



The Center for Jewish Life

Embracing Our Past. Building Our Future.

UPDATE!

ISSUE 2

Issue 2 Editor – Paula Chaiken

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Architect David Sheydwasser, during two recent public forums, unveiled an initial rendering of the front of the Center for Jewish Life. The design, Sheydwasser stressed, is in the preliminary stages.

THE CENTER FOR JEWISH LIFE

Design Meetings Engage Community

Armed with a bright green marker, a flip chart and a receptiveness to hearing a range of ideas, Jennifer Dressler and Bruce Lefkowitz, Co-Chairs of the Design Committee for the Center for Jewish Life, took comments, suggestions and questions from interested community members during two recent public meetings.

The meetings, which drew a combined total of about 75 people and offered members of the public an opportunity to have input into the design process, were held at the JCC on October 14 and at the Kingston Municipal Building on October 22.

Dressler rapidly wrote down the suggestions of those in attendance. Some ideas for the new Center for Jewish Life included: an indoor walking track, a café, a teen lounge, a first-rate sound system, an indoor playground, and a rock climbing wall. Many said they wanted to replicate and improve upon some of the amenities at the current JCC. Other ideas included a space for events and parties like bar/bat mitzvahs and weddings and a temporary stage in a multi-purpose room. Multiple kitchen options were discussed.

The importance of security and safety was expressed

by a number of participants and will be a paramount consideration in the building design, Dressler and Lefkowitz stressed.

Towards the conclusion of the meeting, Architect David Sheydwasser shared preliminary designs of the building's exterior. The entry way is designed to be grand yet contemporary and was inspired in part by the Western Wall in Jerusalem. The idea is to give those who walk into the building the sense that they are part of something bigger than themselves, said Sheydwasser. Included in this initial design are areas for the annual Chanukkah menorah candle lighting and a sukkah. Sheydwasser also imagines a community garden and a reflecting pool, to give people a place to pause and remember loved ones. Overall, Sheydwasser expects the building design will “blend a little of the old and the new.”

While these public meetings are concluded, interested community members are encouraged to share their ideas with Jennifer Dressler and Bruce Lefkowitz. They still have that green marker and flip chart. Please contact Jennifer and Bruce via email at harroldsJennifer@gmail.com.

WHY RELOCATE?

As you may know, the Jewish Community Alliance is moving from downtown Wilkes-Barre across the river to the brand new Center for Jewish Life in Kingston. This move not only represents a major location change, but also a creative and practical way to consolidate the Jewish community while being forward-thinking.

In this issue of our newsletter, we wanted to address the 'why' of our relocation. One major factor is the current state of our beloved Jewish Community Center. Built in 1950, the facility has well served our community's needs for decades. If you have visited our Jewish Community Center in the last decade or so, however, you are well aware that the building requires major renovations. In short, the facility is inadequate to meet the needs of our contemporary community. Renovating the JCC would cost, at a minimum, between \$4 and \$6 million. Such a course of action would not represent a wise investment of our community's finite resources.

It is not only the JCA leadership that felt, and continues to feel, this way. This is what we heard from a cross-section of community members in a 2012 study examining the prospects for a major campaign. At the time, two-thirds of community members and potential major donors interviewed for the study said that relocating to Kingston represented a positive step. Fully 70 percent of interviewees supported the creation of a new facility.

Demographics are also a major impetus behind the move. For more than 170 years, Jews have represented a thriving component in the region. It is true that we are not as numerous as in the past, but we remain a vibrant and engaged community. We must plan to meet the needs of our community, both current priorities and those projected in the future. Our overall strategy has been one of consolidation to conserve resources, avoid duplication and provide services as efficiently as we can. That is why a number of Jewish organizations, including the Jewish Federation, the JCC, and Jewish Family Service, took the dramatic step two years ago to merge into one cohesive organization. And that is why the creation of a modern and spacious Center for Jewish Life – one that meets current needs and projected future needs as well – is the most viable option. Jewish life can operate under a single roof. And there will be room to grow if additional synagogues or agencies join us at a later date. Temple Israel has already opted to relocate its Hebrew school and administrative offices to the Center for Jewish Life on a three year, trial basis.

Additionally, a beautiful, thriving new Center may inspire unaffiliated Jews in our community to take part in our activities and organizations. And, just as our camp attracts non-Jews to our superior program, we're building a Center that will engage the greater community.

This endeavor cannot succeed without your active involvement and support. Together, we will build a new dynamic facility that will serve our social, educational, cultural, athletic and other needs and ensure the existence of a vibrant, engaged Jewish community for decades to come.



Architect David Sheydwasser and Design Co-Chairs Jennifer Dressler and Bruce Lefkowitz at a recent meeting where the community gave its input about the form and content of the new Center for Jewish Life.

HOW TO FIND OUT MORE:

For more information about any aspect of the project or the campaign, or to learn about how you can help with the creation of the Center for Jewish Life, please do not hesitate to contact Danny Goldberg, executive director of the Jewish Community Alliance of Northeastern Pennsylvania: by email at jca.exec@jewishwilkes-barre.org or by phone at 570-824-4646, ext. 235.

BUILDING COMMITTEE OVERSEES CAMPUS DESIGNS

The Building Committee, created when the board of the Jewish Community Alliance officially voted to build the Center for Jewish Life on Third Avenue in Kingston, oversees the building process. Chuck Cohen and David Schwager are co-chairing the committee and have put together a group that represents our community. The team oversaw a competitive process to choose David Sheydwasser as project architect. Mr. Sheydwasser possesses a strong vision and more than 25 years of design experience, and has already produced several preliminary designs that have generated buzz and excitement. Following on the heels of two community forums (see article on page one), in which residents offered thoughts about the design of the new building, we will now be moving forward with the formal design process. Together we will turn dreams into blueprints, and blueprints into bricks and mortar.

