



Jewish Heritage Day
presents

MARCH 22, 2026

See page 22 for more info...

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L'CHAYIM

Published by the Jewish Federation of Lee & Charlotte Counties

January 2026 / 5786

JewishFederationLCC.org

Volume 48, Number 5

INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

- 10 Community Focus
- 17 Jewish Interest
- 22 Commentary
- 24 Organizations
- 27 Focus on Youth
- 29 From the Bimah
- 31 Temple News
- 35 Community Directory



Host, Connect, Celebrate
Create lifelong friendships and share culture with visiting Israeli teens this spring. p. 2

Jews Got Talent!
Show off your skills and enjoy a fun-filled Jewish Heritage Day celebration. p. 7

For the most current news and articles on the war in Israel, please visit our website at JewishFederationLCC.org.

Linda Idelson Culinary Event

Hosted in the Charles & Linda Idelson Kitchen
Canterbury School
8141 College Pkwy. Fort Myers

Monday, January 12th
6pm - 8pm

We proudly welcome Beejhy Barhany — chef, author of Gursha, and founder of Tsion Café in Harlem. Born in Ethiopia, Beejhy fled with her family as a young child during the mass exodus of Ethiopian Jews in the 1980s. From Ethiopia to Sudan, to Israel, and eventually to New York, her journey is one of courage, Jewish identity, and unbreakable tradition.

She will guide us through a traditional Ethiopian Jewish Coffee Ceremony, share stories of Jewish resilience, and serve stew and fresh bread that honor her heritage.

The evening will open with music by Canterbury students and a shared commitment to memory, culture, and community.

Where food gathers us, tradition sustains us.
Where stories are shared, legacy lives on.



TICKETS: \$36 pp or VIP \$75 (includes cookbook, VIP seating and meet & greet
Want to be a sponsor? \$175 includes 2 tickets \$250 includes 3 tickets
RSVP by: 12/29/25

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L'CHAYIM invites correspondence on subjects of interest to Jewish people. Partisan political opinions will not be published, but opinions on subjects affecting the Jewish community are welcome. All inquiries regarding copy for **L'CHAYIM** should be directed to the editor. All news material must be very clearly printed or typed (not in all-capital letters) and double-spaced. Electronic submissions encouraged. The editor reserves the right to edit for space and content.

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**FEBRUARY ISSUE
 EDITORIAL
 DEADLINE:
 Wednesday, January 7**



OUR MISSION

To strengthen and enrich the Jewish Community by providing and supporting philanthropic, educational and social service programs locally, in Israel and throughout the world.

OUR VISION

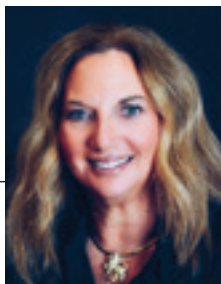
A Jewish Community that is based on Jewish values such as Tzedakah (benevolence), Tikkun Olam (repairing the world) and K'lal Yisrael (taking responsibility for one another).

Host an Israeli teen this spring

Create memories that last a lifetime

FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

■ Debbie Sanford



Jewish Federation of Lee & Charlotte Counties is excited to welcome a delegation of Israeli teens to our community this spring, and we are seeking local families to open their homes and hearts.

and comfortable environment for our visitors.

Most meals, activities, and program costs will be covered by the Federation. Host families simply provide a safe, warm home, some meals and transportation — and the opportunity for these young ambassadors to experience Jewish life in

Southwest Florida.

Past host families in our partner communities have shared how rewarding the experience can be, forming friendships that continue long after the visit is over. **This is a chance to bring Israel**



We are looking for host families from Sunday, March 22 through Thursday, March 26. Families will pick up their guests at Jewish Heritage Day at the Red Sox Stadium on March 22 and say goodbye on the morning of March 26.

Hosting is a meaningful way to build lifelong connections, share culture, and strengthen the bonds between our communities. We especially encourage families with teens in the household to participate, as this creates a natural

into your home in a personal, hands-on way.

If your family is interested in hosting, or if you would like more information, please contact me at debbiesanford@jfedlcc.org and/or PJ Library Coordinator Brittany Salem at pjlibrarycoordinator@jfedlcc.org.

We hope you'll consider being part of this special opportunity to welcome our Israeli teens and create lasting memories for your family and theirs. 🌍

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Ajax Paving Industries.....7

Alliance Financial Group....29

Anago.....13

Clarity CPA.....17

Classy Car Service.....33

Doubletree by Hilton.....21

Elite Estate Services.....10

FineMark Natl. Bank
 & Trust.....4

Fort Myers Memorial
 Gardens.....32

Ginsberg Eye.....3

Gordon's Pool &
 Spa Service.....33

Green Schoenfeld & Kyle..33

Gulf Coast Orthodontics....29

Holocaust Museum & Cohen
 Education Center.....14

Lyons & Lyons.....27

Kushner & Kushner.....33

Margaritaville.....11

Mobile Massage.....32

PCC Tile & More.....33

Scott Geller Eye Specialists...5

Senior Housing Solutions....3

Snyderman's Shoes.....33

Taschner Periodontics.....17

The Bagel Factory.....33

Temple Beth El.....35

Marcia Can Help

a fund of the Jewish Federation and Jewish Family Services, provides for emergency nutritional needs through our Food Pantry, gift card distribution, and crisis grants to prevent utility cut-offs, evictions, loss of transportation and other essential services without which none of us can live.

Inspired by the recognition that these needs must be addressed in our community, and as a tribute to Marcia Cohen, a long-time resident of Sanibel and social activist. Her husband Jack established the **MARCIA CAN HELP** fund in 2017.



Help us meet these pressing needs by contributing to the **MARCIA CAN HELP** fund.

For further information please contact
 Debbie Sanford at (239) 481-4449 ext. 6 or debbiesanford@jfedlcc.org

A transformative journey south

By Karin Fine, Co-President of Jewish Federation of Lee & Charlotte Counties

I love to travel, and many who know me often ask, “Where are you going next?” I just returned from one of the most impactful trips I’ve ever taken — one that I feel compelled to share. My journey took me through several southern cities that forever changed the course of history in the United States: Atlanta, Montgomery, Tuskegee, Selma, and Birmingham.

The highlight of the trip came in Selma, where we had the privilege of



Karin Fine

official marchers who walked from Selma to Montgomery with Dr. King and John Lewis. Lynda is one of the foot soldiers whose courage and sacrifice helped propel the Civil Rights Movement forward and bring about essential changes in U.S. law.

We also met Jacky Smith, the owner of “The Coffee Shop” where we had lunch



Jacky Smith

listening to Lynda Blackmon Lowery. She shared her first-hand experiences of hearing Martin Luther King Jr. speak when she was just seven-years-old in a Black church. Inspired early, she joined protests by the age of 13. By 15, she had already been sent to jail nine times. Linda was among the 300



Linda Blackman Lowery

in Selma. At 42, she decided to go to college and later worked for years in human resources in Birmingham. Eventually she moved back to Selma and bought “The Coffee Shop.” As a child, she and her brother often visited the same shop with their mother, but they could only order ham sandwiches from a takeout window in the back because Black customers were not allowed inside. Today she owns the very space she once couldn’t enter.

This transformative week allowed me to see, in depth, what life was like for those who lived, worked, and survived in the segregated South. It reminded me how essential it is that we listen to one another — truly listen — so that we can understand the stories that shape us all.



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Gift planning after OBBBA

Planning ahead for tax-smart, values-driven giving in 2026 and beyond

By Jill Hagler, Director of Philanthropy, TOP Jewish Foundation

The One Big Beautiful Bill Act (OBBBA) — signed into law on July 4, 2025 — introduces sweeping tax changes that took effect Jan. 1, 2026. These new rules alter how some charitable deductions work, which could affect your charitable giving strategies. Now is the time to review your financial and philanthropic strategies for 2026 and beyond and there are a few things you need to know.

Charitable deductions for non-itemizers

Taxpayers who take the standard deduction can deduct cash gifts up to \$1,000 (single) or \$2,000 (married filing jointly) to public charities — but not to donor-advised funds (DAFs).

New “floor” for itemized charitable deductions

Itemizers can only deduct charitable gifts that exceed 0.5% of adjusted gross income (AGI).

Cap on high-income deduction benefits

High-income taxpayers will see the value of their charitable deductions capped at 35%, even if their marginal rate is higher. For example, a \$10,000 charitable gift will generate a \$3,500 tax deduction instead of \$3,700 under current law (based on the 37% tax bracket).

Tax rates made permanent

Current income tax brackets (10% to 37%), the increased standard deduction, and the elimination of personal and dependent exemptions are now permanent. In addition, some seniors, aged 65 and older, may be eligible for a new deduction of up to \$6,000 for tax years through 2028.

Higher estate and gift tax exemption

The federal estate and gift tax exemption



Jill Hagler

risers to \$15 million per person (\$30 million per couple), with the annual gift tax exclusion remaining at \$19,000 per person. With fewer families subject to estate tax, strategies that reduce income tax liability become even more important for effective charitable and financial planning.

There are a few ways to put your knowledge (and your values) into action.

Make a Qualified Charitable Distribution (QCD) from your IRA

If you are age 70½ or older, you can transfer up to \$108,000 directly from your IRA directly to a qualified charity, tax-free. A QCD reduces taxable income (even if you don't itemize) and counts toward your Required Minimum Distribution (RMD) at age 73. Married couples can each give up to \$108,000 annually from separate IRAs, potentially doubling their impact.

Give appreciated assets

Donating appreciated securities held for more than one year allows you to deduct the full fair market value (if you itemize) and avoid capital gains tax — a double benefit.

Open or Add to a Donor-Advised Fund (DAF) at TOP Jewish Foundation

A Donor-Advised Fund at TOP Jewish

Foundation acts like a charitable investment account — receive a full deduction now for your donation (if you itemize), then recommend grants to your favorite charities over time. It provides an excellent way to “bunch” or pre-fund giving and involve your loved ones in philanthropy.

“Bunch” your charitable giving

Consider combining two or more years of giving into one to maximize deductions. If your total itemized deductions are less than the standard deduction, consider “bunching.”

Consult your trusted professionals

Your financial, legal, and philanthropic advisors can help you develop a giving plan tailored to your goals and the new tax laws.

“At TOP Jewish Foundation, we’re committed to partnering with donors and their advisors to steward resources wisely and strengthen the Jewish community,” said Ellen Weiss, Executive Director of TOP Jewish Foundation.

For more information, please contact me at jill@topjewishfoundation.org or (813) 769-4769.

Disclaimer: TOP Jewish Foundation does not provide tax, financial, or legal advice. Please consult with your professional advisor before taking any of these steps. ☺



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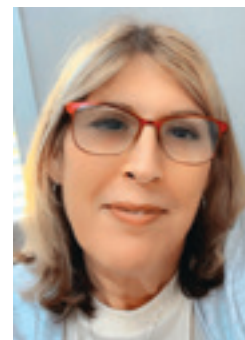
Community support shines as food pantry sees rising need

By Monica Wildonger, JFS Case Manager & Food Pantry Coordinator

As the holiday season wrapped up, our Jewish Federation Food Pantry experienced one of its busiest and most meaningful periods yet. Thanks to our partnership with the United Way, JFS received a generous donation of toys, allowing us to brighten the holidays for many local children.

We were also able to distribute donated frozen turkeys, ensuring families could enjoy a special holiday meal they might not otherwise have had.

Beyond the holidays, the need for support has continued to grow. Our case management services have seen a noticeable rise in requests, reflecting the increasing challenges many local families are facing. The diaper bank has also received a surge of inquiries, with more parents seeking essential supplies during difficult times.



■ Monica Wildonger

Our JFS food pantry has welcomed more clients in recent months — a clear sign that food insecurity remains a pressing issue in our community. Even as the need grows, the compassion and dedication of our volunteers, donors, and partners keep us moving forward.

