They were okay with our nation standing but wanted to change what we stood for. They came to substitute our values, which were given to us in the Torah, with their principles of philosophy, art, and beauty. Their intent was to

replace revelation with reason and sanctity with sophistication.

When we light our menorahs and sing Al HaNissim, we mention how the Greeks rose against the Jewish people so that we should forget the Torah and turn away from its commandments. We remember that this was a war against the Jewish soul and an attempt to educate our faith out of us.

They outlawed commandments such as Shabbos and banned Rosh Chodesh and Bris Milah. It was a campaign not to kill us, but systematically assimilate us. Through reeducation, the Jews would slowly transform into Greeks.

But, as is seen throughout our history, the fire that burns in a Jewish soul cannot be extinguished. The Maccabees understood that they were fighting not simply for Jewish survival, but for the survival of what makes us Jewish, our connection to the Torah, and the commandments. The fact that there are Jews in Youngstown, Ohio, lighting menorahs in the present day, is testimony to just how strong this idea is.

This year, when we light the menorah, it's our chance not just to recall an ancient victory, eat latkes, and enjoy the company of friends and family, but also to declare our inner light proudly. Even in our small community, we have the opportunity to make the statement that holiness still lights up the world, and that the fire within the Jewish soul will never be extinguished.

This Chanukah, as the menorah shines, we are reminded that true wisdom doesn't come from passing trends rather, from the Torah we received on Mount Sinai, which continues to guide us from generation to generation.

From all of us at Children of Israel Congregation, we wish everyone a Freilichen Chanukah!

For Children of Israel service times and upcoming events, visit [cojyoungstown.org](http://cojyoungstown.org) or scan the QR code to the left.



## Celebrate Hanukkah

Friday, December 12, 2025 | 6pm

*A celebration for all ages!*

Join us for:

- A Festive Service
- Klezmer Band - The Yiddishe Cup
- Latkes, Pizza, Donuts, & More

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## Akiva visits Hartford Orchard

Kindergarten through fourth grade Akiva Academy students took a field trip to Hartford Orchard in September as part of their Rosh Hashanah celebration. They learned about the apple

sorting machine and how to pick them from the tree. They also took a hay ride to the orchard itself. Students were given apples to take home and enjoyed a cold cider during lunch time.



## Students celebrate Rosh Hashanah

Akiva Academy students celebrated Rosh Hashanah Sept. 19. They enjoyed apples

in honey and created arts and crafts related to the holiday. Pictured are first grade students.



## Preschoolers learn about Thanksgiving



Early Learning Center at the JCC preschoolers in the Ocean Explorers classroom have been getting ready for Thanksgiving throughout November. They enjoyed many activities including using their fine motor skills to transfer corn kernels in the sensory bin, creating a painted Mayflower handprint craft, and comparing and contrasting how Thanksgiving is celebrated now versus a long time ago. The children also got ready for the season feast by talking about the different kinds of food they could eat on Thanksgiving, and then creating their own Thanksgiving plate by gluing their favorite foods to a paper plate. Pictured is Josie Hall creating her Thanksgiving plate of pumpkin pie.

## ELC students explore the fall season



The Early Learning Center at the JCC firefly room has been investigating autumn. During their investigation, the kids looked at different fallen leaves that had been gathered in the sensory area. As the children independently looked through

the leaves, the teachers talked about how leaves are various colors and sizes. When one of the kids held up a leaf, the teacher would describe the qualities of the leaf. Pictured from left are Corinthia Jones, Jackie Hartzell, and Storm Adams-Driver.



Students decorate sukkah

Akiva Academy students visited the JCC sukkah in October to hang decorations they made with the help of Mrs. Eldrid, Akiva art teacher. They fulfilled the Mitzvah of being in the sukkah and waved the Lulav three times in six different directions as part of celebrating Sukkot. Pictured are fourth grade students.



School-wide shabbat held

Akiva Academy held a school-wide Shabbat on Oct. 10 focusing on Simchat Torah. Students learned about the Torah scroll and, as part of the holiday celebrations, did seven laps with it in the JCC's Multi-Purpose Room. Pictured from left are Marliegh Schonberger and Neela James.



SAM KOOPERMAN ENDOWMENT



Applications for camp scholarships and study in Israel are being accepted.

The deadline to apply for camp scholarships is December 31.

The deadlines to apply for study in Israel scholarships are December 31 and June 30.



For more information contact  
Courtney Campesi at 330.746.3250 ext. 152  
or [ccampesi@jewishyoungstown.org](mailto:ccampesi@jewishyoungstown.org).



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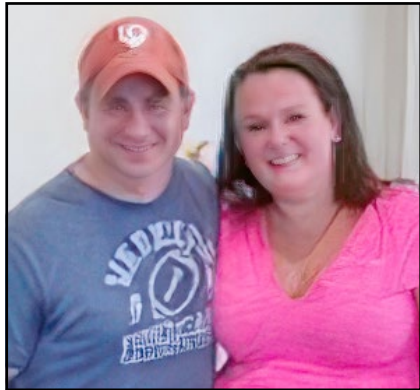
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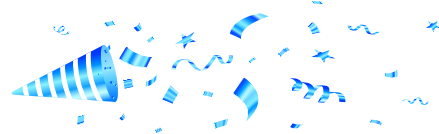




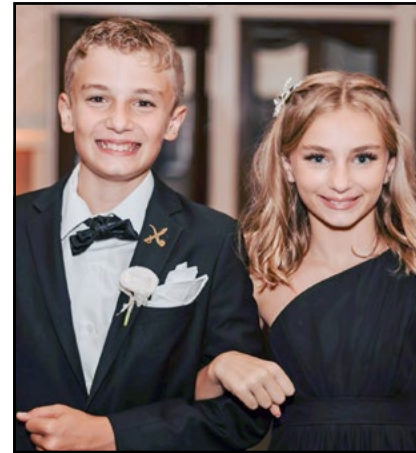
## MAZEL TOV

**Marni Altman and Adam Neft**

Marni Altman, daughter of Lisa and Jeffrey Altman, will be married to Adam Neft, son of Esther and Jimmy Neft of Pittsburgh. The wedding will take place on March 8, 2026, in Columbus at Beth Jacob Congregation.



## MAZEL TOV

**Bella Marie Vickers and Blake Michael Vickers**

Please join Megan and Jeffrey Vickers as they joyfully celebrate their children, Bella Marie Vickers and Blake Michael Vickers, being called to the Torah for their B'nai Mitzvah on Nov. 8 at 4:00 p.m.

Bella and Blake are seventh grade honor roll students at Girard Junior High School, where they bring their unique personalities and work ethic to everything they do. They are the beloved grandchildren of Terrie and

Robert Chudakoff, and they also cherish their sister Emma Guerrieri, her husband Santino, and their newborn niece Sonny.

Bella is a talented dancer and cheerleader who has earned numerous awards in dancing competitions. She loves expressing herself through movement, spending time with her close friends, and never misses an episode of "Dance Moms." Her energy and creativity light up every room she enters, whether it's a stage, a classroom, or home.

Blake is a true sports enthusiast with an unstoppable competitive spirit. He plays basketball, football, and baseball, and can talk about sports stats and highlights for hours. When he's not practicing, playing, or watching sports, he enjoys hanging out with his friends or diving into videogames for hours at a time!

Together, Bella and Blake share a special twin bond that shines in everything they do. They love traveling with their grandparents, making family memories, and spending time with their playful dogs, Gizzi and Louie. Their family is incredibly proud of the kind, bright, and fun-loving young people they've become, and looks forward to celebrating this milestone surrounded by loved ones.

## MAZEL TOV

**Madeline Long**

Madeline Long was chosen as one of five 2025 Gems of the Valley by the Fund for Women & Girls of the Community Foundation of the Mahoning Valley. She was chosen for her work in building a brighter community and uplifting the women around her. She was honored at a ceremony Oct. 16. Maddie is the first teen to receive the honor. She's pictured with her mother, Lisa Long.

## MAZEL TOV

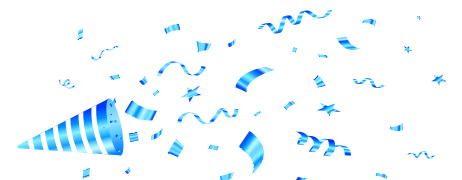
**Courtney Campesi**

Courtney Campesi, Youngstown Area Jewish Federation financial resource development director, was selected as a member of the Leadership Mahoning Valley Class of 2026. Through this nine month immersive, interactive program which includes a series of speakers, tours, hands-on activities and site visits, Courtney will gain knowledge of programs, services, businesses, and institutions in the community.

## MAZEL TOV

**Elise Skolnick**

Elise Skolnick, Youngstown Area Jewish Federation director of communications & marketing, was recently chosen as Inspirational Person of the Week by Spanning the Need.





## Federation kicks off 2025 Combined Jewish Appeal

The Youngstown Area Jewish Federation held its kick off to the 2025 Combined Jewish Appeal Sept. 9 at the Funny Farm Comedy Club in Niles.

Mo Mandel, an actor and comedian, was the featured entertainment for the evening. He entertained the crowd with jokes about the area as well as a variety of

topics. Attendees also enjoyed cocktails and dinner.

Ian and Hannah Anderson and Jeff and Rachel Kay were event co-chairs. Nancy Burnett, Alice Franklin, and Samie Winick are campaign co-chairs.

Visit [jewishyoungstown.org](http://jewishyoungstown.org) to donate to the campaign.



*Mo Mandel, comedian, entertained Inaugural event attendees.*



*Pictured from left are event co-chairs Hannah Anderson, Rachel Kay, Jeff Kay, and Ian Anderson. They introduced Mo Mandel, the featured entertainer.*



*Pictured from left are campaign chairs Samie Winick, Alice Franklin, and Nancy Burnett.*



*Howard Sniderman chats with Mo Mandel, the entertainer for the event.*



*Inaugural event attendees enjoyed dinner before the entertainment.*



## Penners honored posthumously at AFP National Philanthropy Day Luncheon



The 2025 AFP Legacy Award Honorees are David and Benita Penner.

"The Penners were deeply devoted members of the Youngstown Area Jewish community and known not only for their warmth and kindness, but for their unwavering commitment to building a better future for others," said Courtney Campesi, Youngstown Area Jewish Federation financial resource development director.

They were very engaged in their community, taking part in weekly programs at the JCC of Youngstown and dedicating their time to volunteer with their synagogue.

Before their passing, David in 2019 and Benita in 2020, they ensured their lifelong commitment to education and community engagement by establishing a transformative legacy gift of over \$3 million. Their support benefits charitable organizations not only within the Jewish community but also across the broader region and internationally.

David was born and raised in Youngstown. After serving in the U.S. Army, he returned home to join his

family's furniture business before transitioning into a successful, decades-long career in insurance. Benita moved from Pittsburgh to Youngstown as a teenager and graduated from the Knox School in New York. She and David married in 1963 and built a full, joyful life centered around family, community and Jewish values. They were proud parents to their daughter Harriet and took immense joy in their role as grandparents to Holden.

Both were actively involved in the Jewish community and gave generously of their time, energy, and resources. David and Benita participated in Brotherhood and Sisterhood groups at their temple, Congregation Rodef Sholom (now Congregation Ohev Beth Sholom), supported local programs and took pride in strengthening Jewish life here in our valley.

Through the Penner Family Endowment of the Youngstown Area Jewish Federation, grants are awarded annually to programs focused on breaking the cycle of poverty by expanding access to high-quality early childhood education, from birth through kindergarten.



A group of staff and lay leaders from the Youngstown Area Jewish Federation were at the AFP National Philanthropy Day Luncheon to accept the posthumous award for the Penners. Pictured from left are Cari Immerman; Melissa Bateman, Federation director of community engagement; Bonnie Deutsch Burdman, Federation executive director of community relations/government affairs; Alice Franklin; Lisa Long, Federation CEO; Courtney Campesi, Federation financial resource development director; Nic Bush, Federation development & community relations manager; Elliot Legow; and Samie Winick.

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## 2025 year-end charitable giving and tax planning



**By Courtney Campesi**  
*Youngstown Area Jewish Federation Financial Resource Development Director*

As the year winds down, it's a good time to think about how your charitable contributions can not only support the Federation but also provide meaningful tax benefits. By using thoughtful giving approaches, you can enhance your support for the Federation and its agencies, while potentially reducing your income and capital gains taxes and even protect you from future estate tax exposure.

Please note that effective Jan. 1, 2026, there will be significant changes to tax laws that could impact your charitable giving plan. Considering these changes, you should be aware and take action before the end of 2025.

**Key Year-End Charitable Giving Strategies:** If you itemize deductions, your gifts may lower your overall income tax bill. Contributing retirement assets may offer immediate tax benefits and help reduce the size of your taxable estate.

**Here are a few strategies to keep in mind:**

**Gift Appreciated Assets:** Donating appreciated assets such as stocks or mutual funds continues to be one of the most effective charitable giving strategies. With the stock market's recent strong performance, your investments may have seen significant gains. By gifting these assets directly to the Federation, you can receive a deduction for their full fair market value while avoiding the capital gains tax you'd owe if you sold them yourself. In contrast, if you hold assets that have declined in value, it's usually better to sell them first to realize a capital loss, then donate the cash proceeds. This way, you may be able to use the loss to offset other taxable gains, and up to \$3,000 of ordinary income on your tax return.

**Donate to or Consider Opening a**

**Donor-Advised Fund:** If you're thinking about making a significant charitable contribution or prefer the flexibility of giving over time, a Donor-Advised Fund can be a good solution. You can open a new DAF, with the Youngstown Area Jewish Foundation, or contribute to an existing one, allowing you to take an immediate tax deduction while recommending grants to charities on your own timeline. Contributing appreciated assets, like publicly traded stock, can be especially tax-efficient, helping you avoid capital gains taxes. DAFs at the Federation can also accept a wide range of non-cash assets, including life insurance policies, interests in privately held businesses, real estate, and certain collectibles. When you establish a DAF with our Foundation, you can choose to earn a guaranteed 5 percent annual return on your investment.

**Utilize IRA Charitable Rollovers:** If you or your spouse are age 70 1/2 or older, an IRA charitable rollover is a powerful way to support the Federation while enjoying significant tax benefits. You can transfer up to \$108,000 (per person, in 2025, adjusted annually for inflation) directly from your IRA to the Federation without counting it as taxable income. These gifts also count toward your required minimum distribution if you're age 73 or older, helping you fulfill IRS rules while avoiding the income tax normally due on those withdrawals. Plus, the transferred assets are excluded from your taxable estate, which may reduce future estate tax exposure. Recently, Congress has expanded this option to allow a one-time, tax-free transfer of up to \$54,000 from your IRA to fund a charitable gift annuity. This option provides you with a fixed annual income for life, while still supporting a cause you care about. Our Foundation offers the opportunity to establish a Charitable Gift Annuity, Charitable Remainder Trust, or Charitable Remainder Unitrust.

Looking ahead to 2026, here is what you need to know:

**Charitable deductions for non-itemizers**

Taxpayers who take the standard deduc-

*Year-end continued on page 44*

## Tenants make cards for IDF soldiers



Liron Daniel, Youngstown Area Jewish Federation engagement Israel/program coordinator, and Melanie Lemberski, an IDF combat soldier who served in Gaza after Oct. 7, worked with Levy Gardens Assisted Living tenants to make greeting

and thank you cards for IDF soldiers. They also created decorations for the JCC sukkah with photos and names of the 48 hostages remaining in Gaza at the time. Pictured from left are Lenore Ackerman, Daniel, Lemberski, Jim Stone, and Danny Malkin.

## Soldan has new role with Federation

Rebecca Soldan, assistant director of the JCC, has changed positions within the Federation. She is now director of strategic operations and data management for the Youngstown Area Jewish Federation.

In this role, Soldan will be involved in many corporate wide initiatives and projects, including data management and tracking, software applications and improvements, budget/revenue

enhancement processes and procedures, shared services analysis, compliance and accreditation, and more. She also

will remain involved with JMeals and will work with human resources to continue to lead and assist with interagency trainings including new staff orientation and culture programs throughout the organization.

"For more than seven years, Rebecca has been an integral part of the JCC," said Dave Stauffer, Federation CFO. "It has become clear that Rebecca's skill set aligns with our areas of need and should increase bandwidth campus wide. We are all excited for this transition."





## Federation receives award

The Youngstown Area Jewish Federation was selected for a 2025 WRTA Holiday Lights Award representing the “Education and Empowerment” category.