CHUCK COHEN ON THE CENTER FOR JEWISH LIFE:



Chuck Cohen

I grew up at the JCC on South River Street, playing basketball in the gym (Irv ‘the Fox’ Lebowitz will testify to my less-than-stellar skills!), swimming (s-l-o-w-l-y) on the Swim Team, and building models on Sunday afternoons. And my first, most cherished leadership opportunities came during my high school experience in Jewish Center Youth (JCY), the precursor to today’s BBYO teen program.

So I know the key role that a vibrant Jewish community plays in the lives of those who choose to get involved. But a vibrant Jewish community needs a physical space that reflects its values, invites members of all ages to participate in programs, and inspires a feeling of ‘naches’ (pride).

The new Center for Jewish Life in Kingston will be all that and more. It will feature modern meeting and presentation space, a full-size gym and pool, new kitchens and classrooms, and shared office space. It will be a building that’s efficient, flexible and inviting.

I remember hearing stories from my parents and grandparents about how our community moved from the first JCC on South Washington Street (now the CYC) to the current JCC in the 1950s, and then how the community rebuilt following the devastation of Hurricane Agnes in 1972. Now it’s our responsibility to step up and create a new, vibrant Jewish hub that will serve us for generations to come.

Please join me in helping to design, create, and build the Center for Jewish Life.

DAVID SCHWAGER ON THE PROJECT:



David Schwager

I grew up in the Wyoming Valley, my law office is in downtown Wilkes-Barre, and this is the community where I have chosen to raise my children.

As the co-chair of the Building Committee, I am motivated by a desire to continue the vibrant and caring Jewish community that my family has experienced over three generations.

My parents, Margot and Fred (of blessed memory), my wife Laurie and I, and our children, Max and Melissa, have enjoyed the rich and diverse array of experiences and opportunities in Jewish Wilkes-Barre, and I’d love to see that continue for generations to come.

For more than 170 years, our Jewish community has made an influential and lasting contribution to the civic, commercial and cultural life of the Wyoming Valley. I feel a tremendous responsibility to do my part to make sure this is always the case.

Then there is the future, a future we can’t quite see, but we must prepare for nonetheless. American Jewry is experiencing a shifting communal landscape. That is why we must act today to ensure our institutions are well positioned for tomorrow. With the Center for Jewish Life, we have a “once in several generations chance” to leave our mark with a building that expresses our values. I believe we are embarking on an historic undertaking. The building design will take into account all practical considerations, but it will envision and imagine our collective future. I look forward to building that future with each of you.

VOLUNTEERS WELCOME!

The Committees involved with the Center for Jewish Life welcome and encourage your participation. This must be a community-wide effort and we need your help and input. We are seeking individuals with an interest and background in design, communication, and development. Please contact Jewish Community Alliance Executive Director Danny Goldberg at jca.exec@jewishwilkes-barre.org or 570-824-4646 to volunteer your time and talent to this vital communal project.

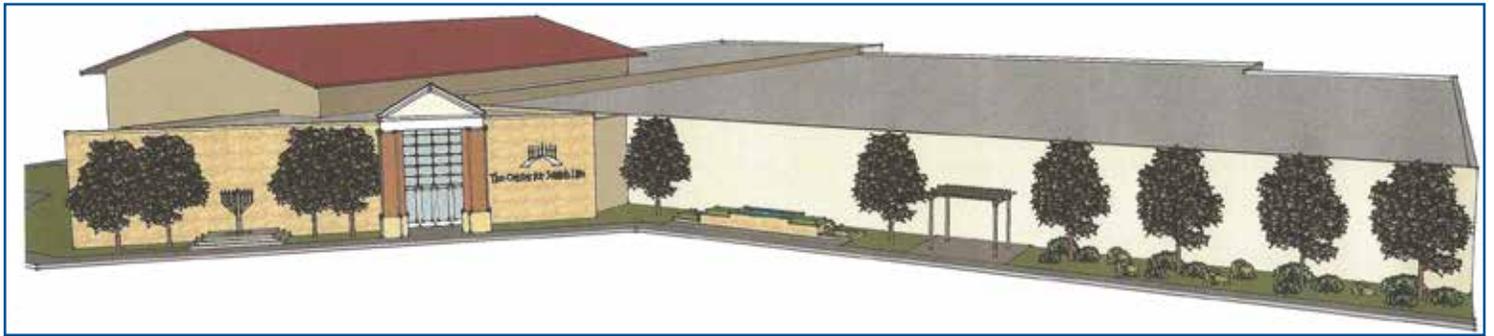


The Center for Jewish Life

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In presenting the initial rendering of the Center for Jewish Life's front entrance, architect David Sheydwasser said he hopes visitors will experience a sense of entering a place that is greater than themselves.

THOUGHTS ON THE CENTER FOR JEWISH LIFE FROM DANNY GOLDBERG

The Center for Jewish Life is an exciting and essential project to provide for the future needs of our community. As you may know, the current JCC was built in 1950, and has undergone many renovations. It is now far beyond its life span. The Center for Jewish Life will enable us to provide educational, recreational, fitness, and community programs and services in a state-of-the-art environment.

I know that progress and change are not without stress. As Jews, it is incumbent on us to do as we have done *Mi Dor le'Dor*, from generation to generation, to guarantee that the next generation of Jews has even more opportunities to thrive than we do. This is what the Jewish community of Wilkes-Barre has done throughout its 170-year history and what we will continue to do.

Please join us in improving our future. The more of us who participate, the stronger we will be. Come share your thoughts, time and talent. My door is always open.



*Danny Goldberg
Executive Director
of the Jewish
Community Alliance*

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