As we step into the new year, we hope it brings peace, joy, and a little less stress for everyone. Until then, we remain committed to ensuring no one in our community faces hunger or hardship alone. ☺



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Honors & Memorials



With a tribute gift you can mark a milestone, celebrate a special occasion, extend your sympathy or send wishes for a speedy recovery. It is a meaningful way to acknowledge friends or family and strengthen our Jewish community by contributing to the Annual Campaign.

A personalized tribute card will be sent to the honoree or bereaved on your behalf, reflecting a personal message if you wish.

In Memory of Carolyn Kaplan

Debbie & Henry Feinberg

In Honor of Suzanne Orkin

Charles & Betty Massie

In Memory of Juanita Slolina

She was a pleasure to know & will be missed tremendously.

Eileen Bobman

jewishfederationlcc.org/tribute-memorials

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& **informed.**



Sign up for the Shalom JFED Newsletter

Get the latest information on upcoming community events and cultural activities, breaking news items, updates from Israel and much more.

jewishfederationlcc.org/newsletter



THE JEWISH FEDERATION SERVES

Local Jewish Education and Culture

- Community-wide Jewish Education and Cultural Programs for all ages
- L'CHAYIM published monthly to keep the Jewish community informed about local, national and international Jewish issues.
- CRC-Community Relations Council to address issues of anti-Semitism and Interfaith Relations.
- Israel Advocacy and Initiatives to strengthen local Jewish community ties with Israel. Holocaust education for middle and high school students in the community and a college campus Jewish life experience committee.
- Volunteer opportunities for all ages.

Overseas

- Funding to the Jewish Agency for Israel and the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC) for full-spectrum social services to Israel and Jewish communities in 60+ countries around the world.
- Partnership 2Gether relationship with the Hadera-Eiron Region in Israel.

Jewish Community Foundation

- An endowment that ensures future social and educational programming and support for our community.
- Needs-based college scholarships and study scholarships in Israel.
- Jewish camp scholarships.



Jewish Federation
of Lee & Charlotte Counties

Jewish Family
Services

Local Seniors Services

- Lunch Bunch, a monthly gathering with a free lunch for older adults to meet and schmooze.
- Holiday baskets and teen visits to seniors and senior facilities for Rosh Hashanah, Hanukkah and Passover.
- Holocaust survivor outreach.

Local Social Services

- Non-sectarian, individual & family outreach, information & referral services.
- South Fort Myers United Way House.

Local Emergency Services

- Food Pantry and gift cards.
- Emergency financial assistance grants to families and individuals in crisis.
- Local disaster outreach and assistance.

Education, Arts & Culture Programs

Israeli Folk Dancing
Jewish Social Club
Mah Jongg
Holiday Senior Visits
PJ Library
Federation Hits the Road-Day Trips

Holocaust Remembrance
Jewish Film Festival
Community Breakfast
Major Gifts-Pacesetters
Jewish Heritage Day

Lion of Judah
Women's Day
TRIBE
Annual Meeting
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P2G Partnership Together

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Get ready for Jewish Heritage Day

March 22, at JetBlue Park!

By Amy Hallock, Community Events Manager

Happy New Year, friends! As we step into 2026, I'm thrilled to share one of my favorite announcements of the year: Jewish Heritage Day is returning to JetBlue Park on Sunday, March 22! Mark your calendars now. This is a day you won't want to miss.

Last year's celebration was unforgettable. Hundreds joined us for a sun-filled day of community pride, incredible food, spirited music, unique crafts, and fabulous shopping. Families enjoyed activities for kids of all ages, and the energy throughout the ballpark was nothing short of joyful. The feedback we received was tremendous, and we're excited to make this year's event even better.

And speaking of "better," we're adding a brand-new twist!

Introducing: Jews Got Talent!

Do you have talent? Can you sing, dance, juggle, tell jokes, play an instrument, do magic — or surprise us with something totally unexpected?

This year we're bringing our own community spin to the classic talent-show



Amy Hallock

format with "Jews Got Talent," a fun and friendly competition open to performers of all ages. Whether you're a seasoned pro or just love being on stage, we want to see what you've got!

Vendors, performers, and creators

Alongside the entertainment, we will once again host our vibrant vendor marketplace featuring local artisans, small businesses, crafters, and culinary favorites. If you'd like to be part of the fun — either as a vendor or a talent show participant — I'd love to hear from you!

Contact me at events@jfedlcc.org.

Small change for 2026

Please note that while our Jewish Heritage Day celebration is confirmed for March 22, the baseball game will take place on a different date this year. We will announce the new game date as soon as it is finalized.

I can't wait to celebrate with all of you again this spring. Let's make Jewish Heritage Day 2026 our most spirited and memorable yet!

L'Chayim to a year of connection, creativity, and community! 🌟



12:00 P.M. ~ 1:30 P.M.

THURSDAY, JANUARY 22

BROOKDALE SENIOR LIVING | 8351 COLLEGE PKWY | FT MYERS

RSVP BY JAN 14 🌟 LUNCH IS FREE



We're having lunch with friends & neighbors to celebrate the season, and we'd love for you to join us!



12:00 P.M. ~ 1:30 P.M.

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RSVP BY FEB 18 🌟 LUNCH IS FREE



We're having lunch with friends & neighbors, & we'd love for you to join us!

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issues of *L'CHAYIM* online at
www.JewishFederationLCC.org.



JFED Hits the Road

Thank you!

By Amy Hallock, Community Events Manager

A heartfelt thank you to everyone who joined us on Nov. 5 for our “I’ll Have What She’s Having” themed JFED Hits the Road adventure. It was a meaningful and memorable day as we travelled together to The Florida Holocaust Museum in St. Petersburg. We are deeply grateful to the museum’s incredible staff and volunteers for their hospitality, expertise, and dedication.

A special thank you as well to The Bagel Factory in Fort Myers for providing a delicious breakfast to start our journey, and to Jo-El’s Kosher Deli in St. Pete for welcoming us with a wonderful lunch and keeping their doors open late just for our group. Their amazing and hard-working team helped make the day truly special.

Thank you again to all who participated — you helped make this trip one to remember! 🌟



Thank you to our community!

By Amy Hallock, Community Events Manager

On Sunday, Dec. 7, Jewish Federation of Lee & Charlotte Counties held the annual Community Breakfast at the DoubleTree — and what a meaningful morning it was!


We were honored to welcome Saul Blinkoff as our keynote speaker. Saul shared his remarkable story of determination, Jewish identity, and finding purpose in life. His words inspired all 160 attendees, leaving us uplifted and energized as a community.

A heartfelt thank you to our dedicated staff, Board and volunteers whose hard work made the morning seamless, warm, and welcoming. We are endlessly grateful for their commitment to creating



meaningful Jewish moments. We also extend special appreciation to the DoubleTree team for their hospitality and professionalism. Their staff went above and beyond

to help us create a wonderful experience for everyone. A special thank you to Rabbi Sunny Schnitzer of Bat Yam Temple for leading the Motzi and bringing a beautiful spirit to the blessing.

Thank you to all who attended and supported this important gathering. We look forward to seeing you at many more community events! **L'Chayim — to life, connection, and community!** 



Photos courtesy of Sarah with Luxury Picnics + Co.



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“Captivating Cases in Rabbinic Responsa”

New JLI course starts Jan. 22


New JLI course starts Jan. 22

Across history, many rabbis wrote down the questions they were asked. These Q&As are published in some-6,000 books of “rabbinic responsa,” and I’m leading a course that explores 30 real-life questions that ordinary Jews asked sages across the ages. This topic is fascinating for two reasons.

1. When a Jew in Auschwitz asks whether he can save his only son because someone else would be killed in his place, the question alone tells a whole heart-breaking story. Some of the questions we’ll explore are relatively mundane; others are more exotic. But every single one gives us a direct view of how our ancestors lived, what problems they faced, and what they valued.

2. We’ll see how sages came up with clear answers to questions nobody had ever asked before, giving us a unique window into how Jewish law works and where all Judaism’s customs and rules come from.

This course will give you a new appreciation for your Jewish past and the beauty and sophistication of Judaism itself. It’s a chance to be a fly on the wall as these sages investigate the facts, weigh Talmudic precedent, and ensure that key values are protected in their final decision.

Please join me for “Captivating Cases in Rabbinic Responsa,” a remarkable new, six session course from the Rohr Jewish Learning Institute, sponsored by Dr. Gary and Marlene Price. 

“Captivating Cases in Rabbinic Responsa”

Presented by Rabbi Yitzchok Minkowicz

When: Six Thursday evenings, starting Jan. 22, 7-8:30 p.m.

Where: Chabad Lubavitch of Southwest Florida
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Fee: \$99 (textbook included)

Sign up at www.myjli.com.

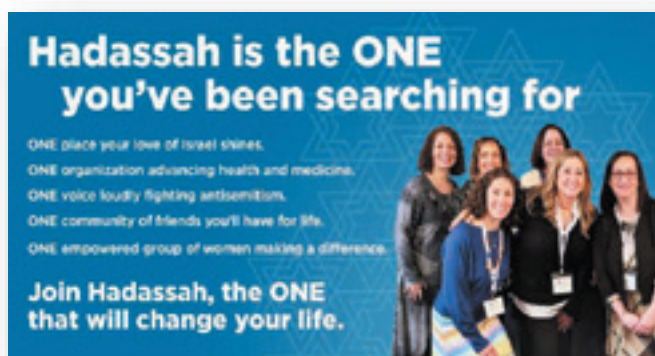
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Wednesday, January 14, 2026
1:30 p.m. ~ 3:00 p.m.

Jewish Federation of Lee & Charlotte Counties

RSVP by January 7, 2026 by emailing
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(Put ‘Connect with Hadassah’ in the subject line along with your response)

Location information will be emailed after Wednesday, January 7, 2026



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Upcoming GenShoah SWFL programs

By Ida Margolis and Shelley Lieb

We are excited to share the following upcoming programs. Don't forget to RSVP!

Open House/ New Member Reception

Tuesday, Jan. 27, 10 a.m.
Located at the Holocaust Museum & Cohen Education Center. **RSVP is required**; visit hmcec.org.



Emily Murray

This event, for all GenShoah members and survivors, includes a guest presentation, "They Were Children: Rescue as Resistance," by Emily Murray. The Holocaust Museum & Cohen Education Center will host the event, offering light refreshments and a short tour of the Museum for anyone interested. A special invitation to join us is extended to new members.

"Dimensions in Testimony"

Tuesday, Feb. 3, 2026, 7 p.m.
Located at Beth Tikvah. **RSVP is required**; email office@bethtikvah.us.


Beth Tikvah invites all GenShoah members as special guests to hear Holocaust Museum & Cohen Education Center President and CEO Erin Blankenship talk about her experience with "Dimensions in Testimony." The project, from the USC Shoah Foundation, enables people to ask questions that prompt real-time responses from pre-recorded video interviews with Holocaust survivors and other witnesses to genocide.