Ten nonprofit organizations were chosen by a selection committee as winners of the award. The public decided who was named Non-profit of the Year. The Federation was recognized at a dinner Nov. 17.

The WRTA Holiday Lights Award, launched in 2021, celebrates the non-profit organizations that make the Mahoning Valley brighter every day. Nearly 50 Valley non-profits have been recognized to date. As an award winner, the Federation receives a regional marketing campaign

that includes TV advertising, bus advertising, social media marketing, and promotion on WRTA’s giant digital display sign.

Other organizations receiving an award were:

- ACLD School and Learning Center
- Friends of the Mahoning River
- Game Changers
- Hopewell Theatre
- Mahoning Valley Historical Society
- OH WOW! Children’s Center for Science & Technology
- Silver Lining Cancer Fund
- Youngstown Area Jewish Federation
- The Youngstown Playhouse

ACLD School and Learning Center took the top honor.



The Youngstown Area Jewish Federation was selected for a 2025 WRTA Holiday Lights Award. Pictured from left at the recognition dinner are Denise Wolf, JCC executive director; Nic Bush, Federation development & community relations manager; Courtney Campesi, Federation financial resource development director; and Elise Skolnick, Federation director of communications & marketing.

## Help Akvia raise awareness and scholarship dollars



By Courtney Campesi

*Youngstown Area Jewish Federation Financial Resource Development Director*

Altshuler Akiva Academy.

Every Child Every Family has dis-

You can help Altshuler Akiva Academy in raising awareness and scholarship dollars, through the Ohio Scholarship Fund Db a Every Child Every Family Scholarship Granting Organization.

Make a difference today by visiting [everychildeveryfamily.org](http://everychildeveryfamily.org) and contributing by selecting

tributed \$2.6 million in scholarship funds for the 2025-2026 school year to thirty-nine schools in Ohio. There are still a few enrolled schools with funds available for the 2025-2026 school year. The scholarship payment request window opens again Jan. 1 and will close March 1, for the 2026-2027 school year.

Donations received through April 15, 2026 can be used as a tax credit for 2025 on Ohio tax liability. Scholarship dollars earmarked for Altshuler Akiva Academy donated between April 16, 2025 and April 15, 2026, will be available for the 2026-2027 school year. If a couple files jointly and wants to make one donation, all they need to do is include both of their names on the online donation. For additional questions, please contact your financial advisor or tax preparer.

## Happy Hanukkah

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## Federation commemorates Oct. 7 attacks in Israel

### Staff report

The Youngstown Area Jewish Federation held a solemn commemoration at the Jewish Community Center to mark the two-year anniversary of the Oct. 7, 2023 attacks in Israel. The event honored victims, recognized acts of courage, and stood in solidarity with hostages who remained in captivity at the time.

A central feature of the evening was Staff Sergeant Melanie Lemberski, a combat fighter in the Israel Defense Forces Reserves. Lemberski shared her experiences leading missions in Gaza as part of Israel's first all-female combat team. She spoke candidly about coping with grief after losing close friends in the attacks at the Nova Music Festival while continuing to serve on the frontlines. Her remarks offered attendees a rare insight into the realities of war and the personal resilience required of soldiers.

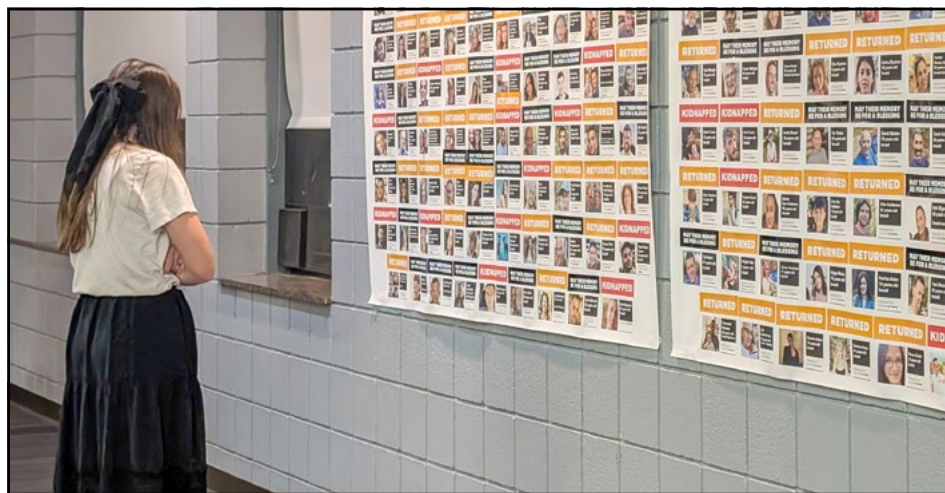
The program opened with a siren, recreating the moment the attacks began in Israel, followed by the lighting of seven symbolic candles representing Israel, the Jewish people, hostages, lives lost, heroes, strength, and hope. Candle lighting was led by community members: Mark Huberman, Federation president, lit the first candle for Israel; Tres Hively, President of the local BBYO, lit the second for the Jewish people; Michael Shemer and Sherri Pataki lit the third for hostages; Henry Long and Rabbi Sternstein lit the fourth for lives lost; Liron Daniel lit the fifth after singing Yuval Raphael's song "New Day Will Rise"

for hope and strength; Marc Muser and Cari Immerman lit the sixth for heroes; and Rabbi Courtney Berman lit the seventh for hope and peace in Israel.

The third candle specifically honored hostages still held in Gaza. Michael Shemer shared the story of Evyatar David, kidnapped from the festival, highlighting his deteriorated condition in captivity and his love for music. Sherri Pataki spoke about Alon Ohel, a young pianist also taken during the attacks, describing his injuries and the harsh conditions he endured. A short video showing Evyatar and Alon performing together illustrated the resilience and hope that art can provide. Both hostages were safely returned to Israel days later as part of a ceasefire and hostage deal.

Other candles recognized lives lost, survivors, and everyday heroes. Yuval Raphael, who survived the festival attack and later represented Israel in the Eurovision Song Contest, and Aner Shapira, a soldier who saved lives during the attacks, were honored. Volunteers from Magen David Adom and United Hatzalah were also recognized for their lifesaving efforts during the crisis.

The evening concluded with attendees singing "Hatikvah," Israel's national anthem, in a display of unity, remembrance, and hope for peace. Lemberski's personal account of courage and resilience resonated deeply, leaving the community inspired by the enduring strength of those affected by the events of Oct. 7, 2023.



Banner remembering the Oct. 7 hostages were on display during the commemoration event.

### MAHONING VALLEY WATERCOLOR SOCIETY



Artwork by Jean Nye

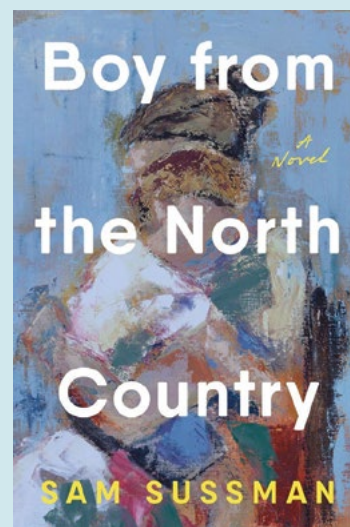
Immerse yourself in the luminous world of the Mahoning Valley Watercolor Society, where regional artists, from ambitious newcomers to seasoned pros, capture the beauty of nature and everyday life through expressive watercolors that celebrate texture, light, and local inspiration in works inviting you to linger, reflect, and return for another look. **Through December 26**



Thomas Family Endowment of the  
Youngstown Area Jewish Federation  
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by Jewish Book Council Author  
**Sam Sussman**

**WITH ZOOM AUTHOR PROGRAM**

When Evan, twenty-six, is called home to care for his dying mother, June, he begins to uncover the astonishing truth of his origins and the secrets of the woman who raised him. He learns about his biological father, his mother's hidden past, and her intense, little-known romance with Bob Dylan. As June shares the stories she once kept from him, Evan comes to understand the remarkable gift of her love, wisdom, and sacrifice in this deeply moving and very tender debut novel by Sam Sussman.

**Thursday, December 9 | 7:00 p.m. via Zoom**

**Register at least 24 hours in advance.**

**To reserve your spot or learn more, reach out to Barb Wilson at [bwilson@jewishyoungstown.org](mailto:bwilson@jewishyoungstown.org) or 330.746.3251 ext.106.**



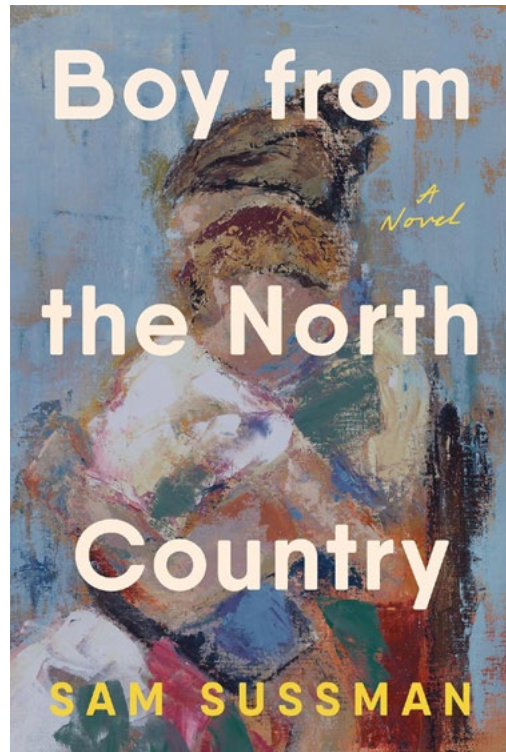


## 'Boy from the North Country' author to join Susan Kanterman Book Club via Zoom

"Boy from the North Country," released in September, is a debut novel by Sam Sussman. The JCC's Susan Kanterman Book Club will discuss it at their December meeting. Sussman will join via Zoom.

Based on Sussman's Harper's memoir essay, "The Silent Type: On (Possibly) Being Bob Dylan's Son," "Boy from the North Country" is a tender and intimate mother-son story. The novel is being hailed as "a monumental event for anyone who cares about Dylan" (by David Yaffe, author of "Bob Dylan: Like a Complete Unknown").

When twenty-six-year-old Evan returns home from his life abroad to the Hudson Valley farmhouse where he was raised by his mother, there is so much he doesn't know. He doesn't know that his vibrant, loving mother June is dying. He still doesn't know the identity of his biological father or the elusive story of his mother's creatively intense, emotionally turbulent romance with Bob Dylan, whom Evan reveres as



*'Boy from the North Country' by Sam Sussman*

an artist and whom strangers have long insisted he resembles. He doesn't know the secrets of his mother's life before he was born or what drove her to leave New York City for a quiet rural life where he was brought up to believe in the cathartic power of stories and, above all, love.

Caring for his mother as her illness worsens, and as she begins to tell him truths he has waited so long to hear, Evan comes to understand the star-

ting gift this extraordinary woman has bequeathed him. While the powerful bond between mother and son lies at the heart of this story, Sussman also renders a riveting and intimate depiction of Bob Dylan struggling through artistic and personal crisis to write his most famous album, "Blood on the Tracks," drawn from the account of Sussman's mother, Dylan's lover at that time, and artfully woven into the book's essential human themes of loss, memory, and the redemptive power of love.

Sam Sussman grew up in the Hudson Valley. He graduated with a BA from Swarthmore College and an MPhil from the University of Oxford and has lived in Berlin and Jerusalem. His writing has been recognized by BAFTA and published in Harper's Magazine. Sussman has taught writing seminars in India, Chile, and England and participated in the PEN World Voices Festival of International Literature. He lives in the Yorkville neighborhood of Manhattan and his native Hudson

Valley.

For more information about the Susan Kanterman Book Club contact Barb Wilson at [bwilson@jewishyoungstown.org](mailto:bwilson@jewishyoungstown.org).

**SUSAN  
KANTERMEN  
BOOK CLUB**

## Local teens participate in regional BBYO tailgate



Three Youngstown BBYO teens joined over 160 others from across the Ohio Northern Region at the ONR BBYO Dawg Pound Tailgate Nov. 2. They enjoyed a sunny day filled with fun activities, including flag football, a QB challenge,

bubble soccer, carnival games, inflatables, crafts, a friendship bracelet bar, food trucks, an apple cider bar, a DJ, and more. Pictured from left are Logan Hirsch, Blythe Hively, Tres Hively, Maddie Long, and Ilana Thal.

## Special birthday celebrated



JCC staff and members helped wish member Joe Spurio a happy 105th birthday. He is pictured here in the center of the photo.



## JEWISH COMMUNITY CENTER OF YOUNGSTOWN UPCOMING EVENTS

### MEMBERSHIP

*During this gift-giving season, why not give the gift of the J? Members will receive \$20 in JBucks for every three month gift membership purchased for a friend during December.*

### CULTURAL ARTS & JEWISH ENGAGEMENT (CAJE)

#### VETERAN'S BREAKFAST CLUB (AGES 18+)

*Finding Shalom in War: The Christmas Truce of 1914* | Wednesday, December 17

#### CELEBRATING THE 100TH ANNUAL JEWISH BOOK MONTH!

*Book Swap & Bagel Brunch* | December 7

#### LATKE LUNCH & HANUKKAH BINGO

*Eat latkes and donuts while playing a few fun rounds of Hanukkah BINGO* | December 22

#### SUSAN KANTERMAN BOOK CLUB

*"Boy From North Country"* by Jewish Book Council Author Sam Sussman With Virtual Author Visit | December 9

*"The Many Mothers of Ivy Puddingstone"* by Randy Meyers | January 13

#### LITTLE GROOVERS

*Joyful dance class designed for children to explore music and movement together while building important gross motor skills. The theme is Astronaut Adventures.*

Thursdays, December 4, 11, 18

#### PAUL AND YETTA GLUCK SCHOOL OF VISUAL ARTS

*Cocoa & Canvas: Family Sip & Paint* | December 7

*Busted and Brilliant: Torn Canvas Art* | January 20

*Jewelry Making 101 Series* | January 26, February 9, February 23, March 9

*Textured Blooms: 3D Flower Canvases* | February 15

#### CRAFT & KVELL

*Winter Tree Collage* | December 19

*Northern Lights Mini Canvas* | January 16

### WELLNESS

**LIFEGUARD CERTIFICATION** (Ages 15+) | Friday, Saturday, and Sunday, December 19-21

**FIRST AID/CPR/AED TRAINING** | December 20

**MERCY HEALTH'S JOANIE ABDU COMPREHENSIVE BREAST CARE "MAMMOVAN" CANCER SCREENING** | December 19

**AFTER SCHOOL FAMILY FUN IN THE POOL** *Rave in the Waves* | December 19

**DIVE IN MOVIE** | January 23

**VOLLEYBALL CLINIC** (Grades 6-8) | December 6-27

CHECK OUT OUR FULL SLATE OF OFFERINGS AT [JCCYOUNGSTOWN.ORG](http://JCCYOUNGSTOWN.ORG)!

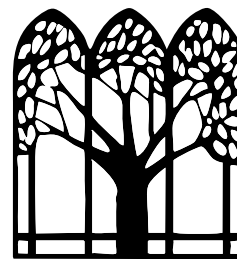
## BBYO Youngstown holds kickoff event for new year of activities

BBYO Youngstown launched its new programming year with a kickoff event in September at Sports World in Boardman. Twelve local Jewish teens gathered for an afternoon of fun and connection, learning more about BBYO, its mission, and upcoming events. Attendees enjoyed a variety of activities, including mini golf, go-kart racing, arcade games, and pizza, while getting to know fellow members and hearing from peers about the engaging opportunities BBYO offers throughout the year.

BBYO is the leading pluralistic teen movement aspiring to involve more Jewish teens in more meaningful Jewish experiences. For over 95 years, BBYO has provided exceptional identity enrichment and leadership development experiences for hundreds of thousands of Jewish teens. Teens in grades eight to 12 are eligible for BBYO. Contact Amber Shrawder at [ashrawder@jewishyoungstown.org](mailto:ashrawder@jewishyoungstown.org), or 330.746.3250, ext.177 for more information.



BBYO Youngstown held its new year kickoff event in September at Sports World in Boardman. Pictured from left are (front) Tres Hively, Hayden Forestal, Maddie Long, Henry Long, (back) Addison Silverman, Cameron Silverman, Blythe Hively, Eli Hagler, Jensen McKelvey, Sidney Braslawce, Noah Francis Hill, and Jake Hagler.



