



The Center for Jewish Life

Embracing Our Past. Building Our Future.

UPDATE!

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REIMAGINING: NEW USES FOR OLD BUILDINGS

BY DAVID SHEYDWASSER, PROJECT ARCHITECT

I'm pleased to be working on the new Center for Jewish Life campus and am enjoying the challenge of adapting a former supermarket into a modern, welcoming, and comfortable space for our Jewish community.

To a large degree, we have all encountered buildings that have been reimagined. Even here, in the Wyoming Valley, we have a tremendous number of older buildings that have been repurposed.

At the risk of leaving some out, I'll list just a few that are notable to me:

- The Stegmaier Brewery was converted into the Social Security Administration building.
- The F.W. Woolworth building was converted into a bookstore and business incubator.
- The Stegmaier residence was converted into a Bed and Breakfast.
- The Guthrie School was converted into the corporate offices of Inter Metro Industries.
- The Ramada Hotel was converted by King's College into a Physician Assistant Studies facility.
- Pomeroy's Department Store was converted into an office building.
- Bedford Hall, at Wilkes University, which is on the national register of historic places, was converted from a residence into academic offices, into an Art Department, into an ROTC building, and then back to an Art Department again.



Our Center for Jewish Life will soon join this list of buildings which have been given a second chance.

Does the existing building have challenges? Yes. It has no air-conditioning or heating systems, it will need a new electrical service, the plumbing systems will have to be completely reworked, the outside "skin" of the building needs to be addressed, and the small grouping of shops on the side of the building will have to be torn down to make room for the addition of the gym and pool.

But it has a lot of things going for it too. My engineers tell me that the structure is in very good shape and that the mechanical and electrical systems can easily be upgraded. Believe it or not, the roof is in good condition, is relatively high, and the column spacing is very far apart, which will allow spaces to be subdivided within the building itself. We will also construct an addition to the existing building to create a new home for us, for our children, and for their children. As envisioned, when the Center is built, it will become many things to many people. It will allow for a full complement of sports and recreational opportunities, large and small meeting and community rooms, a resource center, a place for us to be refreshed, a place for worship, a place to socialize, and a place that affords us educational and vocational opportunities. In the end though, for me, the Center is conceived as an extension of your home. I view it almost like a second living room. In its simplest form, it will be a place where we can come together as a community.

David Sheydwasser, project architect for the Center for Jewish Life, has been a licensed architect for nearly 30 years and specializes in new construction and renovations/ remodeling.

NEW FACES IN THE COMMUNITY



"We are so excited for the new Center for Jewish Life. As a family new to the area, we think it will be a great resource for us to help to get to know, and become a part of, our new community. Also, as frequent users of the JCC pool, we are particularly excited about the updated facilities."

The Salesky Family: (Clockwise) Winona, Joel, Hannah and Elsie

- Winona Salesky, Shavertown



The Center for Jewish Life

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STATE REP. PRAISES PROJECT

State Rep. Aaron Kaufer grew up attending programs at the JCC and later worked in its athletic department. A first-term lawmaker, his Luzerne County district includes Kingston.

“As someone who grew up in the Wyoming Valley Jewish Community and spent a lot of time at the Jewish Community Center, I am deeply invested in the future of Jewish life in our area. This project represents a major opportunity, one we need to capitalize on. The area that we are revitalizing is an empty

property that has been sitting vacant for too many years. I am thrilled to see what used to be an eyesore being converted into a campus that will serve the needs of the Jewish community, while at the same time benefiting the wider community.”

COMMUNAL LEADER FELL IN LOVE WITH THE WYOMING VALLEY AND NEVER LEFT

Dr. Michael Weiss, after graduating from dental school in 1980, moved to the Wyoming Valley without knowing a soul. The native of Cheltenham Township in suburban Philadelphia had joined a dental practice in Hazleton. He figured he would get some experience, stay a few years, and either move back to Philadelphia or head somewhere else.

Instead, he fell in love with the region and never left, marrying and raising three children here. During that time, he became a leader in the Jewish community. Among his many involvements, he served as the president of Temple B'nai B'rith in Kingston, headed what was then known as the Jewish Federation of Greater Wilkes-Barre (now the Jewish Community Alliance) for three years, served on the executive board of the United Hebrew Institute, and was one of the initial supporters of Bais Menachem, a Chabad-run school.

Michael's experience with such a detailed and broad spectrum of the local Jewish community is precisely the reason he wholeheartedly supports the campaign to build the Center for Jewish Life.

“I have a global view of the community,” said Michael, who lives in Mountain Top with his wife Justine. “Building this campus brings the existing, different Jewish groups together. Our similarities surpass our differences. Our Jewish organizations can and must survive together.”

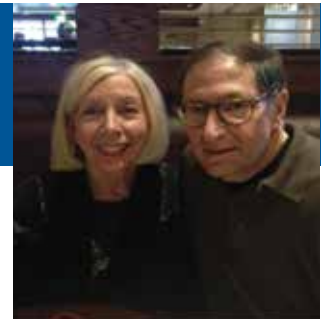
Michael, who maintains his own dental practice in Hazleton, is serving as the campaign's co-chair of Special Gifts.

He acknowledged that, when the idea of building a new center was first discussed in 2008, the proposal was met with skepticism. For three years, the merits of this center were explained at community events and High Holiday services. Slowly, support and momentum have developed.

“We have to move forward together. We have to focus on where we are today and where we are going to be tomorrow,” he stated. “We can't dwell on the past. We have to serve the community of today and tomorrow.”

Completing the new Center, he said, will show “young Jewish families that they can raise their kids here and settle for the long term.”

In addition, he said, the Center will make sure that the Wyoming Valley is a place where our seniors can stay to enjoy the benefits of the community and continue to be enriched culturally, physically, socially, and spiritually. The Center, he explained, will help “ensure the community's future and it is the responsibility of all community members to support the project to the best of their abilities.”



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