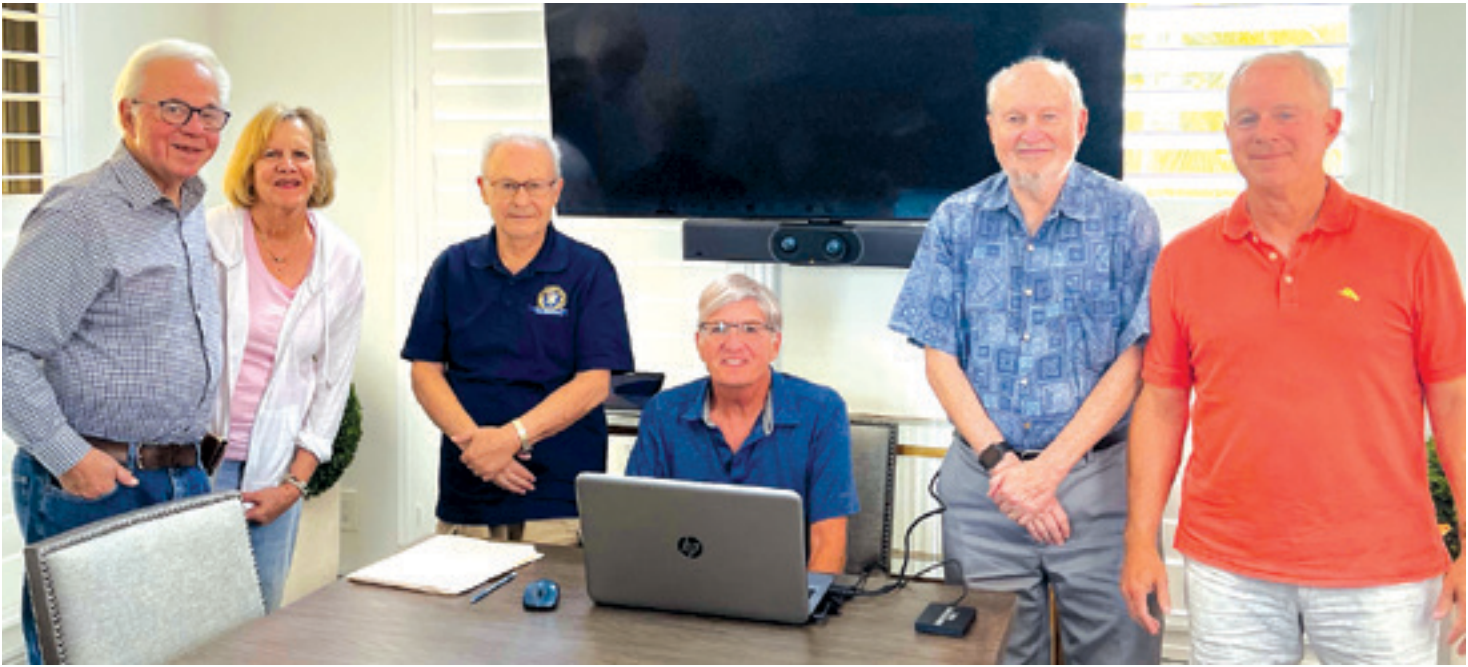


Erin Blankenship, President & CEO
Holocaust Museum & Cohen
Education Center

Genealogy Workshop

Sunday, Feb. 15, 1 p.m.
The location is to be determined. **RSVP is required**; email genshoahswfl@hmcec.org.

Bring your device and follow the lead of Hank Bitterman (2G) who takes you to various online resources to find out about you and your family's past. Hank shares his knowledge from his own family findings both in the U.S. and abroad. This session will provide a good starting point for further inquiries. 



Genealogy Workshop



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At the Holocaust Museum

By Erin Blankenship, Holocaust Museum & Cohen Education Center President & CEO

Happy New Year! We ended 2025 with a bang! December was filled with rewarding and meaningful activities like Student Field Trips, Community Engagement activities held outside our walls, public programs, and of course, our fabulous Luncheon.

Winter fundraising event

Our annual winter fundraising event was held at the Vineyards Country Club with the largest attendance ever. Key-note Speaker Gillian Laub gave a wonderful presentation about her Live2Tell Project, in which she photographed and

the future. Gillian noted the importance of sharing the survivor stories and legacies of the Live2Tell Project with the public and does so through unique public art installations projecting the images onto urban landmarks and buildings. She uses social media to reach young people. We invite you to follow her Instagram account: @live2tell. New posts appear on Fridays.

Special guest speaker and North Port High School teacher Zach Ward passionately spoke about the importance of Holocaust education, and the impact that our Museum and Education Programs have had on himself and his students. Zach is a wonderful example of an upstander, inspiring his students and colleagues to take a stand against hatred. Also joining us was Rabbi Adam Miller of Temple Shalom who offered moving remarks about the importance of the Museum's mission and an opening prayer.

The Luncheon

We could not have hosted The Luncheon without our outstanding sponsors. Thank you for your generous support, and congratulations



Luncheon Teacher Zach Ward, Education Manager Katie Bütte, Museum Board Chair Stuart Mest, M.D.

to our incredible Event Committee for creating a memorable event: Co-Chairs Nina Diamond and Marjie Zucker, and committee members Debbie Annes, Michele Brotman, Margo Ceresney, Ellen Englander, Maureen Lerner, Judy Leventhal, Estelle Price, Sandy Roth, and Mindy Sterns.

Guest lecture

In December, we also hosted a special guest lecture by Dr. Serafima Velkovich, Head of the Family Roots Research Section of Yad Vashem Archives. She spoke about the role of family memory in the search for identity, showing how personal narratives interact with historical research. This program was made possible by the generous support of Hedy and Jack Abel.

To start off 2026, we have a busy month of programming ahead! We hope you'll join us for these January events:

Thursday, Jan. 15, 3 p.m.

Dani Dayan, Chairman of Yad Vashem, the World Holocaust Remembrance

Center, since August 2022, will speak. Prior to his position at Yad Vashem, Dani served as Israel's Consul General in New York. This program is presented with support from Jewish Federation of Greater Naples.

Admission is free, but RSVP is required at [HMCEC.org](http://hmcec.org).

Monday, Jan. 19, 5 p.m.

Located at the Holocaust Museum & Cohen Education Center

Join us for the gallery talk, wine and cheese reception, and exhibition opening of Yahad-In Unum's "Holocaust by Bullets" exhibition. Ewa Schaller, a Yahad-In Unum educator, will discuss their research in the former Soviet Union documenting the systematic killing of Jews by the Nazis and their collaborators from 1942-44.

General admission is \$9; Museum members may enter at no additional cost. RSVP is required at hmcec.org.

Tuesday, Jan. 27 – Event 1

10-11:30 a.m. – GenShoah of SWFL Open House and New Member Reception. RSVP is required at HMCEC.org.

Tuesday, Jan. 27 – Event 2

1-4:30 p.m. – Complimentary Museum admission for International Holocaust Remembrance Day. RSVP is required at HMCEC.org.

Thursday, Jan. 29, 3 p.m.

Located at the Nina Iser Jewish Cultural Center

To commemorate International Holocaust Remembrance Day, Dr. Alex Kor, son of Holocaust survivors Michael and Eva Kor will give a special presentation about his book, "A Blessing, Not a Burden: My Parents' Remarkable Holocaust Story and My Fight to Keep Their Legacy Alive."

Admission is free, but RSVP is required at HMCEC.org.

Save the date Triumph

Wednesday, March 4, Arthrex One Conference Center in Naples

Make plans to celebrate our Museum's 25th Anniversary and hear from guest speaker Emmy Award®-winning Film Producer Paula Apsell. For details on sponsorship opportunities visit hmcec.org.



Paula Apsell



Gillian Laub speaking at the Luncheon



Gillian Laub photographing Southwest Florida Holocaust survivors at the Museum

documented more than 300 Holocaust Survivors worldwide. Several Live2Tell portraits were on display in the lobby and more were featured on centerpiece arrangements on each table.

We were honored to host a photoshoot with Gillian at the Museum to photograph and interview several Southwest Florida survivors to be included in the Live2Tell Project. We look forward to sharing those images and testimonies at the Museum in



Luncheon lobby portraits



Luncheon lobby crowd

JHSSWF January events

Don't miss the two-event, major fundraiser!


By Marina Berkovich, JHSSWF President

You won't want to miss this **two-event, major fundraiser** held during Florida Jewish History Month. Fundraiser tickets are \$85 per person. Each ticket admits one person to both events; attend either event or both. Reserve your seats at www.jhsswf.org/upcoming-events/.

Event 1 – Southwest Florida Jewish History Luncheon
Sunday, Jan. 4, noon-3 p.m., Nina Iser Jewish Cultural Center
Marcia Jo Zerivitz's mesmerizing "Jews of Florida" lecture, previously recorded, is the most comprehensive account of what Jews contributed to various aspects of the state of Florida.

Discover many fascinating historical facts, trace Jewish origins and follow the trail of Florida Jewish History that Marcia Jo helped create in our state.

Event 2 – "A Jewish Visionary: Jane Schiff"
Thursday, Jan. 22, 2 p.m., Nina Iser Jewish Cultural Center

Join us for the premiere of a new film from the locally produced Telly Award-winning Southwest Florida Jewish Pioneers Series: "A Jewish Visionary: Jane Schiff" and meet the incredible family of generational Jewish philanthropy. Learn the story and meaning of Jewish Federation of Greater Naples' lobby artwork, as told by immediate past JFGN Board President. 

Jews By Choice


The last Thursday of each month, 8 p.m. via Zoom

By Dawn Wineinger, Temple Beth El member and volunteer

Jews By Choice meets via Zoom, a relaxed and comfortable format, on the last Thursday of each month from 8 to 9 p.m. Come discuss the delights and challenges of

converting and reconnecting. Recent converts, those exploring conversion, and Jews seeking to reconnect with their roots are encouraged to attend. If you are considering the process of

converting to Judaism, if you are in the conversion process, if you are rediscovering Judaism and if you have questions and/or need to talk with like-minded individuals in a friendly, nonjudgmental

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Holocaust
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THE LUNCHEON

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Women's Simcha Circle

A new space for joy and connection

By Toby Buerger and Ashley Kogan-Weed,
Co-chairs of Women's Simcha Circle at TBE

The Women's Simcha Circle is for dynamic women actively balancing demanding careers, searching for deeper personal growth, or a break from the rewarding demands of family life. If you're looking for meaningful friendships, modern spirituality, and a welcoming Jewish community, this circle was designed for you.



■ **Toby Buerger**

What we offer

"Simcha" means joy, and our mission is to create a supportive, welcoming space where women can step away from the chaos and build meaningful connections. We provide opportunities to:

- Create authentic friendships that inspire and uplift
- Explore spirituality in a modern context
- Belong to a vibrant Jewish community that celebrates life together



■ **Ashley Kogan-Weed**

Events you'll love

Our monthly gatherings are designed for fun and connection. Past events have included lively dinners, vision board workshops, Rosh Chodesh events at the

beach, and holiday celebrations —like our Rosh Hashana apple and honey tasting bar while making personalized intention candles.

We welcome Jewish women across Southwest Florida — and all women who support Judaism — who are balancing careers, families, and personal growth. If you're looking for meaningful friendships, modern spirituality, and a welcoming Jewish community on your terms, this is your space.

Women's Simcha Circle dinner

Join us Thursday, Jan. 8, at 6:30 p.m. at Tacos & Tequila Cantina in the University Village Shops in Fort Myers. You do not need to be a member of Temple Beth EL to join.

For questions and to RSVP, email womenssimchacircle@templebethel.com.

Find future Events on the Temple Beth El calendar or facebook.com/womenssimchacircle.

Come share *Simcha* (joy) with us soon! 🌟



LION OF JUDAH



WHO WE ARE & WHAT WE DO

Lions of Judah play a vital role in creating social justice, aiding the vulnerable, preserving human dignity and building Jewish identity. We are the most dynamic philanthropic Jewish women in the world. We are a part of an international sisterhood of thousands of global activists who care deeply about the Jewish future. The Lions of Judah set an exemplary standard of leadership and giving.

Our impact can be seen through contribution of our time and resources. Each woman makes an annual donation to their Federation that reflects her capacity to give. In our community, the threshold annual commitment is \$5,000. Some Lions also choose to endow their gift to benefit future generations.

THE PIN

Each woman who wears her Lion of Judah pin is uniquely connected to all other Lions, all of whom embody the true meaning of tzedakah.

These women are empowered to take the dream of Tikkum Olam and turn it into a reality.

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HOUSEHOLDS MAKE
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Jewish Federation
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AT DEBBIESANFORD@JFEDLCC.ORG**



Women's Simcha Circle group photo

You are invited!

Women's Simcha Circle Dinner

When: Jan. 8, 6:30 p.m.

Where: Tacos & Tequila Cantina in the
University Village Shops in Fort Myers

You do not need to be a member of Temple Beth EL to join us. For questions and to RSVP, email womenssimchacircle@templebethel.com.