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## Area teens to participate in Student to Student program



For the first year, the Youngstown community will participate in Student to Student, a national program that gives Jewish teens the chance to visit local schools and share what Judaism is and what it means to them. This program will be a part of the Jewish Community Relations Council of the Youngstown Area Jewish Federation's continuing effort to combat antisemitism

in schools and in the broader community. Pictured from left are Nic Bush, Federation development & community relations manager; participating teens Jensen McKelvey, Jake Hagler, Eli Hagler, Tres Hively, Blythe Hively, and Maddie Long; Liron Daniel, Federation Israel engagement/program coordinator; and Fawn Chapel, Student to Student national director.

## Holocaust Survivor speaks to students

Holocaust Survivor Erika Gold shared her story with over 1,000 students from 15 school districts at Stambaugh Auditorium

in November. Her testimony was both deeply moving and impactful, leaving a lasting impression on all who attended.



*Holocaust Survivor Erika Gold shared her story with area students. She's pictured on the left with her daughter, Marilyn Zaas.*

## LONE SOLDIER A Journey of Bravery: Mark Liner



**Come hear his story in his own words.**

Mark Liner is a Lone Soldier, meaning he serves in the IDF without immediate family in Israel. He arrived in Israel during the COVID lockdowns, leaving college to work on kibbutz farms, and later made Aliyah. Mark was drafted into the Golani Brigade in August 2023 and was still in basic training when the war began on October 7. He went on to serve as a combat soldier on the front lines of one of Israel's most challenging wars, spending nearly a year on the northern border with Lebanon before completing his service on the Gaza border.

**December 2 | 12:00 p.m. | JCC Multi-Purpose Room**  
Please RSVP to Nancy Sentelik by email at [nsentelik@jewishyoungstown.org](mailto:nsentelik@jewishyoungstown.org) or by phone at 330.746.3250 ext. 108.

**Cost: \$5.00 | A light lunch will be served.**



*Over 1,000 students packed Stambaugh Auditorium to hear Erika Gold share her story. Pictured are students from Akiva Academy.*



## JCRC call for entries in annual Holocaust Writing, Art, and Multi-Media Contest

### Staff Report

The Jewish Community Relations Council of the Youngstown Area Jewish Federation invites students in grades 7–12 from Mahoning, Trumbull, and Columbiana Counties in Ohio, as well as in Western Pennsylvania, to participate in its annual Holocaust Writing, Art, and Multi-Media Contest.

This contest is held each spring in conjunction with Yom Hashoah (Holocaust Memorial Day), which will be observed this academic year on April 14. Yom Hashoah is a solemn day set aside to honor the memory of the six million Jews who were murdered in the Holocaust and to remind us of what can happen to civilized people when bigotry, hatred, and indifference reign.

The theme for the 2026 contest is “When Time Stood Still: The Fate of Jewish Families and Communities During the Holocaust.” This year’s theme is inspired by an 18-panel exhibit from Yad Vashem that highlights how each of the six million victims was more than just a number. Every individual had a unique

identity—a life filled with hopes, fears, dreams, ambitions, and most importantly, family.

The Holocaust devastated Jewish families and communities across Europe. Synagogues, cemeteries, and cultural institutions were destroyed. Entire shtetls (Jewish towns and neighborhoods) were targeted for extermination by the Nazis, with their inhabitants rounded up, murdered, or deported to concentration and death camps. The destruction of the shtetls resulted in the near-total eradication of eastern European Jewry. In many cases, Holocaust Survivors returned to their home towns after liberation to find no one from their families alive.

Though countless families were torn apart, their bonds remain unbroken in memory. Even in the darkest moments, it was love—especially the love of family—that sustained the human spirit. They were mothers and fathers, sons and daughters, siblings, cousins, and friends—each one part of a vibrant, close-knit community. By telling their stories,

we ensure their legacies live on.

All submissions must reflect the theme and explore the role and impact of family and community in the lives of Holocaust victims and Survivors—before, during, and (for those who survived) after the Holocaust. Entries should demonstrate how family was a source of strength, resilience, or loss—and how these individuals and their loved ones were impacted or remembered.

Students are encouraged to draw inspiration from local Survivor testimonies, which are available for free through the Youngstown Area Jewish Federation website – [jewishyoungstown.org](http://jewishyoungstown.org).

The guidelines for the format of the contest entries are as follows: The writing component can be a narrative composition or piece of poetry, no more than 1,500 words, double spaced and submitted in Microsoft Word. The art component should demonstrate originality and a creative representation of the theme, using paint, crayon, pencil or other similar medium on 8.5x11 white paper.

Multimedia submissions, no longer than five minutes, will be accepted in the form of YouTube videos, Instagram stories, or TikTok posts submitted electronically or on a flash drive, and should demonstrate originality and a creative representation of the theme, and should be as substantial in form and content as a written entry. All entries, whether writing, art, or media, must be accompanied by a title page or label containing the following information: student’s name, home address and telephone number; student’s school name, address and telephone number; teacher’s name; and grade.

The deadline is March 24. Submit submissions to Nancy Sentelik at [nsentelik@jewishyoungstown.org](mailto:nsentelik@jewishyoungstown.org). Presentation of contest awards will be made during the Yom Hashoah Community Commemoration at noon April 14, at the Mahoning County Courthouse. All are also invited to the Shoah Memorial Service at 4 p.m. April 19 at the Jewish Community Center. Contact the JCRC at 330.746.3250, ext. 108 for more information.

## Upgrades to library/resource center being planned



**By Nic Bush**  
Youngstown Area  
Jewish Federation  
Development  
& Community  
Relations Manager

In just a few short years, the world will lose its last Holocaust Survivor. Once that moment passes, we will no longer have their firsthand stories of survival, perseverance, and the devastating impact of hatred. It is our moral duty to ensure these stories are preserved and shared for generations to come.

That is why the Jewish Community Relations Council of the Youngstown Area Jewish Federation is embarking on a project to upgrade and rebrand the

library/resource center in the JCC into the Schwartz Holocaust & Antisemitism Resource Center, a vital new hub for education and remembrance in our community. This inspiring space will feature rotating Holocaust exhibits, an impactful 40 foot timeline depicting the long history of antisemitism, a redesigned website highlighting Dr. Saul Friedman’s interviews with local Survivors, the Jewish Journal archives, and artifacts cataloged by the Federation’s Holocaust Education Specialist, Jesse McClain.

The Center will be anchored by a powerful mural created by a talented local artist, symbolizing the enduring importance of Holocaust remembrance. This striking artwork will be a way to honor every Survivor who called Youngstown home and remember the six million lives lost in the Shoah. The JCRC is currently accepting proposals from artists for the mural.

“When you enter the new space, even for just a few minutes, we want you to leave having learned something new,” says Melissa Bateman, Federation director of community engagement. “That’s our simple goal. We want to educate as many people as possible about what extreme hatred can lead to. Such vitriolic

hatred doesn’t always result in six million Jews being killed, but it does lead to two Israeli embassy workers being shot and peaceful activists being firebombed.”

If you’d like to support this project, please reach out to Nic Bush at [nbush@jewishyoungstown.org](mailto:nbush@jewishyoungstown.org) or at 330.746.3251 ext. 114 for more information.

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## JCRC participates in annual parade



The Social Action Committee of the Jewish Community Relations Council of the Youngstown Area Jewish Federation participated in the annual Nonviolence Week Parade Oct. 5, helping mark the start of a week dedicated to addressing violence in the community. Their float, which won first place in design, centered on the theme zachor (to remember) and featured pop-

pies—symbols of remembrance in both Polish and Israeli cultures. The float's message honored past civil rights leaders, the hostages and those who lost their lives as a result of the Oct. 7 attacks, and members of the Youngstown community who have died due to gun violence. Pictured from left are Samie Winick, chair of the committee; Yetta Gluck; and Nancy Burnett.

## SUSAN KANTERMAN BOOK CLUB

# BOOK SWAP

## AND BAGEL BRUNCH

Join the Susan Kanterman Book Club as we celebrate the 100th Anniversary of Jewish Book Month with a bagel brunch. Bring your gently used books to swap with fellow readers.



Sunday, December 7 | 10:00 a.m.-11:30 a.m. | JCC Multi-Purpose Room  
 FREE for Book Club Participants | Not in the Book Club? \$5/Member | \$10/Non Members  
 Please register by Friday, December 5. To reserve your spot or learn more, reach out to Barb Wilson at [bwilson@jewishyoungstown.org](mailto:bwilson@jewishyoungstown.org) or 330.746.3251 ext.106.

## Local teens attend fall BBYO convention

Four Youngstown BBYO teens came together with over a hundred Jewish teens for the Ohio Northern Region and Keystone Mountain Region Fall Convention at Camp Wise. The weekend was packed with fun, connection, and unforgettable memories.

Luai Ahmed was the guest speaker. He shared his remarkable story of being raised in an environment of antisemitic ideology, his personal journey of deradicalization, and his

continued work combating extremism and antisemitism.

Other experiences included a teen-led Shabbat, a cabin talent show, Limmud sessions that encouraged reflection and conversation about Jewish identity and community, AZA and BBG Bootcamp where teens deepened their understanding of BBYO tradition, Israeli games and a Bollywood-inspired dance session, a Saturday night social that included a Silent Disco, and more.



Local teens joined over a hundred teens for the fall BBYO convention at Camp Wise. Pictured from left are Sidney Braslawcsce, Blythe Hively, Maddie Long, and Tres Hively.



## Holiday of light

By Nancy Burnett

The season of goodwill is upon us. The holiday season is evident as we are greeted merrily by strangers. Shoppers throng the highways and malls looking for the perfect gift for loved ones, friends, and co-workers, and once a year the community rises up to express thanks and revel in the joy of the season.

It is the time I can look around me and observe the festivities—and be thankful for my choice of Judaism. While others celebrate the season either religiously or secularly, as Jews we celebrate all seasons. Nearly every month of every year provides a celebration of life and acknowledges He who provided it. Each month allows a time of reflection or thanksgiving for the harvest, for the giving of Torah, for the end of enslavement in Egypt.

Hanukkah is a rabbinical holiday but a time to reflect on the beauty of the faith itself. Throughout history, Judaism has been endangered—its very existence threatened. Yet as long as the flame of faith burns in the soul of even one individual, Judaism will never be extinguished.

Each candle on the hanukkiah symbolizes a light in the darkness—a beacon leading a community back to its roots, its history, its spiritual source. The light from each candle draws a circle enveloping those bathed by the light into a unified community sharing a history and a future.

## Holiday traditions

Staff report

The Elf on a Shelf is a relatively new holiday tradition. It is an elf scout sent by Santa to help with the composition of his Naughty and Nice lists. The elf is adopted and named by a family thus bestowing it with Christmas magic. The elf observes household behavior during the day and then flies to the North Pole to report to Santa, returning the next morning to a different household-viewing vantage point. The intent is to encourage good behavior throughout the holiday period so Santa will shower gifts on the well-behaved child.

The Mensch on a Bench is the story of Moshe who helped the Maccabees by sitting watch over the oil as it burned for eight days and nights. It instills in children a sense of

Hanukkah is a holiday of light—a reminder that from the darkest moments of destruction, one beacon of light brings hope. The Torah is a constant reminder of the centrality of light to humanity. The Torah itself is described as “wisdom’s light” (Proverbs 6:23). The Jewish people are a light unto the nations” (Isaiah 49:6).

The celebration of this holiday began as a defeat of Hellenism. Emil G. Herschel said, “The Greeks stressed the holiness of beauty; the Jews emphasized the beauty of holiness.” The Maccabees rose up in revolt for more than religious freedom; they fought for their right to live a Jewish life—to encounter negative influences of a foreign culture—to resist assimilation.

And so we begin the celebration of Hanukkah with the lighting of one small flame, but it casts its glow and dispels much darkness. That first candle is meant to be a beginning—a beginning of renewed hope in our souls—a new faith in our past, present, and future—a new trust in the G-d who provided the first light from total darkness—a reminder that it takes only a spark to ignite a blaze.

As the holiday season draws to a close for the community, we as Jews are left with the spark ignited in the depths of our souls—carrying us onward through all other months of the year.

history mixed with legend and reminds the reader of a historical event being observed in Jewish households.

The lessons learned from these two innovations are very different. The Elf encourages good behavior, and Santa provides toys.

The Mensch may have originated as “elf envy” but serves as a model of good behavior. A mensch is by definition a good person—one who does good deeds regardless of the season. The lesson to be learned is good behavior throughout the year. Good behavior is its own reward. Moshe is moved throughout the house not as a spy, but as a reminder to act with kindness—to think of others and to look for ways to make the world a better, safer, more peaceful place to live.





## At Christie's, a public viewing and private sale of unique and historic menorahs

By Jackie Hajdenberg

(JTA)—A silver Tiffany & Co. menorah from the year 2000. A bronze, 23-inch tall Statue of Liberty menorah made in 1986 in New Jersey by German-born artist Manfred Anson. A silver Hanukkah lamp, inlaid with carnelian stones, that was made in the early 20th century at the Bezalel school in Jerusalem.

These are just a few of the 35 unique and historic menorahs that famed auction house Christie's is selling ahead of the Jewish holiday of Hanukkah, which this year begins on Dec. 14.

The menorahs, which come from the collection of attorney and Judaica collector Max N. Berry, will be sold by Christie's in a private sale, also known as a selling exhibition, from Tuesday through Dec. 22. Their prices range mostly from \$5,000 to \$30,000.

If you don't have such shekels to spend on a menorah, fear not. It doesn't cost a thing to admire Berry's collection of Hanukkah lamps: They will be on public view at Christie's Rockefeller Center (20 Rockefeller Plaza) from Dec. 5 through 12.

"It is a tangible embodiment of my religious heritage which I wanted to explore, study, and understand," Berry, who will be 90 next month, told the New York Jewish Week about his menorah collection. "No other collection of mine creates such personal and deeply felt reactions of others and ourselves."

Other menorahs in the private sale include an early 20th-century German silver Hanukkah lamp, engraved with the name of artisan Emil Freund of Hanau; a 14-inch hammered iron menorah created by David Palombo in Israel in the mid-20th century, and a Polish-made brass menorah with two deer engraved on its backplate.

"Max Berry's Judaica collection is world-renowned and we are looking forward to offering a wide selection of pieces at auction in the coming year," said Casey Rogers, a senior vice president at Christie's and head of "Collector/Connoisseur, The Max N. Berry Collections: Selected Hanukkah Lamps" exhibition. "At the same time, we also thought it would be a lovely idea to present this selling exhibition of menorahs just in time for Hanukkah!"

In addition to Judaica, Berry collects American and Chinese art, Western and

Indigenous works, Modern masters, and important art and artifacts from Nantucket, where he currently lives with his wife Pam. Next year, Christie's will host a comprehensive auction of rare and important pieces from Berry's extensive Judaica collection, though the auction house declined to provide additional details.

The menorahs, by contrast, will not be sold at auction; in recent years, as auction sales have declined, Christie's has increasingly engaged in private sales, where interested buyers are offered the chance to buy objects behind closed doors. In 2024, total auction sales at Christie's were \$4.2 billion—a 16 percent drop from \$5 billion the prior year—while private sales rose 41 percent, from \$1.1 billion to \$1.5 billion, according to Artnet.

"It's probably because we are in such uncertain and volatile times," Adrien Meyer, Christie's global head of that business, told the publication about the increase in private sales. "Uncertainty triggers the need for a level of reassurance and that's what private sales provide."

Past Judaica sold at Christie's include an 18th-century Torah finials or rimonom, sold in 2023 for \$226,800; a Continental-style silver menorah with detachable oil font, sold in 2018 for \$5,000; and the Rothschild Torah ark, sold in 2014 for \$1.565 million.

Berry—who declined to share why he was selling this menorah collection—was born and raised in Oklahoma. His interest in collecting began with stamps, coins and marbles. He graduated from Georgetown University Law Center and spent most of his professional legal career as an attorney in Washington, D.C., where he was a member of and donor to Congregation Adas Israel. Berry has served as a board member at a number of art institutions, including the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the National Gallery of Art, and the Smithsonian, where he served as the chair of the board of directors.

"What is fascinating to me is that while the objects are universal, the designs reflect the aesthetic and craftsmanship of their country of origin," Berry said of his menorah collection. "In other words, part of the appeal of Judaica is the diversity of interpretation among cultures, while the nature of



A Polish brass menorah up for private sale at Christie's. (Christie's Images Ltd. 2025)



A Bezael silver menorah up for private sale at Christie's. (Christie's Images Ltd. 2025)

the lamps—eight arms and a shamash—is universal. Each country has distinct stylistic and symbolic features."

Berry thinks of Hanukkah as a "very personal family tradition," he said over email.