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Courtesy of Temple Beth El

Folks in search of recovery are invited to experience the 12-Steps from a Jewish perspective on Saturdays at 11 a.m. via Zoom. We are a fellowship of people seeking a path to recovery from alcohol, drugs, and other addictions such as food, gambling, sex, shopping, etc., through Judaic spiritual principals and the 12-Steps.

Our guidebook is “Twelve Jewish Steps to Recovery” by Rabbi Kerry Olitzky and Stuart Copans, M.D., second edition.

All who might benefit from this group are welcome. Zoom details are available by calling the Temple Beth El office at 239-433-0018. 📞

Nar-Anon support meetings

By Joann Goldman

Nar-Anon Family Groups is a 12-Step fellowship that offers a recovery program for those affected by someone's addiction. The group will meet in the Community Room at Jewish Federation of Lee & Charlotte Counties.

Addiction is a family disease; it affects the relationships of those close to the addict — parents, spouses, siblings, children, longtime friends and employers. In the group meetings, these family members and friends share their experiences, strengths and hopes to help each other and themselves.

If someone's addiction is affecting you, first you must help yourself. Come to a meeting and hear from others

who are going through similar problems and talk about how they cope and find recovery.

Nar-Anon is based on a set of spiritual principles and has no affiliation with any particular religion. There are no dues or fees. The only requirement for membership is a problem of addiction in a relative or friend.

This group has been a part of the Lee County community for more than 18 years. Meetings are held at 7 p.m. every Thursday at Jewish Federation of Lee & Charlotte Counties (9701 Commerce Center Court, Fort Myers).

For more information, please contact me at jogol18@gmail.com or 239-470-4827. 📞

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Marty Supreme, A Private Life, Star Trek and more

Stars of David

By Nate Bloom, Stars of David Contributing Columnist

Editor's Note: Persons in **bold** are deemed by Nate Bloom to be Jewish for the purpose of this column. Persons identified as Jewish have at least one Jewish parent and were not raised in, or identify with, a faith other than Judaism. Converts to Judaism, of course, are also identified as Jewish.

For months, not much was released about “Marty Supreme.” The deadline for my December 2025 column came and went without getting more info.

This “very Jewish” film opened on Dec. 25. It’s a big flick, and I knew it would play in theaters near you way into January. Then, a flood of information finally came to me before the deadline for this column.

I could tell you more about the plot, but that was in the reviews out on Dec. 25, and you can read those reviews online, so here’s the “Jewish stuff.”

“Marty Supreme”

This comedy film based loosely on the life of **Marty Reisman** (1930-2012), a top (Jewish) table tennis player. **Josh Saffdie**, 40, directed the film, and he co-wrote it. **Timothee Chalamet**, 28, plays Marty (last name “Mauser”).

There are 29 cast members, and nine are Jewish: **Timothee**; **Gwyneth Paltrow**, 53 (as Kay Stone, a socialite who befriends Marty); **Odessa A’zion**,

25 (plays Rachel Mizler, a Jewish character. Rachel is married, and she’s having an affair with Marty, her life-long best friend); **Fran Drescher**, 68 (plays Rebecca Mauser, Marty’s mother). Sandra Bernhard, 70 (a small role as Judy); **Isaac Mizrahi**, 64, is, of course, a famous designer who acts now-and-again. (He plays Merle); **Emory Cohen**, 35 (plays Ira Mizler, Rachel’s husband); **David Mamet**, 77, the famous writer, has a small role as Director Glenn Nordmann; and **Fred Hechinger**, 25 (a small role as Troy).

I am quite sure that **Timothee Chalamet** is going to get a best actor Oscar nomination for playing a “real” Jew in two successive years (**Bob Dylan**, 2024; **Marty Reisman**; 2025).

“Song Sung Blue”

This film is another likely hit that also opened on Dec. 25. It is based on a real couple who formed a **Neil Diamond** tribute band. They performed Neil Diamond tunes in small venues. The couple are played by **Hugh Jackman** and **Kate Hudson**, 46.

“A Private Life”

This French language film (from France) is described as a comic psychological thriller. It opens in the U.S. on Jan. 16 with subtitles on the screen. This film

played the prestigious Cannes Festival last April (not as a competing film). The reviews were stellar, and the audience gave this film a 10-minute standing ovation after it ended.

Jodie Foster, who is fluent in French, plays **Lilian Steiner**, an American psychoanalyst who lives in Paris. **Lilian** is devastated when **Paula Cohen-Solai**, a client, takes her life. Or did she?

After I read these two characters’ last names, I thought: “Are they both Jewish?” I got lucky and found a translated interview with **Rebecca Zlotowski**, 45. She’s the film’s director and co-writer. In this interview, she said that her film delves deeply into Jewish culture.

The director said **Lilian Steiner** (**Jodie Foster**) is Jewish; so was **Paula**; so is **Paula’s husband**. His name is **Simon Cohen-Solai**, and he is played by French Jewish actor **Mathieu Amarlic**, 60. One more: **Lilian’s** (Jewish) ex-husband helps **Lilian** investigate **Paula’s** death.

It dawned on me that there are five roles in the film and the characters are all Jewish! I could go on and on about this film and its Jewish connections. I know I am going to a theater to watch this film!

"His & Hers"

This six-episode limited series premieres

on Netflix Jan. 8. It’s based on a novel of the same name by **Harlan Coben**, 63. Here the premise: **Anna** is a burned-out former news anchor. Then there is a murder in **Anna’s** small Georgia childhood town. This stirs her, and she looks for answers.


Police detective **Jack Harper** is also looking for the killer, and he is suspicious of **Anna**. **Jon Bernthal**, 49, co-stars as **Harper**. **Jon** is always busy! Two action films last year (“**The Accountant 2**” and “**The Amateur**”) and another Emmy nomination (2025) as a guest actor on “**The Bear**.”

“Star Trek: Starfleet Academy”

The new **Star Trek** TV series opens on the **Paramount+** streaming channel Jan. 15 — two episodes on Jan. 15, with the remaining eight episodes premiering the following Thursdays.


“**Star Trek: Starfleet Academy**” is set in the far future: the 32nd century. It follows a new class of **Starfleet** cadets — the first in over a century — as they come of age and train to be officers.

Oded Fehr, 56, plays **Fleet Admiral Charles Vance**. Followers of “**Star Trek: Discovery**” know that he played **Vance** from 2020 to 2024. **Vance** is a “main cast” role. **Oded** was born in Israel, and he served in the Israeli navy. 🇮🇱

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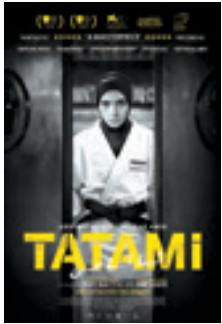
For a continuously updated calendar of events, visit www.JewishFederationLCC.org.



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30th Annual Jewish Film Festival

SUNDAY, FEB. 1 - SUNDAY FEB. 7



“TATAMI”

Feb. 1 at 3 p.m.

Co-directed by Guy Nattiv (Academy Award-Winner for Skin) and Zar Amir (Cannes Film Festival Best Actress-Winner for Holy Spider), TATAMI follows Iranian female judoka Leila (Arienne Mandi) and her coach Maryam (Zar Amir), who travel to the World Judo Championships, intent on bringing home Iran’s first gold medal. Midway through the Championships, they receive a chilling ultimatum from the Islamic Republic: Leila must fake an injury and lose, or be branded a traitor. With her own safety and her family’s freedom on the line, Leila faces an impossible choice: submit to the Iranian regime, as her coach Maryam implores her to do, or fight on for the gold. TATAMI is the first feature film to be co-directed by an Iranian and an Israeli filmmaker.

105 MINUTES • PERSIAN, ENGLISH • GEORGIA, ISRAEL, USA, UK • NARRATIVE



“THE RING”

Feb. 3 at 6:30 p.m.

Arnon Noble is a religious man with a strong bond to his mother, a Holocaust survivor. He usually drives her to school lectures where she tells the students how she saved the lives of her baby boy and herself with the help of a thin gold ring. When the mother's health deteriorates, he travels to her old hometown, Budapest, to search for the mythological ring that saved her life in the past. He turns to his estranged daughter, a TV researcher, for help and offers to go on this journey together. Will the search for the ring be successful? Will the ring save the mother's life again and will the same ring that saved his mother also succeed in saving Arnon's relationship with his own daughter.

This film is a heart-warming dramady about three generations and the family history that reconnects them. "The Ring" is based on Adir Miller's Holocaust survival story.

122 MINUTES • HEBREW AND HUNGARIAN WITH ENGLISH SUBTITLES • ISRAEL • NARRATIVE



“ONCE UPON MY MOTHER/ THE LAST JEWS OF GUANTANAMO”

Feb. 11 at 6:30 p.m.

In 1963, Esther gave birth to Roland, the youngest sibling of a large family. Roland was born with a clubfoot that prevented him from standing. Against everyone's advice, she promised her son that he would be able to walk just like everyone else and have a wonderful life. From that moment on, Esther devoted herself fully to ensuring this promise came true.

Spanning decades of hardships and miracles, this film is the story of an incredible destiny and the greatest love of all: a mother's love for her child.

98 MINUTES • NARRATIVE

“MATCHMAKING 2”

Feb. 13 at 3 p.m.



Baruch Auerbach (Maor Schweitzer), a mature Yeshiva student who missed every opportunity to marry, is left to live in a small room in the Yeshiva where he studies and serves as the faithful assistant to the matchmaker Malki (Irit Kaplan). When Malki assigns him the task of escorting her young daughter Shira (Omer Nudelman) from the airport, he decides that it is time to get married.

Baruch asks for Malki’s help, but when she tries to match him with Ruth (Niv Sultan), he decides to do everything he can to thwart the matchmaking with Ruth and win Shira's heart. Only when he realizes how much he has misinterpreted the circumstances of his life will his heart open to the love he deserves.

118 MINUTES • HEBREW AND HUNGARIAN WITH ENGLISH SUBTITLES • ISRAEL • NARRATIVE



“NEVER ALONE/THE ICE CREAM MAN”

Feb. 17 at 6:30 p.m.

Shortly after the Nazi invasion of the Netherlands, a popular Jewish ice cream parlor owner, Ernst Cahn, finds himself targeted by the infamous “Butcher of Lyon,” Klaus Barbie. As his world crumbles, “The Ice Cream Man” must choose between resistance and death...a choice that will reverberate throughout the country. Based on actual events.

85 MINUTES • FINNISH • FINLAND • NARRATIVE



“AIR WAR”

Feb. 19 at 6:30 p.m.

A rivalry between two charismatic Israeli air force fighter pilots reaches breaking point on the eve of the six-day war. After single handedly shooting down six Egyptian migs in aerial combat, the young, brash Lt. Ran Neshet is awarded a new assignment: to take over the command of a fighter squadron.

The squadron's second-in-command, the more methodical and disciplined Lt. Eitan Rom is profoundly threatened by his new reckless Commander, who is clearly inexperienced and domineering.

The ongoing power struggle begins to affect the performance of the squadron; however, as their country’s existence hangs in the balance, the two men must learn to work together. It is only then that they are ready to lead their squadron to victory.

106 MINUTES • HEBREW WITH ENGLISH SUBTITLES • ISRAEL • NARRATIVE



“WELCOME TO YIDDISHLAND/ JEWS IN MUSIC”

Feb. 26 at 6:30 p.m.

Welcome to Yiddishland offers an upbeat, witty, and timely exploration of a global community of artists rediscovering and revitalizing the endangered Yiddish language through progressive and provocative creative works. As we journey through Yiddishland — not a homeland, but a heartland without borders — we travel across continents, from Melbourne to Berlin, New York to Haifa, meeting a diverse array of individuals who find solace, identity, and inspiration in Yiddish language and culture.

96 MINUTES • ENGLISH, YIDDISH • AUSTRALIA • DOCUMENTARY



“PINK LADY”

March 5 at 6:30PM

In an ultra-Orthodox Jewish community in Jerusalem, Bati has a seemingly perfect life. She is happily married to Lazer and the young couple have three children. But their world starts to crumble when Lazer is blackmailed and Bati discovers his secret affair with his male study partner. Desperate to protect her family and keep the man she loves, she supports Lazer as he attempts to “cure” his homosexuality, whilst uncovering her true desires.

106 MINUTES • ISRAEL • NARRATIVE



“MARATHON MOM/ UN TANGO PARA RACHEL”

March 11 at 6:30 p.m.

Marathon Mother tells the inspiring story of Beatie Deutsch, an ultra-Orthodox Jewish mother of five who, after a pause from athletics to focus on her family, reignites her passion for running. In 2015, driven by a personal promise and the challenges of motherhood, Beatie embarks on a rigorous journey to complete a marathon. As she trains with dreams of becoming an Olympian, her remarkable journey transcends the track, embodying a powerful message of perseverance and empowerment. Through her story, Beatie inspires other women to embrace their dreams and overcome their own challenges.

90 MINUTES • ENGLISH, HEBREW WITH ENGLISH SUBTITLES • ISRAEL • DOCUMENTARY

JOINT OF LEE AND CHARLOTTE COUNTIES PRESENTS THE Jewish Film Festival of Southwest Florida MARCH 29

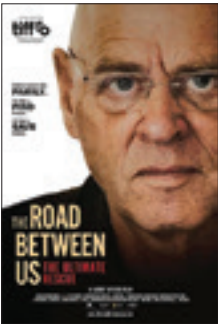


“CHARLES GRODIN: REBEL WITH A CAUSE”

March 15 at 3 p.m.

Raised in a Jewish household in Pittsburgh, Charles Grodin’s life embodied the concept of Tikkun Olam. "Charles Grodin: Rebel with a Cause" not only celebrates his hilarious acting career, but also his remarkable, decades-long, successful fight to get wrongly convicted people — most of whom were mothers of color with young children — out of prison.

93 MINUTES • ENGLISH • USA • DOCUMENTARY



“THE ROAD BETWEEN US”

March 19 at 6:30 p.m.

Retired Israeli general Noam Tibon rescues his family from Hamas terrorists who invaded their home during a massacre, sparking an ongoing conflict.

95 MINUTES • ENGLISH • CANADA • DOCUMENTARY



“SONG OF ASCENT/ALON MY BROTHER”

March 24 at 6:30 p.m.

In the wake of the October 7 massacre in Israel, acclaimed singer-songwriter Matisyahu finds himself at the center of a cultural storm. This powerful documentary/concert film follows Matisyahu’s journey as he performs three sold-out shows in Israel while facing cancellations and protests at his US tour dates due to rising anti-Israel sentiment. Thrust into a role he never sought, Matisyahu becomes a powerful voice for Jewish people worldwide, navigating the complexities of identity, faith, and resilience amidst a global crisis.

86 MINUTES • ENGLISH • USA • DOCUMENTARY



“TURN LEFT AT THE END OF THE WORLD/CUT OFF”

March 26 at 3 p.m.

A group of families emigrates from India to Israel in the late sixties, seeking a better life in what they believe to be the first outpost of the West in Asia. To their surprise, they are sent to a new settlement in the middle of the desert, populated mostly by Moroccan Jews. The two cultures clash as the group tries to integrate into the community, and are faced by harsh realities. But despite the conflicts and prejudices, young love develops between two girls from opposite sides of the struggle. The film finds a perfect combination between humor and sentiment in a very real and very difficult situation.

"Turn Left at the End of the World/Cut Off" was selected as a "New Israeli Classic" in a special event by the Tel Aviv Cinemateque in October 2024, exhibiting the new digitally restored version made for the film's 20th anniversary.

108 MINUTES • HEBREW/FRENCH, ENGLISH SUBTITLES • ISRAEL • NARRATIVE

2026 Jewish Film Festival of Southwest Florida

Regal Belltower, Fort Myers
Individual film tickets: \$14, On Sale 12/1
Festival Pass: \$168, On Sale 11/1
www.jewishfederationlcc.org/jff2026

FILMS & DATES

“Tatami” - Sunday, Feb. 1 at 3 p.m.

“The Ring” - Tuesday, Feb. 3 at 6:30 p.m.

“Once Upon My Mother/The Last Jews of Guantanamo”
Wednesday, Feb. 11 at 6:30 p.m.

“Matchmaking 2” - Friday, Feb. 13 at 3 p.m.

“Never Alone/Ice Cream Man” - Tuesday, Feb. 17 at 6:30 p.m.

“Air War” - Thursday, Feb. 19 at 6:30 p.m.

“Welcome to Yiddishland/Jews in Music”
Thursday, Feb. 26 at 6:30 p.m.

“Pink Lady” - Thursday, March 5 at 6:30 p.m.

“Marathon Mom/Un Tango Para Rachel”
Wednesday, March 11 at 6:30 p.m.

“Charles Grodin: Rebel with a Cause”
Thursday, March 15 at 3 p.m.

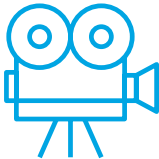
“The Road Between Us” - Sunday, March 19 at 6:30 p.m.

“Song of Ascent/Alon My Brother”
Tuesday, March 24 at 6:30 p.m.

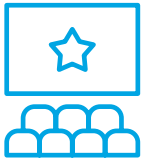
“Turn Left at the End of the World/Cut Off”
Thursday, March 26 at 6:30 p.m.

For more information, please contact Debbie Sanford at debbiesanford@jfedlcc.org or 239-481-4449 ext. 6.

For more information about the Jewish Film Festival, please e-mail David Garonzik at Jewishfilmfestival@jfedlcc.org.



**Films will be
screened at the
Regal Belltower!**



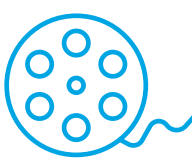
**General admission
ticket open seating
for all films.**



**Festival Passes
available
on Saturday, Nov 1**



**Individual
tickets available on
Monday, Dec. 1**



**The series of 13 films
is \$168/Individual
films are \$14 each**

What's in a (wine) name?

By Jerry Greenfield, the Wine Whisperer

Newcomers to the delights of the wine world are often — and understandably — confused by trying to decipher the label on a bottle. I tell my wine classes that there is no consumer product in the world that gives you less information than a wine label.

First of all, we need to understand that Old World wines (from Europe and thereabouts) are mostly named for the region where they're made. So, a bottle that says "Chianti" comes from that region in Italy, but you just have to know that the wine is made mostly from Sangiovese grapes.

It's kind of like picking up a jar in the supermarket that says "sauce," but you can't tell if it's tartar sauce, spaghetti sauce, or whatever.

In the New World (North and South America, Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa) they actually put the name of the grape on the label. So, you pick up a bottle of wine from the Mendoza region in Argentina, and it says plainly "Malbec."

The good news is that many Old World wineries are now revealing the name of the grape. You can pick up a bottle of entry-level red Burgundy, and it might actually say "Pinot Noir" right there in black and white.

It wasn't always like that. Back in the '70s as the wine industry emerged in the New World, vintners just put the names of Old World regions on the



■ Jerry Greenfield

bottles. So in the U.S., a sparkling wine from the Napa Valley might actually have been called "Champagne."

The naming situation got even more muddled and confusing after Prohibition and World War II when a new generation of winemakers, led by Robert Mondavi, worked on developing a more specific identity for their wines.

Until he came on the scene, winemakers would give their products names like "Claret" and "Hearty Burgundy," but the pioneers of that time started creating new ways to identify the unique wines of their regions. They put the actual names of the grapes on their labels, and it's believed that Robert Mondavi was the first to do so.

Their creativity and innovation met with a lot of resistance, especially from wine store owners who were used to the Old World system. But the idea took hold because the French, in particular, started to pressure U.S. winemakers to stop using their protected place names on the bottles.

But the Mondavis still had some concerns about this new approach and tried to find ways to incorporate an Old World flavor into their names. Robert had produced some Sauvignon Blanc, but there

was little consumer interest in it. He decided to name it after the Loire Valley village of Pouilly-Fumé, and came up with Fumé Blanc, which he put on the label with the words "Sauvignon Blanc" in tiny type just below.

So, for all of us today, things are a bit easier; but just a bit. Most Old World wines are still labeled by place names, so you just have to know that Gevrey-Chambertin is actually Chardonnay from a particular village in Burgundy. But that's fine, because we always want to make new discoveries, like the ones we're offering this week. Our New Year's resolution is to always sample widely.



Matanzas Creek Sauvignon Blanc Alexander Valley 2023 (\$19) – Fifteen percent is aged in French oak; the rest in stainless steel. White nectarine, apple, key lime, pineapple mango with a punch of minerality on the nose. Wine Whisperer rating on a scale of 100: WW 89

Les Cadrans de Lassegue Saint-Emilion Grand Cru 2021 (\$28) – Deeply colored with black cherry and violets on the nose and palate. A well-integrated blend of Merlot and Cabernet Franc. WW 91

Gary Farrell Chardonnay Russian River Valley 2022 (\$38) – Sourced from vineyards throughout the prime RRV growing area and aged eight months in French oak, this offers lemon and grapefruit with overtones of honeydew, lime, and apricot. Bright underlying acidity. WW 89

Poliziano Lohsa Morellino di Scansano 2022 (\$16) – Morellino is the name for Sangiovese in the Maremma area of coastal Tuscany. This favorite is loaded with black cherry, orange peel and mineral aromas and flavors. It's medium-bodied with a creamy mouthfeel and delicious finish. WW 92

Ask the Wine Whisperer

Q: What is the largest wine bottle? Caroline L., Port St. Lucie

A: The Nebuchadnezzar holds 20 standard bottles of wine, which is 15 liters. Most of these are used for Champagne.

Jerry Greenfield is The Wine Whisperer — a wine author, educator and consultant. Order his books, "Secrets of the Wine Whisperer" and "Ask the Wine Whisperer," available through his website or on Amazon. Read his other writings at www.winewhisperer.com



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2026

SUNDAY, MARCH 15, 2026 AT 11:00AM

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The Collier/Lee Hadassah "Inspiring Women" Luncheon honors local women from both counties whose leadership skills, dedication, experience, generosity, and time make a difference in their organizations and the quality of our lives.

Join us to celebrate their accomplishments and support Hadassah's Gandel Rehabilitation Center, Mt. Scopus, Jerusalem, Israel. For information, contact CLIW2026@gmail.com.



2026 INSPIRING WOMEN HONOREES



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Community and Spiritual Leader
and Jewish Educator



Jane Schiff
Philanthropist and
Community Leader



Sylvia Simko
Global Zionist and
Community Leader

The challenges of Jewish-Christian grandparenting

Aging Jewishly — What our traditions teach us about growing old.

By Rabbi Barbara Aiello

Beth stood quietly at the senior center’s main entrance, looking around for a familiar face. She had forgotten that Board Game Day brought out the crowds, and she chided herself for arriving late, especially now that the only available spot was with someone she didn’t know.

Beth took her seat and a friendly gentleman, Doug, greeted her warmly. Scrabble was the game of choice and after sharing pleasantries, Beth began to play in earnest while Doug seemed distracted from what he had said was his favorite game.

“I’m sorry,” Doug said. “It’s just that I’ve got a lot on my mind.” Beth replied, “I know we’ve just met but if you want to talk, I’m a good listener.”

Doug’s smile was one of relief. “It’s my grandkids. They’re Jewish, but I’m not. I’m Christian. It’s getting more complicated by the day.”

Beth shook her head almost in disbelief. Here she was, sitting with someone she’d just met, and the conversation had turned to religion. Nonetheless, Beth knew she had to share.

“I understand,” Beth began. “I’m Jewish, but my three grandchildren are being brought up Catholic. It gets confusing for me too.”



■ Rabbi Barbara Aiello

Although they may not be versed in current statistics, Beth and Doug represent a growing trend in Jewish-Christian interfaith relations. According to a Pew Research Center report titled “Review and Analysis of the Interfaith Marriage Data,” published May 12, 2021, on the Center for Radically Inclusive Judaism’s website, interfaith marriage rates continue to climb. Today, “72% of non-Orthodox Jews who married between 2010 and 2020 are intermarried.”