"Emotional bonds grow through the lighting of the family Hanukkah lamp each year through this ritual which connects past generations to the present and future generations," he added. "For me, I particularly treasure the memories of my mother lighting our Hanukkah lamp and the delight of celebrating with my father and brother, of

my family lighting our Hanukkah lamp every year and the joy of the 8 days of gifts and playing with dreidels for my young children, then grandchildren. And, thinking of eventually, their lighting their own Hanukkah lamps with their grandchildren."

As it happens, Christie's is not the only place in New York to view unique Hanukkah menorahs ahead of the eight-day holiday: At the newly-renovated Jewish Museum, an exhibition on the fourth floor showcases more than 130 Hanukkah menorahs from the ancient times to the present.



From the Archives. These reviews first ran in the Dec. 15, 1995 Jewish Journal.

DECEMBER 15, 1995

THE JEWISH JOURNAL

11

EDUCATION

## SISKELS AND EBERTS AT AKIVA

**ED. NOTE:** The following are "reviews" of the video HANUKKAH TALES AND TUNES by students at Akiva Academy.

*I thought Hanukkah Tales and Tunes was a great movie for ages 2-8. It had a story called "Galya and the Goblin." They had songs like the "Dreidel Dreidel" song. K.J. (the puppet) and his friend David let three adults tell them all about Hanukkah. It is very educating.*

by Sarah Clayman, 4th grade

### THIRD GRADE REVIEWS

*Hanukkah Tales and Tunes video was... the story about dancing, singing miracle. It was cool and funny.*

by Katie Kinast

*I thought that the costumes were neat!!! But you could have made it longer.*

by Ben Kessler

*I think Tales and Tunes video was a great movie. I think other kids would like to see it. I like the costumes, dances, songs. The story about Galya and the goblin was good too. It was one of the best movies about hanukah I have ever seen.*

by Lia Sheakoski

*...fun. I liked everything. And I like the dances. They were fun to watch because I dance. The singing was good and the songs were good. I like the story about Galya and the goblin. I also liked the costumes.*

by Cara Miller

*Fun to watch. My favorite part was the dancing and the costumes. I liked the singing too. And the part with the troll was good too. Well I need to go bye!*

by Sara Heal

*Hanukkah Tales and Tunes teaches you about the miracle and everything about Hanukkah. The thing I liked most of Hanukkah Tales and Tunes was Galya and the goblin; it was funny.*

by Sam Stoyak

*Hanukkah Tales and Tunes Video was very funny. I liked the part where they sing my little dreidle.*

by Andrew Mirkin

*In the video I liked the part when they were singing and dancing. I liked the songs. I also liked Galya and the goblin.*

by Marissa

*I think that the dreidle costumes were nice. I think that story was nice.*

by Kelton

*I really liked the video because it has all the things a good video needs. I like the part when they sang songs. The costumes were really cute.*

by Vica

*Hanukkah Tales and Tunes Video was the story about dancing and songs.*

by Kenny

*I like Hanukkah because of the latkes. And because my whole family is there.*

by Jeff

*Hanukkah Tales and Tunes Video was good and funny. The story about Galya and the goblin was very good. The dances were good. The songs were good.*

by Max



### What the Kindergartners Had To Say.....

when they were asked what was their favorite part of the video HANUKKAH TALES AND TUNES?

**Ron Z** - When they sang the song "Hanukkah".

**Samantha** - I liked when they lit the menorah.

**Julian** - My favorite part was Galya & the Goblins.

**Jonathan U.** - I liked the story of Hanukkah.

**Rachel** - The part I liked best was when the candles & dreidals danced.

**Arielle** - My favorite part was when they popped out of the box that was a silver menorah.

**Ben B.** - I liked Galya & the Goblins best.

**Mark** - I liked when the Goblin lost the dreidel game.

**Jarae** - I liked the goblin story the best.

**Gabe** - I liked when they lit the menorah the best. I learned some new things.

**Ben S.** - I liked when they sang and danced. I thought it was a good movie.

**Chelsey** - My favorite part was when they sang songs. I liked the little girls dancing.

**Roni** - I liked when they danced alot.

**Jerrica** - I liked the singing and dancing alot.

**Jonathan W.** - I liked the song about the King Antiochus the best, especially when they said "no-no".

**Lucas** - I liked the whole movie, it made me feel silly.

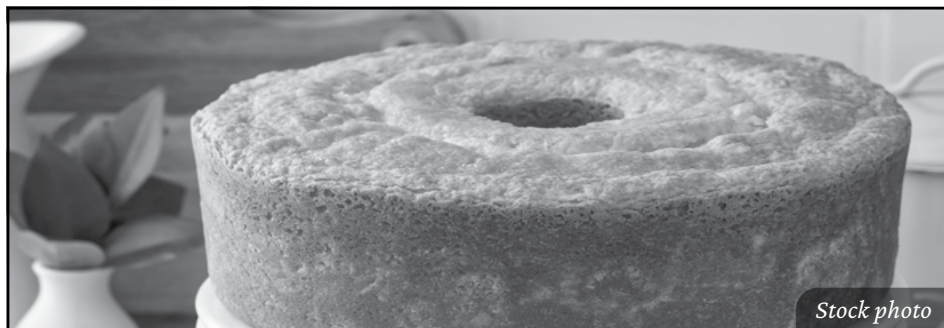
**Alexander** - I liked some of the dancing and some of the songs. I also liked when they lit the menorah.

**Michael** - I liked when they sang songs. I especially liked the silly dreidle song.



## Gigi's coffee cake with cinnamon

From the recipe file of Denise Wolf, JCC Executive Director



Stock photo

Cream together:

- 1/4 cup butter
- 1/2 cup Crisco
- 2 cups sugar

Add:

- 4 eggs, one at a time, beating well

Measure and sift together three times:

- 3 cups flour
- 3 tsps. baking powder

Add this mix to the above with:

- 1 cup milk

Grease angel food pan

Measure:

1/2 cup (at least) sugar with cinnamon (to taste – the more cinnamon the better)

Put a layer of batter in pan and sprinkle sugar and cinnamon generously.

Put in remaining batter.

Add a lot of cinnamon and sugar on top of batter layer.

Fold slightly before baking (try to have cinnamon under batter so that it isn't on top).

Bake at 350 degrees for one hour or until toothpick comes out clean.

Let stand one hour to cool.

## Boyos de Pan

Sephardic cheese puffs from the recipe files of Elliot Legow



Stock photo

Ingredients:

1 pound lean bread such as French or Italian, torn into small pieces

4 cups grated kashkaval (a spun-curd Balkan cheese with a texture similar to provolone dolce), Swiss, Gouda, or Cheddar cheese

4 large eggs, lightly beaten

2 tablespoons chopped fresh parsley

1 clove garlic, minced

About 1 teaspoon salt

Ground black pepper to taste

Preheat the oven to 375 degrees.

Grease 2 large baking sheets.

Soak the bread in water to cover until soft, about 5 minutes. Drain and squeeze out the water – there will be about 3 cups of bread. Stir in the cheese, eggs, parsley, garlic, salt, and pepper.

Drop the batter by heaping spoonfuls onto the prepared baking sheets and bake until golden brown, about 25 minutes. Or deep-fry the batter in 1 inch of hot vegetable oil until golden brown on all sides.

Serve warm or at room temperature. Makes about 48 small puffs.

## Edible dreidels

From the recipe file of Barbara Wilson, JCC Director of Cultural Arts & Jewish Engagement



Ingredients:

- Peanut butter fudge
- White & blue melting chocolate discs
- Pretzel sticks

Instructions:

Shape the fudge as a dreidel and freeze.

Dip in melted white and blue melting chocolate discs.

Insert pretzel stick.

Pipe the letters on.

Alternate method:

Ingredients:

- Marshmallow
- Hershey's kiss
- White & blue melting chocolate discs
- Pretzel sticks

Instructions:

Use frosting to stick a Hershey's kiss to the bottom of a marshmallow, or melt the flat part of the kiss and stick it on.

Insert pretzel stick and pipe the letters on.

## Kolache

This recipe, from Kandy Rawl's files, is a favorite of her mother-in-law, Violet W. Rawl.



Stock photo

Ingredients:

1/2 tsp sugar

3 oz. cream cheese

1/2 cup soft butter

Instructions:

Mix until smooth and creamy.

Add 1 cup flour.

Mix until combined.

Form into a ball, wrap in saran wrap.

Chill overnight.

Roll dough 1/8 inch thick on floured board.

Cut into 2 1/2 inch squares.

Place tsps. of jam of choice in center.

Fold two corners together, pinch closed.

Bake on parchment 10 to 12 minutes at 350 degrees.

Cool, sprinkle with powdered sugar.

May be doubled.



## PJ Library celebrates the 100th anniversary of Jewish book month

### Staff Report

For the 200,000+ kids across North America who receive PJ Library books, one could say that every month is “Jewish book month.”

PJ Library, a program of the Harold Grinspoon Foundation, combines the power of Jewish storytelling with helpful tools for families. From free age-appropriate, monthly books to guides, podcasts, grants, and community experiences, the program helps families celebrate Jewish moments and cultivate Jewish values year-round.

November 13 - December 13 is Jewish Book Month, and 2025 marks 100 years of this cherished tradition. Jewish Book Month began in 1925 when Boston librarian Fanny Goldstein launched Jewish Book Week to celebrate Jewish stories, strengthen the Jewish community, and share the richness of life and identity. Her vision grew into a month-long celebration that brings Jewish literature into homes and communities across North America.

This year, PJ Library partnered with the Jewish Book Council, the organiza-

tion behind Jewish Book Month since 1943, to make the commemoration even more special through two gifts imagined for PJ Library families.

In November, PJ Library families received custom envelopes with one of two Hanukkah-themed books: “Hanukkah with Friends” by Chris Barash for younger readers and “Meet the Latkes” by Alan Silberberg for older ones. These books were accompanied by the Jewish Book Council’s commemorative poster, beautifully illustrated by Alyssa Russell and featuring artwork from “Fanny’s Big Idea: How Jewish Book Week Was Born” by Richard Michelson.

“PJ Library families already know the joy of discovering new Jewish stories each month,” said Jessica McCormick, director of family experience at PJ Library. “During this centennial celebration, we’re taking a moment to create a shared experience across all PJ Library families, ensuring exciting Jewish titles reach every home. As always, we’re also helping families incorporate these treasured stories into their Hanukkah celebrations by providing resources to make coming together to celebrate Jewish literature an even more vibrant experience.”

Online, families can watch “Hanukkah with Friends” come alive in an animated read-along video and enjoy an exclusive draw-along session with “Meet the

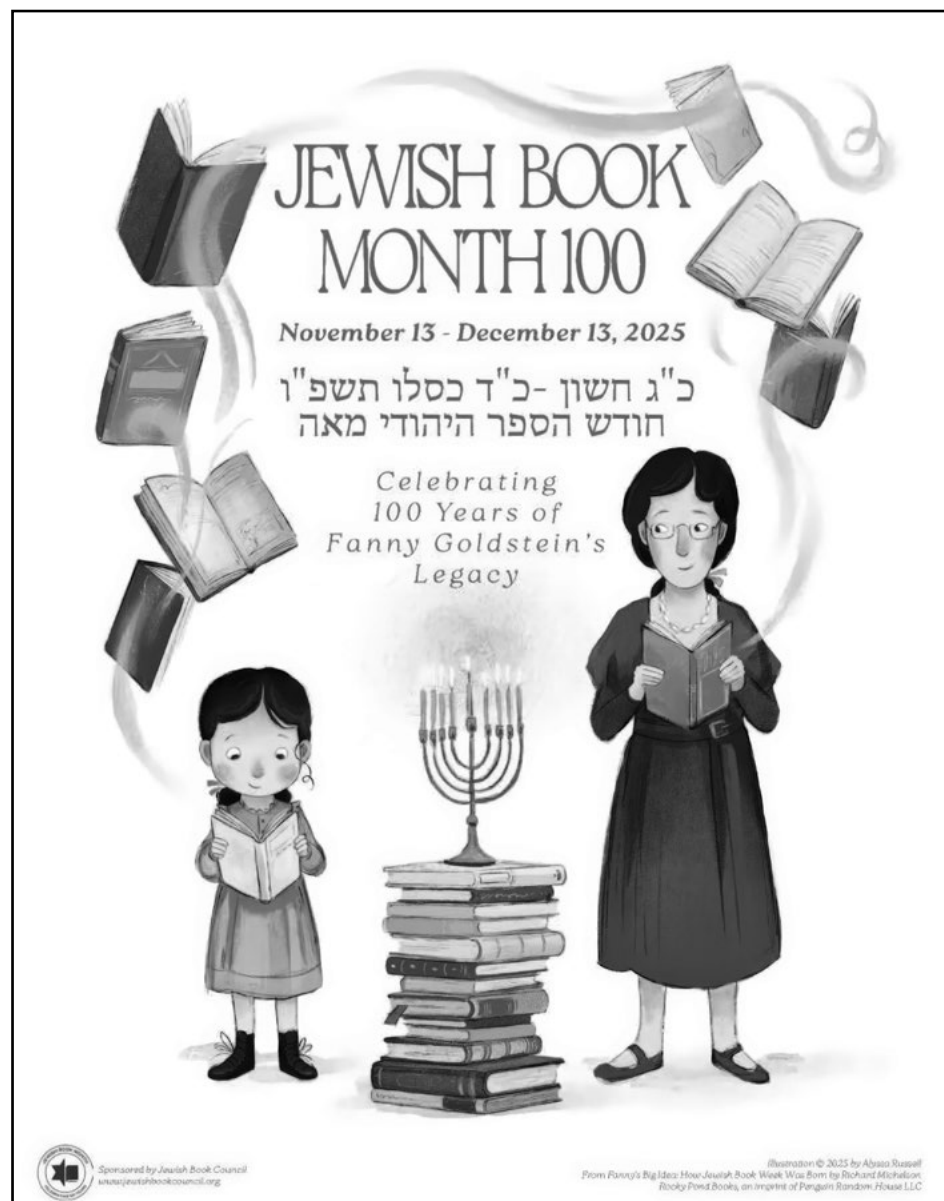
Latkes” author Alan Silberberg. Families can also download PJ Library’s Winter Holiday Guide, “A Time to Hope,” as well as find recipes, stories, Jewish learning, and family-friendly activities to enhance their celebrations.

What’s more, all PJ Library subscribers in North America are eligible for \$100 Get Together microgrants when they gather with at least two other Jewish families to “do Jewish” together.

“If you’re looking for an excuse to invite some friends over, make latkes, light Hanukkah candles, and read Alan Silberberg’s hysterical “Meet the Latkes,” this is it.” added McCormick. “We’ve made Get Togethers even easier for families to access. Subscribers can simply host their Get Together and then report it online. This ensures meaningful home-based Jewish gatherings are possible and accessible for more PJ Library subscribers this Hanukkah season.”

Families raising Jewish children are encouraged to sign up children ages 0-12 for PJ Library. From free books to robust holiday resources, PJ Library helps families bring Jewish stories home, not only for Jewish book month, but all year round – creating in a childhood experience that helps cultivate lifelong Jewish stories.

For information about local PJ Library activities, contact Barb Wilson at [bwilson@jewishyoungstown.org](mailto:bwilson@jewishyoungstown.org).






### A Joyous Holiday Season

from Ilona, Mitchell, Zachary & Alla, and Joshua Cohn

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## Zucchini “Hearts” (Baked Zucchini Patties)

From the recipe files of Liron Daniel, Israel Engagement/Program Coordinator



Prep Time: 10 minutes

Bake Time: 55 minutes

Servings: 12–15

Kosher Type: Parve

Ingredients:

2 very large zucchinis, grated

1 large cooked potato, mashed

1 medium onion, finely chopped

1 egg

2 tbsp olive oil

3 heaping tbsp whole-wheat or white flour

Gluten-free option: You can skip the flour, but chill the mixture for at least 1 hour before baking so it firms up.

Seasoning:

Tsp. natural soup powder (optional),

Salt and black pepper to taste

Instructions:

Preheat oven to 180°C / 350°F. Grease a silicone muffin pan well.

Mix all the ingredients together in a bowl. Fill each muffin cup  $\frac{1}{2}$ – $\frac{3}{4}$  full (don't overfill; thinner bakes better).

Bake in the center of the oven for 45 minutes.

Move the oven rack to the lower position and bake for 10 more minutes.

Let cool slightly. Flip the pan carefully and gently release the patties.

Tip: Cooling on a slightly damp towel helps them release more easily.