Beth and Doug’s confusion — and occasional discomfort — reflects this growing national trend. Their feelings inspired author and Brandeis Women’s Studies Research Center scholar Ruth Nemzoff to create a four-session course aimed at bridging the gap: the chasm between non-Jewish grandparents, like Doug, and their observant Jewish grandchildren, as well as Jewish grandparents, like Beth, whose grandchildren are being raised Christian.

An expert on interfaith issues, Ruth believes it is essential to create a climate where grandparents like Doug and Beth can talk and share. Her courses that began in 2019 do just that.

For example, Ruth emphasizes, “In session one, grandparents explore how to pass down what’s meaningful to them

while honoring the choices their kids have made.”

She also focuses one class on Jewish holidays and how a Jewish grandparent can diplomatically introduce Jewish celebrations to their son or daughter’s Christian family and how Christian grandparents can do the same.

Ruth reminds grandparents that “December doesn’t have to be a competition,” and that opening a discussion about holiday celebrations can create an environment of cultural understanding for their grandchildren.

“Today, “72% of non-Orthodox Jews who married between 2010 and 2020 are intermarried.”

Experts in the field of Interfaith Family Relations offer suggestions that include an emphasis on the positives, and grandparents themselves share their wisdom derived from their own lived experience.


As one Jewish grandmother of Catholic grandchildren says, “Lose the guilt. As parents of our adult children, we know that we gave our kids the best we could at the time. If they’ve found another spiritual path, we should applaud their choice to raise their children guided by spiritual

principles — even if those principles come from a religion different from our own.”

“Find a group,” says a Catholic grandparent who works hard to understand the Jewish traditions observed by his grandchildren. “Me and another grandparent got together and posted on social media so that we could help each other out. We found the Facebook page called Interfaith Family Groups. We share articles, ideas and even books our grandkids can read to learn about their grandparents’ religion.”

The international interfaith organization, 18 Doors, formerly InterfaithFamily.com, offers resources for interfaith families, including a recent virtual discussion: “Not sure how to talk to your adult child about their observance of Passover and Easter, and how you can connect with your grandchild?”

The organization, 18 Doors, and many other local, Jewish Federation-sponsored groups, remind grandparents that a world of resources await them — and most of all, **“You’re not alone.”**

Rabbi Barbara Aiello served the Aviva Campus for Senior Life as resident rabbi for 10 years. Her most popular columns are now published in her recent book, “Aging Jewishly,” available on Amazon books. Rabbi Barbara lives and works in Italy where she is rabbi of Italy’s first Reconstructionist synagogue. Contact her at Rabbi@RabbiBarbara.com. 



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The weird, wide world of W

By Brian Simon

W is the weirdest letter. It's the only letter whose name is more than one syllable, unless you count "LMNOP" as one letter. It's the only letter whose name contains a hyphen. It's spelled double-u. And its plural is double-ues, which even spellcheck doesn't recognize! It's obviously named after the letter U, but it looks like it should be double-V. In fact, it is called double-V in French, Spanish, and Scandinavian languages.

The history of the W goes back to the spread of Christianity and Latin into the British Isles. The Latin alphabet did not have a vowel U. It used the same letter V for both the "vuh" sound and the "oo" sound. Thus, the Roman Goddess of Love was spelled Venvs. The great leader was Jvliivs Caesar. And, in Mel Brooks "History of the World, Part I," the character Swiftus yells at Comicus, "You are nuts! N-V-T-S, nuts!" Anyway, back to England — the English language had a "wuh" sound, and the new Latin alphabet had no way to make that. The sharp, angular lines of the V were easier to inscribe or carve into stone, while the letter printed on paper tended to have softer edges, not unlike the U. At some point — perhaps in the second



■ Brian Simon

century — book scripts began to distinguish the U from the V. Then, when medieval scribes had to make the "wuh" sound, they chose a new symbol: "uu." "Uu" is called a digraph, where two letters combine to make a new, distinct sound. Other digraphs in English include "sh" as in shoe, "th" as in think, and "ch" as in L'Chayim.

The new symbol eventually became recognized as a letter of its own, although it was adopted slowly. The 16th century German grammarian Valentin Ickelsamer wrote, "Poor w is so infamous and unknown that many barely know either its name or its shape, not those who aspire to being Latinists, as they have no need of it, nor do the Germans, not even the schoolmasters, know what to do with it or how to call it; some call it 'we,' others call it 'uu,' the Swabians call it 'auwauwau.'" I mean! Swabians? Auwauwau? I wish auwauwau had stuck, if only for the possibility that URL's would sound like the teacher in Charlie Brown: auwauwau auwauwau auwauwau-dot-ickelsamer-dot-e-d-u. The German alphabet adopted the W as a letter but still pronounced it as "vuh." That reminds me of an old joke. I saw

it on Benny Hill, but I'm sure you've heard it somewhere else. Two men are standing at the airport gate. One man asks the other, "Is it pronounced Hawaii or Havaii? The other man replies, "Havaii." The first says, "Thank you." The other replies, "You're velcome." Other Latin-based languages managed to make the "wuh" sound by combining other vowels. For example, "oui" in French and "bueno" in Spanish, but that doesn't explain how we pronounce "one" in English. Elmer Fudd made the "wuh" sound from R's and L's, as in "Wascawy Wabbit."

The history of the W goes back to the spread of Christianity and Latin into the British Isles.

The invention of the printing press may have led to the current shape of the W, with its straight, angular lines. It looks more like two V's than two U's, although Cotton Mather's book describing the Salem witch trials was printed like this in 1693: *Being an*

Account of the Tryals of Several UUitches Lately Executed in New-England. The letter W was outlawed in Turkey for almost 100 years! In 1928, Turkey changed its alphabet from an Arabic-based system with almost 500 characters* to a Latin-based system with only 29. They wanted to modernize the country and improve literacy. But they forbade anyone from using W, Q, or X because they wanted to discourage the use of minority languages, like Kurdish. *500 characters! Can you imagine how hard it was to learn the alphabet song in old Turkish? That would be like trying to memorize all the digits of pi. Parents would brag about how their kids knew all their letters before high school, the way we brag about reading Harry Potter books. It would be like learning the lyrics to "Bohemian Rhapsody" if all the words were non-sequitors like Scaramouche, magnifico, and Beelzebub. Hebrew doesn't have the "wuh" sound. There is no W in Hebrew, except ironically in the English spelling of the word "Hebrew." But I come not to bury W, but to praise it. W is the widest letter in most English fonts, a fact many of us can relate to. You be you, double-u! We love you. Or, as Elmer Fudd might say, "we wuv you." 🇮🇱





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6:00 – 10:00pm

Temple Beth El Dubin Center

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The Jewish Heritage Day Festival, follows on
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Join the community for an unforgettable afternoon at the Red Sox vs. Phillies game. Don't miss this special event filled with pride, unity, and baseball fun!

Grab your seats for the game and cheer with our community as we celebrate Jewish pride at the ballpark.

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VS

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Jewish War Veterans

Victor Paul Tuchman Post 400

By Eryka Aptaker

We had very interesting and informative speakers at our October and November meetings.

Starting with our October guest speaker, retired Lt. Col. Derek Knuffke spoke to the group. Derek retired from the U.S. Army in 2015 after 21 years as a soldier. Derek gave us an informative talk about the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) and Combat Operations in Iraq. After retiring in 2015, he worked as a corporate recruiter in defense contracting and additionally served as a JROTC instructor in Denver, Colorado. More importantly, he is the future son-in-law to Mashall and Bo Lieberman. Thank you for the wonderfully interesting presentation, Derek!

For our November meeting, we were fortunate to have Dr. Motti Charter, a repeat guest speaker. Motti is the son of Commander Harvey Charter and his lovely wife Barbara Charter. Over the past two years, Motti has served more than 480 days in the IDF, across four deployments. It was very interesting to hear, first-hand, what has been transpiring in Israel. As he stated, we only see and hear a very small part of the news. Motti was very informative and answered the questions which so many of us had.

Also in November, Jewish War Veterans Post 400 participated in a Veterans Day service at Temple Beth-El. As always, it was an honor to be present. Thank you, Rabbi Luna, for remembering our veterans!

For those who have contributed in our efforts to raise funds for helmets and vests to send to IDF, we want to say thank you for your kindness and compassion in helping the brave men and women who serve.



Veterans Day service at Temple Beth-El

Although this edition of *L'Chayim* comes out after Hanukkah has ended, we still want to say “*Chag Hanukkah sameach*.”

As always in these articles, we ask that you consider joining this amazing and

dedicated group. Join us as we engage in great conversation over bagels and cream cheese. Jewish War Veterans, founded in 1896, is the oldest continuing veterans organization in America. We are challenged in the pursuit of new mem-

bers to keep our organization alive. With the loss of many of our WWII veterans and older members, we are striving to have members of our younger generation(s) join and show support to the JWV. We have



a Patron membership for non-veterans. If your family members were veterans, think about honoring them by joining the JWV Post 400.

I joined in honoring the memory of my father, a Korean War veteran. It was the best decision I have ever made. This group has been a blessing in my life and some of the members have become like family to me. You would be a part of a very dedicated, committed and welcoming group of individuals. We hope to see you at our future meetings!

For questions regarding joining our group, please contact Harvey Charter at 239-246-3151. ☺



Guest speaker Lt. Col. Derek Knuffke, retired



Guest speaker Dr. Motti Charter;

Stay in touch throughout the month. Sign up for the Federation's e-blasts.



Jewish Federation
of Lee & Charlotte Counties

Get the latest information on upcoming community events and cultural activities, breaking news items, updates from Israel and lots more.

Send an email to
debbiesanford@jfedlcc.org

CHAVURAT SHALOM OF SOUTHWEST FLORIDA
chavuratshalom@gmail.com

Welcome to 2026!

By Cheryl Fulmer, Ellen Feingold and Marcia Rudin

Many of us in Southwest Florida brace ourselves for the month of January, because it is the coldest month. Its average daytime temperatures are approximately 73 to 75 degrees Fahrenheit; average nighttime temperatures are approximately 55 to 57 degrees Fahrenheit. If you are reading this article north of Florida, you are probably wishing for such “warm” temperatures.

And there is another reason why we come to the month of January with some consternation — there are no Jewish holidays in January this year! This year, Tu B'Shvat starts on Sunday evening, the first of February.

So, what to do during the “dry” month of January? Let’s read Torah!

This year, we will read the first four portions of the Book of Exodus during the month of January. On the Shabbatot of January, we will be concerned with our Egyptian sojourn starting about 13 centuries before the common era (B.C.E.). We were slaves for hundreds of years — the Torah says 400 years, but it appears likely it was actually closer to 200 years — until the Eternal One chose Moses to work His miracles until we were able to leave Egypt for the Promised Land.

All this (and more) will be recounted in exquisite detail in our Torah during the month of January. Come to Chavurat Shalom’s Shabbat service on Friday evenings at 7:30 p.m. to hear an interesting talk on the Torah’s portion of the week. Come to the exclusive Torah Talk on the second Tuesday of the month for an in-depth discussion at 7:30 p.m.

Upcoming services and events

Our Chavurat Shalom programs are underway for the winter season.

Our Friday night Shabbat services continue every week throughout the year at 7:30 p.m. Services are led by Chavurat Shalom members, with English readings, Hebrew and English singing, and Torah reading with commentary by a member.

The weekly Shabbat services are coordinated by Drs. Ellen Feingold and Kathy Zoss and include volunteer participants. This gives our membership an opportunity to explore Judaism on our own without the guidance of clergy, widening our understanding of our Jewish heritage through personal exploration of our Biblical texts.

On the first Tuesday of the month at 7:30 p.m., we enjoy our informal “Schmooze” sessions.

Torah Talk, when we study the Parsha of the week together, is the second Tuesday of the month at 7:30 p.m.

The third Tuesday at 7:30 p.m. is “Leonard Minsky Jewish Current Events.”

The fourth Tuesday at 7:30 p.m. is set aside for the lecture and discussion series.

Everyone is welcome to attend our events. All activities are held via Zoom, with in-person gatherings on Sanibel Island and Fort Myers planned occasionally.

Email us at chavuratshalom@gmail.com or visit our website at chavuratshalomofswflorida.org to get further information about these events. All times are Eastern Standard Time.

Contributions

Chavurat Shalom members and the greater community have the opportunity to show their Jewishness by making a donation to the Tzedakah Committee.

The committee recently donated funds to: Jewish Council of Public Affairs; End Jew Hatred Movement of the Lawfare Project; Jewish Federation of North America; Gladiolus Food Pantry; F.I.S.H.; Stand With Us; Hillel International; and Jewish Federation of Lee & Charlotte Counties.


In the past, the committee contributed funds to: Jewish Federation of Los

Angeles; Friends of the IDF; M’ever La Yam (Across the Sea); Rambam Hospital (Haifa); Soroka Hospital (Beersheva); Israel Children’s Fund; Friends of ERAN; American Friends of Rambam Hospital; American Friends of Saroka Medical Center; American Friends of Leket Israel; American Friends of the IDF; Sar-El; AID Coalition; Brothers and Sisters for Israel; American Friends of Magen David Adom; F.I.S.H. (Sanibel); Gladiolus Food Pantry (Fort Myers); Jewish Federation of Lee & Charlotte Counties (Fort Myers); St. Matthews House (Naples and Fort Myers); Harry Chapin Food Bank (Fort Myers); Planned Parenthood of Southwest Florida; Association of Rape Crisis Centers (Israel); The Shelter for Abused Women and Children (Naples); Cycle Forward (Lee County); Quality of Life Center (Fort Myers); and the JOINT Distribution Committee (funds designated for Ukraine).

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GENERATIONS OF THE SHOAH SOUTHWEST FLORIDA
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Resonance

By Ida Margolis and Shelley Lieb

Though this article does not intend to directly compare the unique experience of the Holocaust with current events, it explores the reality of past traumatic experiences that can resonate in the present.

For many Holocaust survivors and their descendants, what happens in the world today can quickly and painfully send them back to yesterday. There are many occasions, events, or news items that may have a jarring resonance for Holocaust survivors and their descendants, such as: bearing witness to someone’s arrest without due process, reading about hungry children, hearing derogatory language directed at individuals or groups of people, the banning of books, seeing pictures of military soldiers in cities, or coming across a swastika symbol painted in a public place.

When one reads about renting an Airbnb with a swastika-like design embedded into the floor corners — a symbol that represented hate, persecution, and death for many innocent people — it resonates. Swastika. Or sauvastika. Facing right or left. Ancient history or recent, it probably doesn’t matter, particularly for survivors and their descendants.

In a recent article in the *Forward* newsletter titled “So, there was a swastika at my Airbnb,” journalist PJ Grisar recounts and explores his response to this experience. Although he wasn’t alarmed, he started to



Ida Margolis and Shelley Lieb

find out more about it. The image was part of a wooden floor in a house in the Hudson Valley of New York that dates back to 1866. He knew that there was history about this symbol that goes back long before it was appropriated by the Nazis. You can read the article here: forward.com/forward-newsletters/looking-forward/783793/swastika-indian-symbol-airbnb-holocaust-nazis/.

According to *Smithsonian Magazine* on smithsonianmag.com, “Archaeologists have found the distinctive design on artifacts from India, Europe, Africa, China and the Americas. When Adolf Hitler co-opted it, its meaning changed forever.”

Returning to the connection between the Holocaust and the present, PJ laments that regardless of how far back the history of the Jewish people goes, “so much of Jewish culture is boiled down to a period of about 12 years.” He decries that many people (including some Jews) base their

knowledge of the Jewish people on having read one book or seen one movie about the Holocaust.

As PJ continues to explore this experience, he quotes scholar Miriam Udel from her latest book, “Modern Jewish Worldmaking Through Yiddish Children’s Literature,” published in 2025: “The Holocaust is, in a profound sense, not a Jewish story.” He considers the reason for that statement to be startling and important.




Sebring Bowl with swastika in 1920s Ohio Collection at Holocaust Museum & Cohen Education Center - Photo by Cody Rademacher



Swastika in floor

“Tales of resistance abound — and should be emphasized — but it’s still primarily a story in which something was done to the Jews, and for reasons the Jews had no real control over,” said PJ.

Why should the Jews let their enemies distort the much bigger whole of Jewish history and traditions? It is hard to let go of the Holocaust resonance that turns up in so much of daily life. Try to remember that, in the words of the author, “there’s far more to Jewish life than death.”

Perhaps these symbols, actions, words, and policies are lessons of the Holocaust as reminders to pay attention to prevent it from happening again. For many survivors and their descendants, this resonance as part of their present is a reminder of the past, but not as a determiner of the future. 



JEWISH HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF SOUTHWEST FLORIDA (833) 547-7935

Florida Jewish History Month 2026

By Marina Berkovich, JHSSWF President

Let's start the New Year together with the Jewish Historical Society of Southwest Florida. One 2026 fundraiser ticket covers admission to both events.

Sunday, Jan. 4 – Annual Fundraiser Luncheon

Noon, Nina Iser Jewish
Cultural Center

Marcia Jo Zerivitz is the forceful individual behind the establishment of Florida Jewish History Month (FJHM). Her presentation, "Jews of Florida: Centuries of Stories," will be shown to our audience. We recommend you attend even if you previously heard it or have the book. This powerful, fast-paced presentation is fact-filled, and you will be impressed catching the many items you did not remember or those that you never knew.

Thursday, Jan. 22 – "A Jewish Visionary: Jane Schiff"

2 p.m., Nina Iser Jewish Cultural Center
We will premiere the new documentary in our Southwest Florida Jewish Pioneers Series, "A Jewish Visionary: Jane Schiff." Jane is the immediate JFGN Board President. This film covers Florida-related past of the Schiff family and explains the JFGN lobby art.



Marina Berkovich

Jewish history

Jewish history is not the same as the history of genocides and holocausts that, through the ages, sought the extinction of the Jewish people — or the People of the Book, or the Twelve Tribes of Israel, as Jews are referred to through different eras.

The Jewish people have risen from the ashes and endured persecution time and again, moving into new, often unexplored or unsettled lands. They inevitably brought with them a portable set of values that cannot be eradicated — resilience, a drive to succeed, commitment to work and education, the betterment of themselves and their neighbors, and love for future generations. Jews do not build synagogues or monuments to commemorate their own achievements. Jews build these spaces to preserve traditions and pass them on from generation to generation.

By the time World War II started in 1939, there were 16.6 million Jews in the world. By the start of 2025, the Jewish population had reached 15.8 million — almost completely replenished. It took only 85 years! We do not need to enumerate every instance of suffering and pain; they are generally documented,

from ghettos to extermination camps, from Stalin's Gulag to the expulsion of Jews from every Muslim-majority nation. At times, it seems that Jewish history is rooted in the history of suffering.

The Jewish Historical Society of Southwest Florida plays a key role in documenting the region's Jewish history, focusing on the overwhelmingly positive and progressive contributions of Florida's Jewish community. By choice, these settlers came to a state that did not allow Jewish settlement for more than 250 years. But for the grace of God and many courageous Southwest Florida Jewish pioneers, the region became one of the most desirable corners of the world, offering refuge, tolerance and acceptance for Jewish people.

Florida Jewish History Month (FJHM) was established by Governor Jeb Bush in 2003. Many newcomers relocated since then and are not aware. Celebrate with us!

JHSSWF work depends on your support. We appreciate you sharing the information about our events and educational programs. Register at jhsswf.org/upcoming-events/.

Our telephone number is 833-347-7935 (833-JHS-SWFL). Kindly direct all correspondence, including contributions and renewals to P.O. Box #10075, Naples, Florida 34101.

The Jewish Historical Society of Southwest Florida is a section 501(c)(3) charitable organization. Contributions are deductible to the fullest extent allowed by law.

America's 250th birthday rubric

*January facts for every
Jewish Floridian*

Jan. 17, 1728 – The first synagogue in New York City was established: Shearith Israel congregation.

Jan. 1, 1791 – Catherine the Great established Pale of Settlement to restrict Russian Jews to it.

Jan. 1, 1863 – U.S. General Ulysses S. Grant revoked his antisemitic General Order No. 11.

January 2003 – The first Florida Jewish History Month was designated by Gov. Jeb Bush.

HADASSAH Collier/Lee Chapter (732) 539-4011

Leading with light

A new chapter for Collier/Lee Hadassah

By Shelley Einhorn, President Collier/Lee Chapter of Hadassah

I am happy and proud to introduce myself as Hadassah's Collier/Lee Chapter's president as of Jan. 8, 2026. It's an honor to lead and to serve such a historic and respected organization. Our founder, Henrietta Szold, lived a life that showed that one person can make a difference. Our chapter moves forward thanks to our many generous and active members and leaders.

As we celebrated Hanukah, we were reminded of "the light we carry forward." The symbolic resilience of the Jewish people is evidenced by Hadassah. One of their most well-known achievements is its support of the Hadassah Medical Organization in Jerusalem, home to two of Israel's leading hospitals Ein Kerem and Mount Scopus. The light of healing, teaching and research to the Jewish, Arab, Christian, and Druze people. Hadassah carries the light forward.

Following the tragedy of Oct. 7, 2023, the lights went on at the Gandel



Shelley Einhorn

Rehabilitation Center on Mount Scopus in Jerusalem. Opened months earlier than expected, this center welcomed PTSD victims of trauma, as well as hundreds with physical injuries. For all Israelis, we shined the light of Jewish resilience.

In Jerusalem, Hadassah patients are accommodated deep underground in a new Intensive Care Unit: safe from conventional, biological, and chemical attack. Six new operating theaters at Ein Kerem Campus Round Building must be equipped with the necessary orthopedic high-tech instruments that can best treat victims of modern warfare.

Come and join us in our Collier/Lee Chapter of Hadassah as we support life-saving treatment and ground-breaking research in Hadassah hospitals, youth programs in Israel for at risk children, and women's health education and advocacy. I hope to see you soon!

Am Yisrael Chai

You Are Invited

Jan. 8 – Installation of officers in Naples. Dr. Judith Mann, National HMO Chair is our speaker.

Jan. 14 – Fort Myers-Estero-Cape Coral area "Connect With Hadassah Tea" at Jewish Federation of Lee & Charlotte Counties

Feb. 23 – Spring luncheon meeting: Lunch and Learn. A potluck lunch with a program about how Hadassah advocates for its mission and values.

Feb. 27 and 28 – Hadassah Shabbat Zachor, Friday, Feb. 27 at Temple Shalom; Saturday, Feb. 28 at Beth Tikvah Synagogue.

March 15 – Collier/Lee's fifth annual Inspiring Women Luncheon, honoring local women whose work and efforts make a difference in our communities.

April 26 – Women's Health Symposium: collaborating, informing, empowering all attendees. Founding members are Collier/Lee Hadassah, Sisterhood of Temple Shalom, Women's Cultural Alliance, Jewish Federation of Greater Naples, and Jewish Federation of Lee & Charlotte Counties.

TEMPLE BETH EL RELIGIOUS SCHOOL
Fort Myers
Allison Fego, Religious School Coordinator

In a month filled with music, reflection, hands-on creativity, and meaningful conversations, students across the Religious School engaged deeply with Jewish learning and community building. From our youngest learners exploring the beauty of Shabbat to older students reflecting on their upcoming *b'nai mitzvah*, the classrooms were alive with curiosity, compassion, and connection.

B'nai Mitzvah reflections with the older class
Rabbi Luna got a chance to sit down with our older students and engaged in deep reflection about their upcoming *b'nai mitzvah* milestones. They shared concerns about time management, family dynamics, and expectations. A values-based exercise helped students connect to the deeper meaning behind the *b'nai mitzvah* experience.