## Double Your Donation this Giving Tuesday

DeSalvo Construction will match every gift to the Youngstown Area Jewish Federation, doubling the difference you make in our community. If you've already pledged to the Annual Campaign, paying your donation now ensures it will have twice the impact.

At the Youngstown Area Jewish Federation, we're proud to be that place, supporting people of all ages and walks of life.

# GIVING TUESDAY



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## JEWISH COMMUNITY CENTER OF YOUNGSTOWN J-AWAY PROGRAM

J-AWAY is a program for Jewish homebound older adults in the Youngstown area who are in need of an exercise program.

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- Train in the comfort of your own home
- Participants will receive a free exercise band



For more information or to register contact Wellness Manager Amy Haskett at 330.746.3251 ext. 310 or [ahaskett@jewishyoungstown.org](mailto:ahaskett@jewishyoungstown.org).

This program is funded by the Thomases Family Endowment of the Youngstown Area Jewish Federation.

## SAVE THE DATE



JCC OF YOUNGSTOWN  
**SUZI SOLOMON  
GOLF CLASSIC**

**THE CLASSIC RETURNS  
ON JUNE 8, 2026**

It's not too early to consider a sponsorship for the Suzi Solomon Golf Classic. Your support helps the JCC continue its important work throughout our community and provides a great opportunity to showcase your business.



For information contact Nic Bush at [nbush@jewishyoungstown.org](mailto:nbush@jewishyoungstown.org) or at 330.746.3251 ext. 114.



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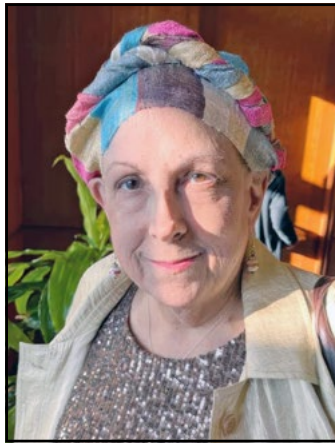


## Dr. Mari Alschuler

It is with deepest love and sorrow that we announce the passing of Dr. Mari Alschuler, who left this world peacefully on Sept. 20, 2025. Mari's life was a testament to compassion, creativity, courage, and love and her impact will continue to ripple through the lives she touched.

Mari's path in life reflected both her brilliant mind and her caring heart. She earned degrees from Brown University, Columbia University's Teachers College, Columbia University's School of the Arts, and Fordham University, later completing her Ph.D. in Leadership and Education at Barry University. These accomplishments shaped a remarkable career devoted to teaching, counseling, advocacy, and writing.

As a professor of social work at Youngstown State University, Mari inspired



countless students with her wisdom, warmth, and unwavering belief in the power of empathy. She was also a clinician in private practice, where she specialized in trans- and gender-affirming care, mindfulness-based therapies, poetry therapy, expressive arts, and journaling. She formerly served as director of the National Association of Social Workers, Ohio Region 4, where her leadership helped strengthen the profession she so loved.

But Mari was more than her titles. She was a gifted poet and writer, weaving words into bridges of healing and connection. She was also an artist who delighted in quilting, collage, and fused glass jewelry. Creativity was not just her craft; it was the lens through which she saw the world.

Mari's heart found its home in Rosalynda Dina, the love of her life. Together they built

a family rooted in devotion, laughter, and strength. She became the proud and tender mother of three beautiful daughters—Lilliana, Elliana, and Gracie—and found a new joy in motherhood.

Mari was preceded in death by her mother, Joy Van Wye Malakoff, and is survived by her beloved; Rosalynda and her daughters; Lilliana, Elliana, and Gracie; her father and stepmother; Al and Jennifer Alschuler; her brothers; David Alschuler and Mark (Helena) Van Wye, and her nephew; Meyer Van Wye.

Her passing leaves an ache in the hearts of her family, friends, colleagues, students, and clients. Yet, we are comforted in knowing that Mari's legacy will live on through the countless lives she nurtured, the poetry she shared, the lessons she taught, and the love she gave so freely.

Services to celebrate Mari's life will be announced at a later date.

In lieu of flowers, donations may be made to the American Cancer Society or the Pancreatic Cancer Action Network (PanCAN) in her memory.

## Mino Vaturi

It is with great sadness that we announce the passing of Mino Vaturi on Oct. 15, 2025 at the age of 93 at his home in Las Vegas.

Mino was born on Nov. 24, 1931, in Tripoli to Vittorio and Auva Vaturi. He was the youngest of two brothers and one sister. At three years old the family moved to Palestine (Israel) where he eventually ran a small store in Tel Aviv. In 1962, he emigrated to the United States where he quickly picked up the hospitality trade. By 1965 he was working as general manager of Squaw Creek Country Club in Ohio where he worked until he retired after 30 years. While in Ohio and later in Las Vegas, he made lifelong friends who shared his love of poker. Mino retired permanently to Las Vegas in 1995 where he and his wife Darlene frequented casinos, ate amazing food, took long drives, and enjoyed all life had to offer with friends and family. He made it his mission in retirement to collect napkins from every restaurant he visited, much to the amusement of his family. He loved recounting stories of the various poker room antics around the valley where over the years he was a regular at Mirage, Venetian, Orleans, and Red Rock Casinos. He also enjoyed traveling to Israel and many other countries.

He was a member of Children of Israel Orthodox Temple in Ohio. In Las Vegas, he was a member of Bet Kneset Bamidbar, where he belonged to the men's group.

Mino leaves behind his loving wife of 33 years, Darlene. Preceding him in death was his first wife Marta, whom he was married until her untimely death in 1983. His also survived by his son Shani Vaturi (Lisa) of Youngstown, stepdaughter Ginger Mortellaro (Mark) of Clarksburg Md., and grandchildren Gabriella Vaturi, Amanda Vaturi, Vittoria Vaturi, Kathryn Mortellaro, Dominic Mortellaro, niece Susan Burrows (Paul) of California, nephew Harvey Stern (Tasia) also of California, and grand-nieces, Brook and Lia Burrows, Milena and Ariela Stern, and grand-nephew Asher Stern.

A grave side service was Oct. 20, 2025 at Palm NW Cemetery.

A special thank you to Southwest Medical Hospice for the warm and gentle care given, however briefly, to Mino in his last days.

## Jeffrey Lee Baron

Jeffrey Lee Baron passed away peacefully on Sept. 4, 2025, at the age of 80. Jeff was born in Youngstown, Ohio, on Nov. 12, 1944. He was the son of the late Harry and Esther Baron.

Jeff was raised in New Castle, Pa. and attended New Castle High School. Upon graduation from High School in 1962, Jeff attended the University of New Mexico where he completed his Bachelor of Arts Degree in secondary education and history, in 1967. Jeff earned his Master's Degree in elementary education and sociology in 1970, at Loyola University.

Jeff furthered his education by earning his Doctor's Degree from the Pennsylvania State University in 1981 with a major in education administration and curriculum.

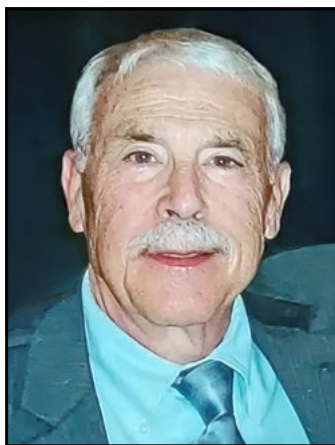
Jeff had a strong work ethic. His professional goal was to work where education was viewed as a high priority. Throughout

his career in education, Jeff was an instructor, a teacher, a principal, an administrator, high school varsity tennis coach, community service volunteer, and community leader.

Upon retirement, Jeff pursued his interest in real estate part time.

Jeff's greatest joy in life was traveling, domestically and internationally, meeting new people, hearing their stories and sharing his stories. He had a gift for turning those he met into friends. Everyone was always welcomed in his home, and with his caring demeanor everyone knew they were a friend

and family. Jeff will be remembered for being there for those who needed him. He gave his unconditional support and wisdom to family and friends, and he was always willing to lend a hand. Jeff was never without a word of encouragement, a dash of humor, a good story and a great smile. Jeff also had a deep



connection and held a special place in his heart for all animals.

Jeff was a sports enthusiast, he enjoyed tennis and golf with friends and family. He was a dedicated supporter of his Penn State Nittany Lions and a loyal follower of the Phillies, Eagles, Pirates, and the Steelers.

Those remaining to cherish Jeff's memory are his partner of 40 years, Debra Wagner, of Harrisburg, Pa., his brother Stephen and his wife Ellen, of Crofton, Md., his brother Larry and his wife Debbie, of New Castle, Pa., his niece Randi Baron Leonard and her daughter Jayden, of Crofton, Md., his nephew Timothy Baron his wife Stacey and their three children, Aidan, Kyra and Holden, of Leesburg, Va., his niece Melissa Baron and her daughter Jennifer Henderson, of San Antonio, Texas and his many cousins and friends.

In lieu of flowers, please consider a memorial contributions in Jeff's name be given to the Alzheimer's Association or to the animal rescue of your choice.

Interment was at Temple Israel Memorial Park, located on Sunrise Drive, Neshannock Township, Pa.



## Bert Zusman

It's with a heavy heart that we announce the passing of a loving, compassionate, caring husband and stepfather, Bert Zusman, aged 100.

Born on Oct. 6, 1924, in Youngstown, Bert was the son of Leo Zusman and Eva Finegold. He passed away on Sept. 26, 2025, in Boca Raton, Fla. He was husband to Joanne Cheza Hydor and stepfather to the late Karen Marie Hydor. His love for them both was unconditional.

Bert graduated from South High in Youngstown in 1942, where he was a member of the cheerleading squad.

In 1943, he enlisted in the U.S. Navy

and served as a ship-to-shore operator in the Southern Pacific Theatre during World War II until his honorable discharge in 1946 as a Radioman Second Class (RM 2). During his military service, he earned the American Campaign Medal, the Asiatic-Pacific Campaign Medal, and the World War II Victory Medal.

Upon leaving military service, Bert enrolled at the University of Miami with funding from the GI bill. He ultimately returned to Ohio and completed his studies at the Ohio State

University, earning a bachelor's degree, and soon after became the owner of



Bertrum Builders and later Logangate Vacation Homes.

In 1965, he met the love of his life, Joanne, and together they raised Joanne's young daughter, Karen Marie. They shared a love for adventure and travel. They visited most major U.S. cities and ski resorts for over 40 years. They attended the U.S. Open Tennis in Flushing Meadows, Queens, and attended many Broadway shows. They traveled internationally as well and have visited many countries in Europe, Asia, South America, and the Caribbean.

Bert was proactive about health, fitness, and wellness. He was very active and engaged in tennis, jogging, exercise, skiing, boating, and maintained a healthy diet.

Bert became a successful businessman. He readily gave back to his hometown

of Youngstown, Ohio, through the Bert Zusman Philanthropic Fund and gave to various area organizations, including Youngstown State University.

Bert was a member of Temple El Emeth and was an associate member of Ohev Beth Sholom (formerly Rodef Sholom), both in Youngstown, Ohio.

Bert will be remembered by his loved ones as a generous man, a gracious host, and a witty conversationalist. Joanne will miss him dearly, and she extends her sincere gratitude to their compassionate and devoted caregivers, Rosa Rodriguez, Santo Delgado, Irina Aistova, and Julia Diaz. They have lovingly provided excellent care and support, especially during his final days.

He will truly be missed and never forgotten for his loving, kind heart, and loved like he did.

## Jack M. Haims

Jack M. Haims passed away peacefully on Oct. 8, 2025, in Monroe Township, N.J. Born in Akron, Ohio, and raised in New Castle, Pa. Jack happily spent nearly his entire life there before moving to New Jersey six years ago to be closer to family.

Jack is survived by his wife of 72 years, Elaine; his daughter and son-in-law, Lynn and Michael Shakin; his sons Allan (Los Angeles) and Joshua (New Orleans); six grandchildren; and four great-grandchildren. He was preceded in death by his parents, Edward and Evelyn Haims, and his brother, Lawrence Haims.

A lifelong New Castle merchant and community leader, Jack was known for his steadfast commitment to service—a guiding principle throughout his life. He served as president of Tifereth Israel Synagogue; chairman of the United Jewish Appeal; and held leadership roles with Israel Bonds, B'nai B'rith, the Lawrence County United Way, and the New Castle

Downtown Merchants Association, among others.

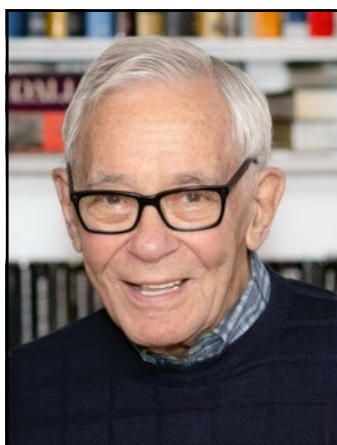
Jack was the owner of The Ladies Store and the Clothes Post in the Towne Mall.

In his second career, Jack brought his lifelong love of the arts to his role as director of development at the Butler Institute of American Art in Youngstown. There, he found a meaningful way to combine his passion for art with his gift for community engagement. A devoted collector, he assembled a personal library

of more than 3,000 history and fine art books and never missed an opportunity to visit a museum or bookstore—often with his grandchildren in tow to share stories about artists or remarkable paintings.

Interment was at Tifereth Israel Cemetery, 390 Maple Drive, New Castle.

Donations in Jack's memory may be made to the Butler Institute of American Art or the Youngstown Area Jewish Federation.



## Neil Altman

Neil H. Altman, 78, of Youngstown, passed away peacefully and surrounded by the love of his family on Oct. 31, 2025.

Born in Youngstown on Oct. 11, 1947, to

Harry and Rita (Goldich) Altman, Neil was a graduate of the Rayen School, Temple University, and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, where he earned his Master of Public Health degree in 1977.

A Youngstown native, Neil returned to his hometown to serve as Youngstown's health commissioner for 30 years, earning the city many highly beneficial grants during his tenure and creating critical programs and services that greatly increased community and public health. Beloved in his community, Neil's stewardship of public health in Youngstown touched huge numbers of lives. His exceptional work was recognized the year before his 2011 retirement when he was named the Ohio State University College of Public Health's 2010 Champion of Public Health in the Public Health Practitioner category.

Neil will be sorely missed by the many who loved him, not only for his impactful work as a community leader but also for his kindness and humanity.

Predeceased by his parents and by Denise (Wilderman), his best friend and wife of 45 years, Neil is survived by his sister Brenda (Dan) Tarr, his brother Steven Altman (Jeanette Kesselman), his son Max Altman (Katherine B. Hernandez), and his grandson Eli Altman.

Services were at Rodef Sholom Cemetery Chapel in Tod Cemetery, 2200 Belmont Ave.

Contributions in Neil's memory may be made to the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC), Doctors Without Borders (MSF), or Youngstown's Ohev Beth Sholom Congregation.

Professional arrangements were handled by Shriver-Allison-Courtley-Weller-King Funeral Home. Friends and family may view this obituary and share memories and condolences at [shriverallisoncourtleyfuneralhome.com](http://shriverallisoncourtleyfuneralhome.com)





# How Abe Kugielsky's photos of Hasidic Brooklyn ended up on display in Grand Central Terminal

By Grace Gilson



*Abe Kugielsky poses in front of his installation at Humans of New York's "Dear New York" exhibition in Grand Central's Vanderbilt Hall, running from Oct. 6 to Oct. 19. (Courtesy Abe Kugielsky)*

(JTA)—When Abe Kugielsky first began photographing the Hasidic Jewish community in Borough Park, Brooklyn, in 2010, he was an outsider with a camera, met with resistance from a community unaccustomed to being documented.

But by 2017, he had amassed a bank of roughly 50,000 photographs, and decided it was time to start posting his images to an Instagram account he called "Hasidim In USA."

Today, his account has drawn 80,000 followers curious for a glimpse inside a traditionally private world. And earlier this year, it has also landed him a place in Humans of New York's "Dear New York" exhibition in Grand Central's Vanderbilt Hall. The free exhibition was curated by Brandon Stanton of the online photo sensation Humans of New York and included dozens of local photographers.

By day, Kugielsky, who is 45 and identifies as Modern Orthodox, runs a Judaica antique auction house in Cedarhurst, Long Island. But his photography, and efforts to gain inroads in the Hasidic community, have become his true passion.

"Judaica is my full-time job, but I will close shop whenever I feel like I need a day off to go," said Kugielsky. "It's very therapeutic to me when I go out to shoot, I'm in my own little bubble, my own zone."

This interview was condensed and lightly edited for clarity.

## JTA: What first drew you to photographing the Hasidic communities in New York?

Kugielsky: When I moved to Brooklyn after we got married, my wife had a job in Borough Park. I would drive her to work every day. I had started street photography as a hobby back in Israel a little bit, and then got married and I let go of it. But when I started visiting Borough Park every morning, and I was getting that Roman Vishniac vibe by seeing the scenes, and I figured, I'll pick up a camera and start documenting something that's been untouched in New York.

It's been very popular in Israel. There's so many photography books on Orthodox life in Jerusalem, but there's nothing about Hasidic life in America. There's one book from like 1974, a small book with some photos, but that's about it. It's really very little. So I felt like it was an untouched niche, and I picked up a camera and I started photographing.

## How do you build trust with your subjects in a community that is often described as insular?

To see someone walking on Borough Park with a camera taking pictures is not common. It's not Mea Shearim [the Jerusalem neighborhood] where we have tourists and Americans and photographers. This is very uncommon, so there was a lot of fear of resistance, and of course, the resistance came. So it started off really more in hiding from distance, and over time, I built

trust in the community to a point where they celebrate me.

I made it my goal to post in a very positive light, either a positive caption or a positive scene or a positive story, to show them I'm not here to bring out what everyone else has been doing. I realized over the years that it's really rooted a lot in generational trauma, where, whenever media came into Borough Park or Williamsburg, it was always for a negative story, and that's where the resistance really came from. So over time, when they recognized that my work is not with that goal, they started to appreciate it more and more.

## Can you tell me more about the response from the Hasidic community to your work?

I started off with an article in a local Yiddish magazine, and then a couple of months later, another article and I came out publicly with my name, my identity, so people started recognizing me more. And over time, I started getting more and more positive feedback.

I remember a woman in Williamsburg stopped me once, and she said, "I want to tell you that your photos made me fall in love again with my own culture." So it really had a certain impact on the community, recognizing that these photos tell a positive story. It tells the story of the community that no one else does in a positive light.

It really shifted to the point where, if I walk down Williamsburg, people stop me and ask me for a selfie, and people will DM me and say, 'Hey, there's an event going on here, please come down and photograph.' My goal was to go in deeper and deeper, more and more intimate, and I've gotten there. Especially this past summer, we had some invites into family life, which is a whole new level that I've been really trying to get to.

## What kinds of reactions from the public to your work have surprised or challenged you?

Of course, I get a lot of antisemitic comments from time to time with DMs. Anyone who posts anything Jewish nowadays gets them, but I've had a lot of interesting positive feedback from non-Jews worldwide.

I've had people in Iran reach out to me, and I've heard from people in Middle Eastern countries, in Germany, Poland. I think they love the concept where they can look into another culture, have a window into another culture, something they don't get to see.

## Do you have a favorite image from the exhibit, and what makes it stand out to you?

I have one great image that I really, really love. This was a silver shop in Borough Park I walked into and I asked the owner, an older Hasidic Jew, if I can photograph him, and his response is, "What do I need it for?"

I have an album on my phone with photos I downloaded from Brooklyn Public Library, old images from Williamsburg taken by a photographer in 1964, and I figured, let me show him what it looks like looking back at photos from 50 years ago. I started showing him on my phone. He was scrolling through the photos, and I said, look how beautiful it is to look at pictures from 50 years ago.

But then he froze on a certain picture, and his demeanor changes, and he goes, "This is my wife." He found a picture of his wife and his first newborn son from 50 years ago in those photos, so I captured that moment where he's really reminiscing about those years.

## Humans of New York has drawn criticism for a series focused on aid workers in Gaza as well as for featuring a member of Neturei Karta, a small anti-Zionist sect of the Orthodox community. Was that something you thought about before deciding to participate?

I was tagged when he posted his request for people to submit. I didn't follow him, it's just not really my style of work, he's more storytelling. I went into his page, and I saw all these posts, I wasn't sure what to make of it.

The vibe that I got was I didn't feel an antisemitism there. I felt like he was more going with the trend, showcasing Palestinians from Gaza or Neturei Karta, more from a place of ignorance.

I believe a lot of New Yorkers, a lot of Americans, a lot of people worldwide, don't

*Kugielsky continued on next page*



*Kugielsky continued from previous page*

really know and understand the conflict. It's just in style now to hate, and it's in style now to side with one side or the other without really understanding.

I didn't give it a lot of hope when I submitted my photos, and I was actually surprised that he chose my photos to be included, and throughout my conversations with him, I understood that he really doesn't understand much of the conflict.

**Have you received any critical feedback about your involvement in this project?**

Very, very little. I think one or two people commented like, why would you do this? But for me, A, It's an opportunity for me, for my work, to showcase my work out there more, and, B, I thought it was so import-

ant to have a representation of Jewish life, or Hasidic life, Orthodox life, in such an important exhibition.

**What are you hoping people take away when they encounter your Grand Central exhibit?**

What I'm expecting people to take away is really to see the humanistic side of this culture. People could be living literally a block away from the community, and not really know the community, and not understand them.

I'm hoping that this gives them a little bit more of a humanistic view of the Hasidic community, where they live, their life, their culture, their religion. After all, we're all human, we all coexist in the same city.



"A Bridge Apart" by Abe Kugielsky. (Courtesy Abe Kugielsky)



"Brooklyn Skies" by Abe Kugielsky. (Courtesy Abe Kugielsky)

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# Happy Hanukkah!

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## AI has a reputation for amplifying hate. A new study finds it can weaken antisemitism, too.

By Jackie Hajdenberg

(JTA)—Every day, it can seem, brings a fresh headline about how AI chatbots are spreading hateful ideas. But researchers tasked with understanding antisemitism and how it can be stopped say they have found evidence that AI chatbots can actually fight hate.

Researchers affiliated with the Anti-Defamation League's Center for Antisemitism Research trained a large-language model, or LLM, on countering antisemitic conspiracy theories, then invited people who subscribed to at least one of those theories to interact with it.

The result, according to a study: The users soon believed in the antisemitic theories less, while at the same time feeling more favorable about Jews as a group. And the effects were still strong a month later, even without further engagement with the LLM.

The researchers are hailing the finding as a breakthrough in the quest for identifying actionable strategies in the fight against Jew-hatred.

"What's remarkable about these findings is that factual debunking works even for conspiracy theories with deep historical roots and strong connections to identity and prejudice," David Rand, a Cornell University professor who was the study's senior author, said in a statement.

"Our artificial intelligence debunker bot typically doesn't rely on emotional appeals, empathy-building exercises, or anti-bias tactics to correct false beliefs," Rand continued, referring to practices frequently employed by advocates seeking to fight antisemitism, including at the ADL. "It mostly provides accurate information and evidence-based counterarguments, demonstrating that facts still matter in changing minds."

Matt Williams, who has headed the Center for Antisemitism Research since its founding three years ago, says the study builds on a growing body of research that views contemporary antisemitism as primarily a misinformation problem, rather than a civil rights problem.

"We need to think about antisemitism less like feelings about Jews, and more like feelings about Bigfoot," he said in an interview. "And what I mean by that is, it's not 'Jews' that are the problem. It is 'the Jew' as a

function of conspiracy theory that is the problem. And the relationship between 'Jews' and 'the Jew' in that context is far more tenuous than we might want to think."

Calling conspiracy theories "malfunctions in the ways that we make truth out of the world," Williams said the study showed something remarkable. "People can correct those malfunctions," he said. "They really can, which is super exciting and really impactful."

The study emerges from the ADL's relatively new effort to come-up with evidence-based ways to reduce antisemitism, working with dozens of researchers across a slew of institutions to design and carry out experiments aimed at turning a robust advocacy space into less of a guessing game.

The new experiment, conducted earlier this year, involved more than 1,200 people who said on a previous ADL survey that they believed at least one of six prominent antisemitic conspiracy theories, such as that Jews control the media or the "Great Replacement" theory about Jewish involvement in immigration.

The people then were randomly assigned three different scenarios: A third chatted with an LLM programmed by the researchers to debunk such theories, built within Microsoft's Claude AI model; another third chatted with Claude about an unrelated topic; and the final third were simply told that their belief represented a "dangerous" conspiracy theory. Then they were all tested again about their beliefs.

Members of the group that chatted with what the researchers are calling DebunkBot were far more likely than members of the other groups to have their beliefs weakened, the researchers found.

DebunkBot was hardly a panacea for antisemitism: The study found that those who believed in more antisemitic conspiracy theories experienced less change. And Williams notes that the study found only that belief in antisemitic conspiracies was reduced, not rooted out entirely.

But he said any strategy that can cut against what researchers believe has been a widespread explosion of belief in conspiracy theories is a good thing.

The proportion of Americans subscribing to conspiracy theories over the last decade

has reached as much as 45 percent, more than twice the rate that had held steady for 70 to 80 years, Williams said.

"To me, the increase in that level of saturation is far more concerning than any particular conspiracy theory moving through different generations," he said. "I don't think that we're going to ever create a world in which we go under 15 percent—but going from 45 back to 30 or 25 seems more doable."

The new study comes as AI models vault into widespread use among Americans, raising concerns about their implications for Jews. When Elon Musk launched a model of his own earlier this year called Grok, it immediately drew criticism for amplifying antisemitism—kicking off a pattern that has played out repeatedly. Soon, the company apologized and said it would train its model to avoid the same behavior in the future. Criticism of Grok is still widespread, but it no longer praises Hitler—though even recently it reportedly told one user that the Nazi gas chambers were not designed for mass killing, prompting an

investigation by French authorities.

Chatbot training is seen as essential for delivering high-quality AI results. DebunkBot can be found online on its own website now, but Williams said efforts were underway within the ADL to convince the companies operating major AI platforms to incorporate its expertise.

"There's far more receptivity than not, by any stretch of the imagination," he said, while noting that the work was early and he could not share many details.

Whatever happens with that effort, Williams said, the new research demonstrates that combatting what's sometimes called the world's oldest hatred is possible.

"AI and LLMs—those are tools, right? And we can use tools for good and for evil," Williams said. "But the fact that we can subject conspiracy theories to rational conversation and arguments and actually lead to favorable outcomes is itself, I think, relatively innovative, surprising and extraordinarily useful."

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## In a first, a ballot initiative to divest from Israel has won at the ballot box, in Somerville, Mass.

By Andrew Lapin

(JTA)—A municipal ballot proposal to divest from Israel went before a popular vote for the first time in November—and pulled off a decisive victory.

Question 3 won more than 55 percent of the vote in unofficial election results in the Boston suburb of Somerville, Mass., as the Israel-divestment movement saw the elevation of its most well-known proponent in politics—Zohran Mamdani—to mayor of New York City.

Local pro-Palestinian activists claimed victory, with Somerville for Palestine—the group that gathered the signatures required to put the non-binding resolution on the ballot—posting a celebratory Instagram video alongside the Boston chapter of anti-Zionist group Jewish Voice for Peace.

However, as they were celebrating, the mayoral candidate best poised to enact the proposal in Somerville conceded his race to a rival who signaled he was far less likely to do so. Willie Burnley, Jr., a democratic socialist who had endorsed Question 3, lost to fellow at-large city council member Jake Wilson, who did not.

A handful of other American cities have previously adopted Israel divestment proposals brought by their city councils. One of those is Portland, Maine, whose mayor publicly regretted backing divestment after hearing from local Jewish groups. An attempt last year to place a similar referendum on a Pittsburgh ballot failed after legal challenges to the signatures. Similar attempts to challenge the Somerville measure failed.

Home to Tufts University and several Jewish congregations, the four-square-mile Somerville has a population of around 82,000. Residents voted on whether its mayor should “engage in business that sustains Israel’s apartheid, genocide and illegal occupation of Palestine.” The local teachers union endorsed the measure.



*Somerville for Palestine supporters celebrate a projected win for Question 3, a non-binding resolution imploring the Boston suburb to divest from companies that do business with Israel, Nov. 4, 2025; a still from an ad opposing the measure paid for by a local Jewish group. (Screenshot via Instagram; Screenshot via YouTube)*

Jewish groups opposed the measure, including the newly formed group Somerville United Against Discrimination, which ran TV ads against it. Brian Sokol, a Jewish IT manager and writer based in Somerville, implored his neighbors on Facebook to reject the measure—citing friends of his who were killed by a

Hamas suicide bomber in Israel in 1996. “I am not equating those in

Somerville urging a Yes vote with newly formed violent extremists or terrorists,” he wrote. “But passing this ballot measure would unintentionally land Somerville on the wrong side of the deeper ideological rift.”

On the other side, a group of 84 local pro-Palestinian Jews endorsed the measure in an op-ed in the Tufts student newspaper. Celebrating the recent ceasefire in Israel and Gaza

**Jewish groups opposed the measure, including the newly formed group Somerville United Against Discrimination, which ran TV ads against it.**

but saying that Israel has continued to commit atrocities in the region, the authors pointed to local contracts with two companies, Hewlett-Packard and Lockheed Martin, that total over \$2 million.

Somerville became a flashpoint in the fight over campus pro-Palestinian activism earlier this year when a Tufts graduate student, Rümeyza Öztürk, was seized by ICE agents and put into deportation proceedings for writing an op-ed in the student paper urging divestment from Israel. A judge freed Öztürk while her deportation case remains ongoing.



## When Jews really did wage a ‘war on Christmas’

A new book recalls the “The Great Christmas Boycott of 1906,” when immigrants fought for the separation of church and state in public schools.

By Andrew Silow-Carroll

(JTA)—On a frigid winter’s day in 1906, tens of thousands of Jewish parents in New York’s Lower East Side and Brooklyn kept their children home from school.

It wasn’t a snow day, but a protest: Activists and the Yiddish press had called for a boycott of the Christmas assemblies and pageants that they knew Jewish children would be obliged to attend on the day before the holiday.

“Jews Object to Christmas in the Schools,” blared the New York Times. The Brooklyn Eagle warned that “agitators” sought to rob Christian children of their traditions. The boycott was, depending on the source, a valiant cry for religious freedom, or the first shot in the 100-year-plus “war on Christmas.”

The episode is the subject of historian Scott D. Seligman’s new book, “The Great Christmas Boycott of 1906,” which reconstructs how a seemingly local dispute in one Brooklyn school exploded into a test case for religious freedom and civic belonging.

More than a century later, Seligman suggests, the issues it raised—over religion in public schools and the boundaries of church and state—remain strikingly familiar.

“As soon as I stumbled on the story, I knew there’d be a book,” said Seligman, who grew up in Newark, N.J., in the 1960s, when schoolchildren were still made to recite the Lord’s Prayer. “I was that kid in public school who always wondered why we were praying like Christians, and even why Christmas was a legal holiday.”

The book is the third installment in what’s become a trilogy about Jews engaged in mass action during the first part of the 20th century. “The Great Koshers Meat War of 1902” (2020) recalled a successful consumer uprising led by Lower East Side Jewish women fed up with the high cost of beef. In “The Chief Rabbi’s Funeral” (2024), Seligman explored how a vicious anti-Jewish riot on the Lower East Side led the city’s fractious Jewish community to organize as never before.

In practical terms, the Christmas boy-

cott accomplished little, and even led to an antisemitic backlash. But it set a precedent for Jewish civic activism—and for a broader national debate about religion in public education that would stretch into the 21st century.

The spark came a year earlier, in December 1905, at Public School 174 in Brownsville. The Brooklyn neighborhood was a dense warren of immigrant Jews, many newly arrived from Eastern Europe, who eagerly sent their children to the public schools that were being filled nearly as fast as they could be built or renovated.

“The Catholics gave up on the public schools as irredeemably Protestant. The Jews loved public schools—they were a ticket to acculturation and advancement in a way they’d never had in the old country,” said Seligman. “All they wanted was to get the religious influence out.”

In a school assembly the day before

Christmas, F. F. Harding, the school’s Presbyterian principal, read aloud from a text called “Gems of Wisdom from Bible Literature and Proverbs” and then addressed his 500 pupils, nearly all Jews.

“Now, boys and girls,” he said, “at this time of year I want you all to have the feeling of Christ in you. ... Be like Christ.”

That message did not sit well with Augusta (“Gussie”) Herbert, a 14-year-old seventh grader. The daughter of a Jewish lawyer, Herbert stood up in front of the assembled students and asked why the Christian religion was being taught in a public school.

Her boldness shocked classmates and administrators alike. But she wasn’t alone. Dozens of Jewish children went home and told their parents that Christmas hymns and Bible readings had been part of their school day. Within days, Brownsville’s Jewish community was in an uproar.

Herbert’s father, Edward Herbert,

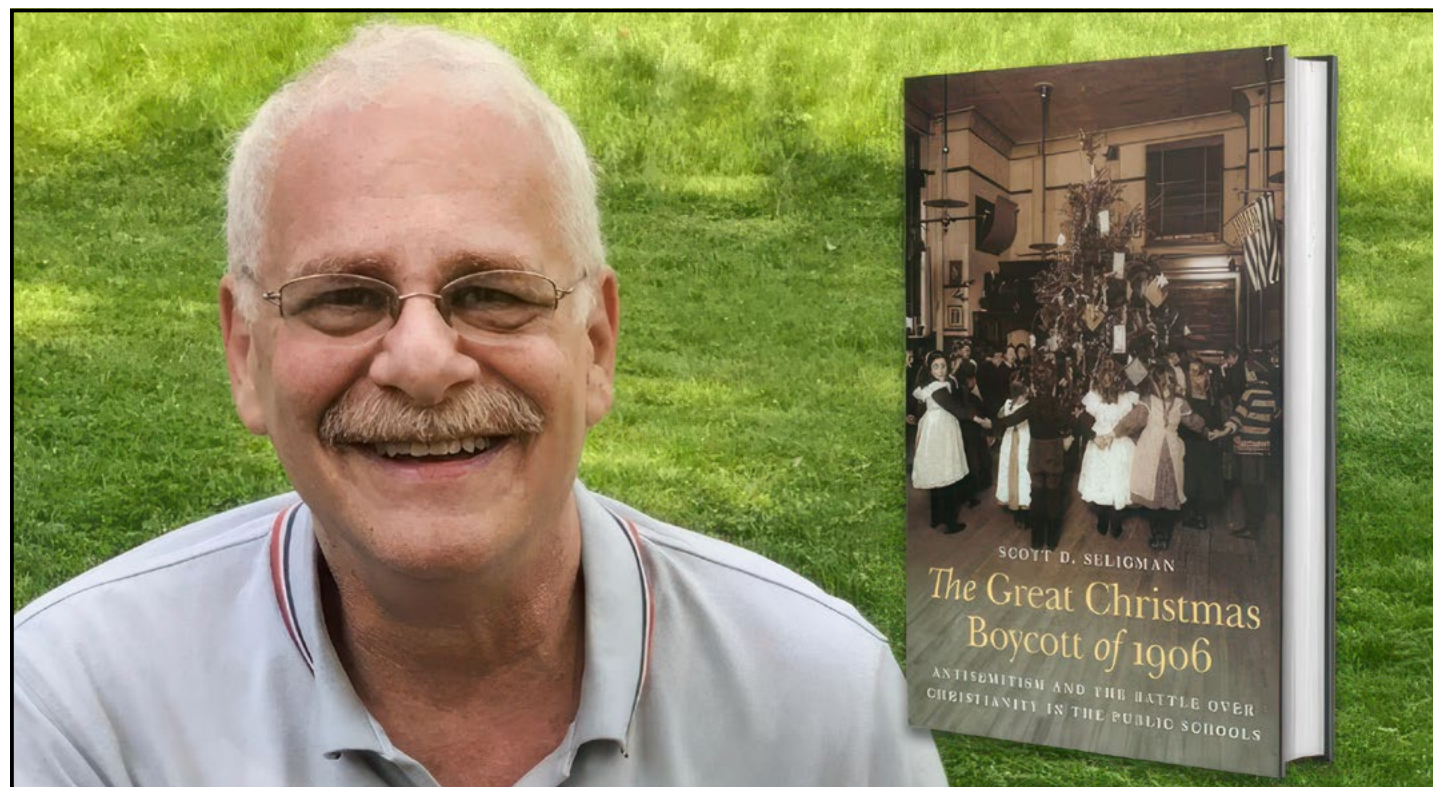
brought the matter to Albert Lucas, a 47-year-old English-born activist who served as secretary of the Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations of America.

Lucas, born Abraham Abrahamson in Liverpool, was already a veteran of Jewish communal battles. He had led campaigns against Christian “settlement houses” that sought to convert Jewish children with free meals and holiday gifts. To him, the creeping Christianization of public schools was a subtler but equally serious threat.

“Lucas believed the schools were the front line in preserving Jewish identity in America,” Seligman said. “He saw it as his duty to protect children from being made to feel like second-class citizens.”

Lucas wrote to the city’s superintendent of schools, William Henry Maxwell,

*War continued on next page*



In “The Great Christmas Boycott of 1906,” Scott D. Seligman reconstructs how a seemingly local dispute in one Brooklyn school exploded into a test case for religious freedom and civic belonging. (Nebraska University Press)



*War continued from previous page*

who had already issued a circular in 1903 reminding principals that “hymns containing reference to the tenets of any religious sect are out of place in unsectarian schools.” But enforcement was lax, and many teachers—Jewish and Christian alike—ignored the rule.

When word of Harding’s assembly reached Lucas, he pounced. Within two days, a petition circulated in Brownsville accusing the principal of “systematically Christianizing” Jewish children. The Hebrew Standard and Jewish Comment denounced the “proselytizing” in public schools, while the Brooklyn Eagle, the borough’s popular daily, defended the principal as merely promoting “good morals.”

In an unprecedented move, the Board of Education held a public hearing to weigh charges that a school principal had promoted religion. It drew a raucous crowd of 1,500.

The hearing revealed sharp divisions even within the Jewish community. Some defended Harding as a well-meaning educator; others accused him of deliberately blurring the line between civic virtue and Christian faith. In the end, the board gave Harding a slap on the wrist, in what Seligman calls “an early Easter gift.”

For Lucas and the Orthodox Union, the Harding verdict only confirmed that quiet lobbying wasn’t enough. They began to organize Jewish parents directly.

Their campaign reflected the broader social tensions of the time. Progressive reformers such as Superintendent Maxwell believed that public schools were engines of “Americanization,” meant to instill not only English and arithmetic but also civic and moral values. For many teachers, “being a good American” was synonymous with “being a good Christian.”

At the same time, America’s Jews were divided along class and ethnic lines. Uptown, German-born Jews—who had arrived decades earlier—feared that the noisy protests of their Yiddish-speaking coreligionists would jeopardize their own fragile acceptance. Downtown, newer immigrants saw those elites as assimilationist and out of touch.

By December 1906, with no change in policy, the Orthodox Union and the Yiddish press decided to act. Two newspapers—the Morgen Zhurnal and the Yidishes Tageblatt—called on Jewish parents to keep their children home on Dec. 24, when schools would hold Christmas exercises.

By most accounts, the response was overwhelming. In the Lower East Side and Brownsville, entire classrooms emptied out. Contemporary estimates suggested that between one third and two thirds of Jewish students were absent from heavily Jewish districts—perhaps 20,000 to 25,000 children citywide.

Anti-Jewish letters to the editor poured in, accusing the protesters of trying to “Judaize” the schools and “destroy” America’s Christian heritage. Protestant ministers accused Jews of ingratitude. Editorials described them as “latecomers, tolerated guests in a Christian country.”

Not all Jews supported the boycott. Abraham Stern, a German-Jewish member of the Board of Education, called the protesters “agitators” and said their actions lacked “the support of the more intelligent Jews of the city.”

Julia Richman, the city’s first female district superintendent—herself a Jewish reformer—said Christmas was both “religious and national” and should not be barred from schools “so long as it is not sectarian.”

Even some Reform rabbis dissented, including Judah L. Magnes of Temple Emanu-El, who favored cultural coexistence over confrontation.

But among the Yiddish-speaking press, the boycott was a point of pride. “Never before,” wrote one editor, “have Jewish workers stood up so boldly for their rights as Americans.”

Lucas and the boycotters were able to point to the New York State Constitution, which explicitly prohibited the use of public funds for schools teaching “the tenets of any religious sect”—a legacy of the long conflict between a Protestant establishment and Catholics.

But if law was on the side of the Jews, Seligman said, “the politics was not.” The Board of Education, caught between outraged Christians and emboldened Jews, eventually let the matter drop.

“At the end of the day, if you’re pushing for minority rights, you’re not going to get a lot of help from elected officials. Your best bet is always going to be the courts,” said Seligman.

By 1907, with no appetite for another boycott, the Orthodox Union’s activism around the issue waned. Hymns with religious themes were discouraged but not banned. Trees and wreaths returned to classrooms.

“The hot potato,” Seligman said, “remained in the laps of the school principals.”

It would take until the 1960s, with the Supreme Court’s *Engel v. Vitale* decision, for school-sponsored prayer to be declared unconstitutional. Even then, Seligman notes, “Christmas programs persisted, largely unchallenged.”

Seligman ends his book by drawing a line from 1906 to today. America’s Jewish population, he notes, is more assimilated and less religious than it was in Lucas’s day. But even as the number of

self-identified Christians has been shrinking, Christian nationalists are louder and more politically powerful. And the Supreme Court, increasingly sympathetic to religious expression, has eroded some of the wall between church and state that figures like Lucas fought to preserve.

Jews, writes Seligman, “are ostensibly in more or less the same position in which the New York Board of Education left them in 1907: forced to accept celebrations of a holiday in which they do not believe in the public schools attended by their children, paid for in part by their tax dollars.”

For Seligman, the lesson of 1906 is less about Christmas than about vigilance. The false accusation of a “Jewish war on Christmas,” he writes, “is as inevitable today as it was in 1906—if not more so.”

And Gussie Herbert’s defiant question—“Why are you teaching the Christian religion in a public school?”—still echoes, more than a century later, whenever Americans debate where faith ends and the public square begins.



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## German auction house calls off 'shameless' sale of concentration camp artifacts

By Shira Li Bartov

(JTA)—An auction house in Germany canceled the sale of hundreds of items that belonged to Holocaust victims a day before it was set to take place.

The Felzmann auction house planned to offer 623 artifacts, including letters from concentration camps and documents detailing Nazi crimes, in the western German city of Neuss. After outcry from a Holocaust survivor group, the auction was canceled and its listing disappeared from the house's website.

The auction was canceled shortly after being condemned by the International Auschwitz Committee, a group of survivors based in Berlin. The group's executive vice president, Christoph Heubner, called the sale a "cynical and shameless undertaking" that left survivors "outraged and speechless."

"Their history and the suffering of all those persecuted and murdered by the

Nazis is being exploited for commercial gain," Heubner said in a statement. He demanded the auction house cancel its event, saying the contents "belong to the families of the victims" and "should be displayed in museums or memorial exhibitions."

Poland's foreign minister Radosław Sikorski said he confirmed with his German counterpart, Johann Wadephul, that the "offensive" auction was aborted.

"Respect for victims requires the dignity of silence, not the din of commerce,"

Sikorski said on X. He also appealed for artifacts to be handed to the Auschwitz Museum.

Days before cancelling without a

statement, the auction house defended its planned sales to the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, saying that private collectors used the items for "intensive research" and their activity contributed not to "the trade in suffering, but the preservation" of memory.

Titled "System of Terror, Vol. II," the catalog showed items dating from 1933 to 1945. The first part of a privately collected trove of Holocaust letters was sold by the auction house six years ago, according to the Frankfurter

Allgemeine Zeitung.

Many items came from the Auschwitz and Buchenwald concentration camps. A postcard from Auschwitz to Krakow in

1940 had a starting bid of \$580, with a listing advertising the prisoner's "very low inmate number" and their letter's "very good condition."

Other listings were expected to fetch much higher sums. A collection of 15 letters by a prisoner in the Ravensbrück camp started at \$3,250. Another stash of letters between a Jewish family started at \$14,000, described by the auction house as "rare" because "only a few Jews were alive" in 1943.

Beyond correspondence, the auction offered belongings such a yellow Star of David with "signs of wear," three journal notebooks from an anonymous Polish Jew who survived the war, and identification documents of Jews who fled.

The catalog was also littered with Nazi documents. Among these was a 1937 medical report from the Dachau camp, which detailed the forced sterilization of a prisoner "by the camp doctor" with "the signature of an SS man." Another listing showed a file by Auschwitz commandant Arthur Liebehenschel, with notes preparing for his post-war trial defense in Krakow in 1947, which the auction house said had not yet been published.

Other documents showed the records of companies forcefully sold to Nazis.

Previous auctions of artifacts linked to Nazi crimes have been canceled in the United States over recent years.

Two 17th-century paintings were taken out of an Ohio auction in September after a Holocaust art restitution organization determined they had been looted from a German Jew's collection during World War II. In 2023, Christie's called off the sale of 300 pieces from a jewelry collection belonging to Heidi Horten, whose husband Helmut Horten bought up Jewish businesses forcefully relinquished by their owners in the 1930s.

And in 2021, an auction house in Brooklyn suspended the sale of a 19th-century ledger claimed by a Jewish community in Romania.

**"Their history and the suffering of all those persecuted and murdered by the Nazis is being exploited for commercial gain."**

**- Christoph Heubner -**



A row of barracks at Auschwitz I, seen Jan. 28, 2020. (New York Jewish Week)



## My Jewish studies students aren't talking about Israel or antisemitism. They told me why.

By Ilana M. Horwitz

(JTA)—I first noticed something was off on the first day of class. I had given my students in my “Sociology of American Jewish life” course at Tulane University blank index cards, asking them to write five words they associate with American Jews. The word antisemitism didn't appear once, and neither did Israel.

Last week, it happened again. When I asked students to choose topics from the 2020 Pew report on American Jews for small group discussions, no one chose antisemitism or Israel.

What was going on? Antisemitism dominates conversations among lay leaders, philanthropists and academics. Universities are launching new antisemitism studies centers. Yet here were 20 Jewish studies students avoiding the subject. The Hillel director confirmed he'd seen the same pattern: low attendance at events on these topics.

So I turned to my students—almost all Jewish themselves—and asked them to write anonymous reflections on this pattern. I wanted them to help me understand what felt like a significant shift from previous years, when these topics dominated classroom discussions.

Here is what I learned:

My students are exhausted. Not physically tired, but soul-weary from the constant barrage of antisemitism they encounter online. “Seeing constant antisemitism and antizionism has just made me so tired of it that it's easier to ignore,” one wrote. “When I'm in Jewish spaces, I prefer to focus on the positive things ... because it feels like antisemitism is a battle we're already losing.”

They see antisemitism everywhere on social media—on Instagram, TikTok, even in comment sections barely related to Jewish topics. It's become so normalized that one student admitted they “don't even get surprised anymore when I see crazy antisemitism.” Another described it as being talked about “on the news so much as well as talked about in everyday life” that bringing it down further in class feels redundant.

But perhaps most revealing was this: They want their Jewish studies classroom to be different. “When I am in class, I enjoy learning about new topics and not about topics that I already talk about and experience every single day,” one student explained. Another put it more bluntly: “I don't want the thing I bring up when talking about Judaism to be antisemitism in a class setting, where it is something we deal with all the time outside of it.”

The Israel conversation has become even more fraught. Students described being paralyzed by the fear of “saying the wrong thing by accident.” The topic has become so contentious that it's “a very sensitive time period because of October 7th,” making people hesitant to speak up even in Jewish spaces. One student noted that discussing Israel has become “a dividing point even within the Jewish community,” creating rifts with family members and friends.

The pressure to be perfectly informed weighs heavily on them. “I don't feel as educated on that, and in most contexts, I

don't want to bring it up because I don't want to say the wrong thing by accident,” one student confessed. They feel caught between the expectation to have authoritative opinions as Jews and their honest uncertainty about complex issues. Another described finding it “hard to delve into” topics when unsure if they're conveying accurate information. This burden of representation—the unspoken expectation that every Jewish student must be an articulate defender of their people—has become another silencing force.

I don't take this silence as apathy, but rather about self-preservation. My students are keenly aware that even among close friends, there might be hidden antisemitism. They've learned to perform constant risk assessments about when and where it's safe to express their views. As one observed, people are either intensely engaged with these topics or “have little to no interest talking about it ... and don't feel comfortable sharing their opinions.”

What struck me most was their desire to reclaim Jewish identity from being pri-

marily defined by hatred against Jews. These young Jews want to explore their heritage, culture, and traditions without every conversation circling back to those who despise them. They're not in denial—they know antisemitism exists. They're just tired of it taking up so much space in their Jewish lives.

This generational shift matters. While Jewish institutions pour resources into combating antisemitism and defending Israel—crucial work, to be clear—our young people are signaling they need something more. They need spaces where being Jewish isn't synonymous with being embattled. They need opportunities to engage with Jewish life, learning, and culture on its own terms.

My classroom revelation taught me this: If we want to engage the next generation, we need to balance necessary vigilance with joyful exploration of what makes Jewish life meaningful. Our students aren't abandoning the fight—they're asking for the chance to remember what we're fighting for.

antisemitism

israel



*Laura Haas continued from page 7*

times. It's about finding meaning in the journey, not just the destination.

We can find hope in each other. In shared humanity. In the shared experience of love, pain, and resilience. Sometimes, hope is a gentle hand reaching out when there is the feeling like we can't go on. Sometimes, it's the simple act of sharing the pain and knowing that it doesn't have to be carried alone. And sometimes, hope is in the willingness to be vulnerable, to say, I'm struggling, but I'm still here, and I'm not giving up.

Hope also gives the strength to act. When you can't look past the immediate pain, it's found that hope propels you toward change. Change, not just for yourselves, but for others. It's why we speak out about mental health. It's why we work to create a world where no one feels alone, where no one feels like they're running out of options. Hope is the fuel behind our desire to help others, to prevent another life from being lost. Hope gives us the courage to transform our grief into action, our pain into purpose.

In the aftermath of a loss like this, there are moments when hope feels distant, when the future feels uncertain. But hope, like resilience, is something that can be found again. Hope is in the memories of a loved one, in the love that continues to be carried for them. Hope is in the ways of continuing their legacy—whether through kindness, understanding, or working to prevent others from experiencing the same pain. Hope is in the belief that healing is possible, even when

it seems so far out of reach.

Resilience doesn't mean you have forgotten. It doesn't mean you have moved on as if nothing happened. Resilience is not about erasing the pain but rather about finding ways to live with it. It's about learning to carry the weight, to move forward with it, and to honor the memory of a loved one, even in the midst of grief.

Resilience is in the moments when we choose to keep going, even when it feels like the world has come to a halt. It's in the courage to face another day, even when that day feels impossible. It's in the small steps taken, the support given to one another, and the act of allowing healing.

Grief, particularly from suicide, has a way of creating feelings of isolation. It can create a silence and a barrier from the world. But I urge you to break that silence, to lean into the people who care for you. You don't have to go through this alone. There is no one right way to grieve, but there is strength in vulnerability. There is power in reaching out to others—whether that's through therapy, support groups, or simply talking to a friend who listens with compassion.

So in honoring your loved one's memory, choose hope—not as a denial of the pain, but as a way to rise above it. Choose resilience, not because you have to, but because you can. And choose to be here for each other, for as long as it takes, with love, patience, and compassion.

For more information about the survivors of suicide support group, contact Laura Haas at 330.746.7929 or [lhaas@jewishyoungstown.org](mailto:lhaas@jewishyoungstown.org).

*Year-end continued from page 19*

tion will be able to deduct cash donations to charity: up to \$1,000 for single filers or \$2,000 for married couples filing jointly. This deduction applies only to cash contributions to qualified charitable organizations, but not to donor-advised funds or supporting organizations.

#### **A charitable contribution “floor” for taxpayers who itemize**

Taxpayers who itemize deductions can only claim the deduction of contributions that exceed 0.5 percent of their adjusted gross income.

#### **Limits on deductions for taxpayers in highest tax bracket**

Tax benefits for charitable deductions will be capped at 35 percent. Even if you are in the higher marginal tax bracket of 37 percent, your cap is still 35 percent. To illustrate, if you made a \$1,000 charitable gift, you would receive a \$350 tax deduction instead of the current \$370 deduction.

Here is what you might want to consider before the end of 2025:

#### **Consider accelerating your future char-**

**itable contributions** by bunching the gifts in 2025 to yield greater tax savings before the new limitations apply. Alternatively, there may be benefits to pre-paying pledges for larger gifts.

**Establish a donor-advised fund** or contribute to an existing donor-advised fund. This is a strategic way to bunch or pre-fund your charitable contributions, and it is fully deductible for those who itemize.

**Think beyond cash** by using appreciated assets to make charitable gifts. Appreciated stock held for over one year can make a powerful contribution. It not only qualifies for a charitable income tax deduction for the stock's full value (if you itemize), but you pay no capital gains tax on the stock's appreciation.

Consult with trusted professionals, including your tax preparer and financial advisor.

I am always happy to discuss these and other charitable giving strategies with you and your advisors, but remember that our Federation does not provide tax advice. I can be reached at [ccampesi@jewishyoungstown.org](mailto:ccampesi@jewishyoungstown.org) or 330.746.3250, ext. 152.



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## By the thousands, IDF Lone Soldiers find support and services at Tel Aviv Errands Day

By Shanna Fuld

(JTA)—TEL AVIV—When A. moved from Florida to Israel after high school and began his mandatory service in the Israel Defense Forces, he knew it would be challenging to serve in a combat unit far from his family.

“Combat service has been very difficult,” said A., whose name is being withheld to protect his identity, like those of other soldiers cited in this story. “I’ve had to face challenges I never could have imagined. But you go through it, and you come out able to handle things—even better than I could have before in my civilian life.”

Several months on, however, A., 19, still has trouble handling his civilian To Do list—like getting an Israeli driver’s license. He just has no time for it.

So when he heard that the Friends of the IDF-Nefesh B’Nefesh Lone Soldiers Program, in partnership with the Mofet Unit of the IDF Manpower Directorate and the Association for Israel’s Soldiers, was organizing an Errands Day event in Tel Aviv for Lone Soldiers—where representatives of banks, government offices, employment organizations, and numerous other service providers would be on hand to ease and expedite errands for soldiers without immediate family in Israel—A. was thrilled.

At the all-day, mid-November event at the Tel Aviv Expo center, which drew over 4,000 Lone Soldiers from 70 different countries, A. went to get his driver’s license and was astonished to find more than 70 volunteer driving instructors and 60 certified examiners speeding soldiers through one of Israel’s most notoriously bureaucratic processes. It took A. just minutes to obtain his license, printed by a biometric machine on site.

“It was on the spot!” he marveled. “It was a big thing I needed to do. It’s all stuff that is really helping me out.”

The mass-scale Yom Siddurim (Errands Day) was the largest ever, and the first to be held since Oct. 7, 2023. Over the last two years of war, holding such an event was impossible because the IDF couldn’t spare thousands of soldiers all on the same day during the height of the war, according to Rabbi Yehoshua Fass, co-founder and executive director of Nefesh B’Nefesh. The mission of his organization, which began with a holistic approach to facilitating *aliyah* (immigration to Israel) from



Over 4,000 Israeli Lone Soldiers hailing from 70 countries attended a unique Errands Day event in Tel Aviv organized in part by Nefesh B’Nefesh, the immigration-assistance organization co-founded by Tony Gelbart, left center, and Rabbi Yehoshua Fass, right center. The soldiers’ faces are blurred to protect their identities. (Yonit Schiller)

North America, has broadened to encompass supporting Israeli national service, development of the country with a focus on its periphery, and Zionist education.

For a day, the Tel Aviv Expo center was turned into a one-stop shop for nearly every bureaucratic, logistical, and personal need a Lone Soldier could face.

Soldiers renewed their passports, sorted out payments from Israel’s National Insurance Institute, and got free haircuts from on-site barbers. They lined up at booths to meet with representatives of government ministries, embassies, banks, the Electric Company, the Population Authority, and numerous NGOs. They got a hot lunch and even availed themselves of tailors on site to hem their military-issue pants and skirts.

Though all wearing Israeli army uniforms, the soldiers hailed from all over the globe—including native Israelis considered Lone Soldiers because they don’t have immediate family they can rely upon in Israel.

“We know these soldiers come from all over the world to serve,” said Roni, a representative of the IDF unit that cares for Lone Soldiers. “Our job is to make sure they know their rights: vacation days, housing assistance, financial benefits, refunds for flights to see their families. We run a 24/7 hotline. Everything we do is so they know they’re not alone.”

Y., a 25-year-old infantryman from Canada who moved to Israel in August 2023, said the hardest part about being a Lone

Soldier is the distance from his family.

“My teammates took me in like brothers,” said Y. “They see their parents every few weeks; I don’t. I am missing my family and want to see them.”

Y. utilized his time at the Yom Siddurim getting his North American undergraduate degree officially recognized so he can enroll in a master’s program in Israel after he finishes the army. He also was able to get answers about rent payments and the process for enrolling in *ulpan* (Hebrew language classes).

A 21-year-old Lone Soldier originally from Russia, D., used the day to take care of paying his municipal taxes, sorting out his electricity bill, and getting new national ID cards.

“I need everything,” D. said, “and here we can do all of it. The atmosphere is happy. We have presents, food, drinks. And today I’m not in the army,” he added with a laugh. “It’s a good day.”

M., a 24-year-old American woman, moved to Israel after graduating from Georgia Tech with a degree in biochemistry. Through the army’s academic track, which deploys degree-holders in technical and relevant positions as officers, M. became a hazardous materials officer for Israel’s Home Front Command.

“Oct. 7 happened in the first semester of my senior year. I realized I wanted my life to be meaningful,” M. said of her decision to immigrate to Israel. “I wanted to serve the Jewish people.”

With an army job focused on keeping fac-

tories and citizens safe, she said the Errands Day event was a reminder of how Israel is also taking care of her.

“It’s touching,” she said. “It shows there is actually infrastructure to help *olim* [new immigrants] and the citizens.”

That’s exactly the point, said Nadav Padan, CEO of Friends of the IDF and a major general in the IDF reserves.

“Yom Siddurim is one of the many ways FIDF shows our deep appreciation and support for the young men and women who volunteer to serve in the IDF,” Padan said. “We aim to ensure they know they are never alone, and that they have a family of supporters across the United States standing with them. Through comprehensive support that includes financial assistance, housing, flights home, community events, and mental health support, FIDF is committed to easing their experience so they can focus fully on their vital mission of protecting the State of Israel.”

In addition to service providers of all kinds, Knesset members from across the political spectrum stopped by, including Minister of Aliyah and Integration Ofir Sofer, Likud’s Yuli Edelstein and Gadi Eisenkot, a former IDF chief of staff and Knesset member.

“This is our nation,” said Nefesh B’Nefesh’s co-founder and chairman, Tony Gelbart. “That celebration of unity, with this as the anchor, is uplifting.”

Fass said that one of the government ministers on hand was so taken with the event that he wants to re-create it for Israelis displaced by the Oct. 7 war, who despite their return home face all sorts of bureaucratic hurdles ranging from getting compensation for lost income to accessing mental health services.

“I said take it! Copy and paste it. It’s modular,” Fass said.

“The young men and women who make aliyah, and are required to serve in the IDF, embody an extraordinary commitment to the State of Israel, driven by a strong Zionist spirit and a deep desire to contribute to our nation,” Fass and Gelbart said in a joint statement. “This year’s Yom Siddurim is a powerful reminder of our responsibility to support these new olim, provide for their needs and demonstrate our gratitude for their ongoing service to the Jewish nation.”



## An immersive dinner takes a culinary journey through the Jewish Diaspora

By Jackie Hajdenberg

(JTA)—Dima and Yuliia Lytvnenko spent their entire lives in Odessa. There, the married couple owned a restaurant, Mama Cassala (Ukrainian for “Mama Said”) and a sausage factory. Both were destroyed in 2022 rocket attacks during the ongoing war with Russia.

Fearing for their safety, the Jewish family—they have three children, ages 15, 11 and 10—fled to Spain in 2023, and then to New York City in early 2024. Today, they are the proprietors of Papa Did It, a beef jerky and cured meat company based in Staten Island.

Yuliia Lytvynenko has been surprised by how little New Yorkers seem to know about the Jewish community in her hometown. Lytvynenko describes Odessa as a “very Jewish city” with many Jewish schools and synagogues. “But a lot of people don’t know that the Jewish in Ukraine are still there,” she said.

The Lytvynenko family’s journey of displacement, preserving their heritage and building a home on a new continent will be told this month and next in New York as part of “Diaspora,” a four-course dinner and the-

ater experience inspired by real-life stories of the Jewish Diaspora.

Produced by a group of Broadway alumni and entrepreneurs, “Diaspora” is the latest project from StoryCourse, an immersive dining and theater collective that’s focused on telling the stories of marginalized people. Running for 13 performances throughout November and December at a studio space at 245 West 18th Street, “Diaspora” treats audiences to performances based on real-life immigration stories of Iranian, Ethiopian, Mexican, and Ukrainian Jewish families, accompanied by vegetarian and nut-free food that represents the four countries.

“I think this is an experience that will really widen people’s perspective on what Jewishness can look like, can taste like, can feel like, and it’s an experience that allows for everyone to have a seat at the table,” said Adam Kantor, the director of “Diaspora,” whose previous credits include “The Band’s Visit” and “Rent.”

“We’re in really divisive times now in terms of anti-Jewishness and anti-immi-

gration policies,” Kantor added. “So it feels like this is sort of a latent sociopolitical act, but it’s one that does not aim to be overtly political, necessarily. It aims to bring people together over community and food and heart.”

Inspired by the Passover seder—that is, combining storytelling with a festive meal—StoryCourse was founded in 2017 by Kantor, composer Benj Pasek and Brian Bordainick, the creator of the membership-based supper club Dinner Lab, all of whom are Jewish. StoryCourse went viral with its virtual “Saturday Night Seder” in 2020—held as a fundraiser for COVID-19 emergency relief—and has also put on shows centering on the stories of LGBTQ+ chefs.

“Diaspora” embraces the Jewish roots of StoryCourse, according to Charly Jaffe, the organization’s creative director. “In a time where so many people are feeling like they’ve lost their sense of home, whether it’s a literal home, political home, or the earth-we-live-on home ... it’s looking at what we do at StoryCourse, and what our Jewish lineage—what we have in our history—actually has so much value for us,” Jaffe said.

The three other Jewish families at the heart of “Diaspora” are Stephanie and Yvonne Ohebshalom, who have Iranian roots; Beejhy Barhany, the owner of Harlem’s Tsion Café, who came to New York from Ethiopia via Sudan and Israel, and Fany Gerson, owner of Fan-Fan Doughnuts in Bedford-Stuyvesant, who hails from Mexico.

“People think: ‘Jewish New York,’ and they just think, like, Katz’s Deli, or Borough Park, or neurotic Woody Allen,” Jaffe said. “There’s so much richness in [the] global Jewish tapestry.”

Andy Hartman, StoryCourse’s head of operations, said he hopes audiences will leave with an “expanded understanding” of Jews and Jewish food. “I think so much of what we have been trying to do is sort of push back on the Ashkenormativity that exists in the United States, more broadly, but even in New York, in terms of what Jews look like and what Jewish food is,” he said.

“Diaspora” explores these themes over four courses adapted from the four

families’ own recipes, including Persian *naan-o-paneer* and Shirazi salad, Ethiopian *messer wot lentil* stew, Ukrainian *borscht* and Mexican dessert flavors like guava with cheese. They’ll be prepared by two Jewish chefs, Dave Dreifus, the founder of Best Damn Cookies, and Lottie Gurvis, owner of Oh My Noshhh private dining.

About 50 guests each night will travel the world from their dinner plate while learning about the lives of these real, New York-based Jewish families.

Ethiopian chef Barhany, who is also the author of “Gursha: Timeless Recipes for Modern Kitchens, from Ethiopia, Israel, Harlem, and Beyond” is participating in “Diaspora” because, she said, “I wanted to bring the perspective of other Jews that we have to immerse ourselves and celebrate our differences and be more inclusive.”

Barhany, 49, was born in Ethiopia; as a child, she spent three years in Sudan before her family arrived in Israel, where she eventually served in the Israel Defense Forces. After traveling the world, Barhany settled in New York, where she’s lived for more than two decades.

“I don’t think there is much knowledge on the flavors, traditions, and what Ethiopian Jews have to offer to the landscape of the deliciousness of Jewish food,” Barhany said. “Tsion Café, or myself—we’re adding to that landscape of the diverse, unique flavors that the Jewish diaspora has to offer.”

Yuliia Lytvynenko said she hopes “Diaspora” informs its New York audience about contemporary Ukrainian Jewish life. (Case in point: Her husband’s surname was not originally Lytvynenko—his father, for whom Papa Did It is named, changed the family’s surname from Rabinovich due to rising antisemitism in Ukraine in the 1970s.)

During the Lytvynenkos’ course—the third—Ukrainian *borscht*, a favorite dish of the Lytvynenko children, will be served, along with a few creative interpretations of traditional Ukrainian spreads.

Asked what he hopes audiences will walk away with from the show, director Kantor said: “I hope that they will be crying into their borscht.”



An immersive dinner takes a culinary journey through the Jewish Diaspora



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