Exploring Shabbat and Hebrew letters
Our Jewish Life Vocabulary incorporated *Shin* ש / *Sin* ש: peace, rest, and familiar sounds.
In the elementary grades, students continued their exploration of Shabbat, learning the letters *shin* ש and *sin* ש along with vocabulary such as: Shabbat and Shalom. *Zayin* ז: remembering, pairs, and olives.



Later in the week, the focus shifted to the letter *zayin* ז, accompanied by vocabulary including *zachor* (remember), *zug* (pair), and *zayit* (olive). Students reviewed vowel markings and created personalized Hebrew flashcards to bring home.

Creativity in action
Students created a collaborative Shabbat quilt, now displayed on the bulletin board outside the classrooms. Students explored what community means and built 3D community models using classroom materials. While preparing to learn about the upcoming holiday of Hanukkah some of the students had some Hanukkah fun and Mad Lib laughs.



Overflowing with spirit and connection
From singing and creativity to reflection and community engagement, the month showcased the vibrancy and depth of the Religious School experience. Our students always look forward to coming back from winter break as they head into the season of *Tu Bi'shvat*, our congregations Mitzvah Day and Purim.
Taken together, these moments paint a vibrant picture of a school community deeply engaged in learning, reflection, and tradition. With every lesson, activity, and conversation, our students continue to strengthen both their Jewish identity and their bonds with one another. ☺

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TEMPLE JUDEA RELIGIOUS SCHOOL

Fort Myers

Tehila Cherubino, Director of Education

As we enter a new month and continue through the winter season, we carry with us the glow of the Chanukah lights. Though the holiday has ended, the warmth and inspiration of those candles remind us that even a small flame can brighten the darkest days.

In Jewish tradition, we are taught that we do not drive out darkness by pushing against it — we simply illuminate

it. Even the smallest flame can brighten an entire room, and when one flame lights another, it does not lose any of its own light. A single act of kindness, a moment of learning, a spark of hope can change everything.

This powerful idea is woven into our approach to Jewish education. Every week in our Religious School, we see our students bringing more light into the

world through their curiosity, enthusiasm, and kindness toward one another. When they learn a new Hebrew letter, recite a blessing or a prayer, do a mitzvah, ask thoughtful questions, or help a friend, they are doing more than gaining knowledge. They are adding light — real, lasting, meaningful light — to our community.

Our students remind us that light doesn't have to be grand or dramatic to matter. Sometimes it shines through a smile, a shared snack, volunteering to help, singing a prayer with joy, or welcoming a new classmate. These small moments of goodness create warmth

far beyond the classroom. They spread to families, friends, and the community around us.

In challenging or uncertain times, the light our children bring becomes even more precious. Their resilience, their joy in learning, and their natural ability to see the good inspire all of us. They show us that hope is not something we wait for — it is something we create.

May we continue to nurture the light within each of our students, so that together we can brighten even the darkest corners of our world. 🕯️

TEMPLE JUDEA PRESCHOOL

Fort Myers

Suki Kelly, Preschool Director

As we enter the new year, we want to reflect on the many joys the first part of the school year has brought. The past few months have been filled with lots of fun and learning — moments that remind us just how special our preschool truly is. We're excited to share some highlights!

Annual Thanksgiving play

Our beloved preschool play returned and absolutely melted hearts! Children practiced their cues, built confidence, and showed off their listening skills on stage.



Thank you to all the families who joined us and to the teachers for helping the children shine. This tradition continues to be one of the sweetest parts of our year.

Auction and fundraiser season

A huge thank you to everyone who helped bring our auction to life through donating, sponsoring, and attending our event! The community support helps us maintain our programs and enrich experiences for our children. We are so grateful to the parent and



grandparent volunteers who dedicated countless hours to make the evening unforgettable. We also want to thank the many alumni families that contributed to celebrate our 35th anniversary of the preschool!

Winter Festival

Our Winter Festival brought families together with music, crafts, and beautiful moments of community. The preschool students performed winter and holiday songs. After the performance, the families checked out the Scholastic Book Fair and other vendors. Thank you to the volunteers who came early, stayed late, and added those magical touches that made the event so special.

Multicultural Week

Throughout the month of December, families came to share their culture with the children. The children spent time exploring different holiday traditions through hands-on activities, stories, music, and snacks. Their joy and curiosity filled the school with warmth during the cold weeks of December. We ended the celebration with the Hanukkah party on the last day of school — full of yummy donuts, latkes, and exchanging of books.

Season of giving

Our Pre-K and Threes classes embraced the value of giving this holiday season. Each child shared how they earned their Tzedakah — whether by helping a sibling, doing a kind deed, or lending a hand to someone in need. Their stories were heartfelt reminders of how capable and



caring our children are. They brought in nonperishable foods to donate to the Jewish Federation food pantry for the months of November and December. The school also collected candy for Soldier's Angels Treats for Troops after Halloween to donate to soldiers overseas.

As we enter January, we focus on returning to routines and setting fresh goals for the new year. We're beginning preparations for our upcoming family events, as well as early planning for our spring celebrations, Family Fun Day, and graduation. Throughout this season, we will continue supporting the children as they grow.

Our Sweet Peas (6 weeks–12 months) and Twinkle Tots (12–24 months) rooms are growing! Please schedule a tour to be put on our waitlist. Our older rooms are also filling up! We are accepting a limited number of students in our Terrific Twos classroom. If you are interested in our program, please reach out to us at templejudea preschool@gmail.com or 239-482-1121. 🕯️

Candle lighting times:

Jan 2: 5:29 p.m.

Jan 9: 5:34 p.m.

Jan 16: 5:40 p.m.

Jan 23: 5:45 p.m.

Jan 30: 5:50 p.m.



The Holocaust’s main lesson

By Rabbi Bruce Diamond

While a seminary student in Cincinnati in the mid-70s, I was privileged to eat lunch with Simon Wiesenthal during his visit to the school. After attending his talk in the chapel, I went to the cafeteria for lunch and there he was, sitting by himself at a corner table. I asked if I could join him, and he seemed genuinely happy for the company.

I didn’t want to intrude on his downtime after he gave a very spirited talk, so — uncharacteristically — I just sat there and let him do the talking, if that’s what he wanted to do — and he did.

He spontaneously started by telling two jokes, each involving a Jew in a passenger compartment on the train in Central Europe before WWII. Ask me and I’ll be happy to repeat them for you. They both had that well-known Ashkenaic wryness.



■ Rabbi Bruce Diamond

After regaling me with his pre-Holocaust humor, he suddenly got deadly serious. Leaning forward to make his point, he said, “The main lesson from the Holocaust is that every Jew should have a valid passport and keep enough currency on hand to buy a ticket out of the country.”

I have followed his advice and shared it with others on many occasions ever since.

Do **you** have a valid passport and enough cash **at home** to buy tickets out of this country if you and yours wanted to leave in a hurry?

Sounds pretty alarmist, right? I agree.

As a rule, over the last couple of years I’ve tried to reassure my people that the sky is not falling on America’s Jews. I’ve done my best to downplay the frequent reports of a significant uptick in antisemitic incidents around the nation, often minimizing and dismissing them

as typical media hype and fundraising stratagems. A good shepherd knows how to calm his flock, not rile it up.

Although I am still sticking with that approach for now, very recently I caught myself thinking about where I would go if it was “time to get out of dodge.” Of course, like most Americans who give this sort of thing any thought, I naturally seized on Canada at first. But I quickly ruled that out since what I know about

A good shepherd knows how to calm his flock, not rile it up.

Canada these days would not make it a safer place for Jews than an America that was turning on us from the top down.


I ended up deciding on Mexico for lots of reasons that aren’t important to go into now.

Until now I have consistently believed that the laws and government institutions of America would protect us as Jews and serve as a bulwark against this country descending into a pervasive, aggressive anti-Jewish morass egged on by its political leadership.

But after watching how easily these laws and institutions can be brushed aside with little pushback from the public or the economic elite, I’m not so sure, to paraphrase William Butler Yeats, that “the center can hold” — or, for that matter, that there is much of a center left at all.

I don’t think it is time just yet for us to be packing our bags, but why not take Simon’s carefully considered advice to heart?

Couldn’t hurt, eh?

Rabbi Bruce Diamond serves at Community Free Synagogue in Fort Myers. 

Between two miracles

By Rabbi David Arias

Hanukah and Purim are both considered “minor” festivals, for which our sages established specific rituals and practices that are perceived as a Mitzvah. However, neither of these two stories appears in the Torah. Both stories describe God’s miraculous intervention in saving the Jewish people. But there is an important difference between these two miracles.

This difference is reflected in one of the customs of Purim as opposed to Hanukah. On Purim, it is a Mitzvah to have a *Mishte*, a festive banquet with food and drinks (maybe too many drinks). On Hanukah, although we enjoy eating latkes and sufganiyot, it is not a



■ Rabbi David Arias

Mitzvah to have a festive dinner, not even on the first night of the *Hag* (festival).

Rabbi Israel Meir HaCohen, in his commentary Mishnah B’rurah, explains that the multiple meals we have during Hanukah are optional, not a requirement like in Purim. Why? Because on Purim, they wanted to kill us, to eliminate us, to murder us. The evil Haman intended to destroy our physical existence, regardless of our faith, even if people converted to another religion.

In response to that, we celebrate our physical existence on Purim. We dress up in funny costumes, and we have a *Mishte*. On the other hand, the story of Hanukah shows us that Antiochus wanted to harm us, deliberately trying to force us

to give up our beliefs and abandon our identity, but not necessarily to kill us.

Between these two celebrations, we have an even lesser known one, *Tu Bishvat*, the New Year for the Trees. No special stories, no miracles. Originally, it was an agricultural and technical date, so whoever planted a tree could determine how old it was and calculate when they could enjoy its fruits. During the Middle Ages, it became a more spiritual and mystical celebration, and it grew even more with the revival of Jewish presence in the land of Israel and the development of the Kibbutzim.

So maybe, *Tu Bishvat* is a miracle among miracles. On Hanukah, we celebrate how Hashem saved us through

the brave actions of the Maccabim. On Purim, we remember how Hashem blessed us through Esther and Mordechai to save our people. In *Tu Bishvat*, the miracle is none other than the responsibility placed in our hands — to be the creators of our destiny. No wonder that in *Tu Bishvat*, it is customary to plant seeds, symbolizing our gratitude to God for creating the world and its nature, combined with the blessed work of humans’ hands.

Now, if we want to hold a *Mishte* on *Tu Bishvat*, we will need to work hard to do it and to celebrate, also, our work.

Hag Hailanot Sameah!

Rabbi David Arias serves at Temple Judea in Fort Myers. 

So maybe, Tu Bishvat is a miracle among miracles

Handcrafting generations of smiles!



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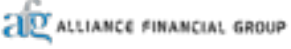
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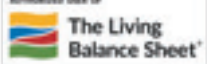
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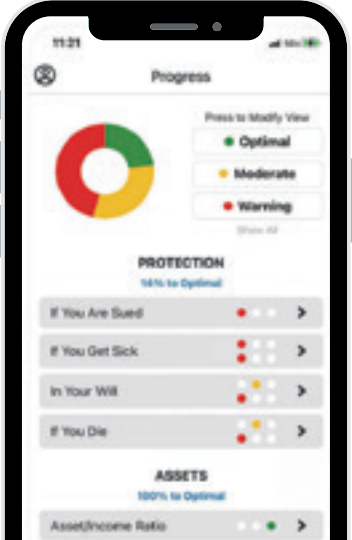


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Why synagogues stick to their own lane

But is it time for a change?

By Cantor Barry Butensky

Limited cross-participation synagogues, at the heart of Jewish communal life, serve as vibrant hubs of worship, learning, and fellowship. Yet a curious phenomenon persists: while churches and mosques often host interfaith or even interdenominational events, synagogues rarely engage in joint activities.

Whether a holiday celebration, charity drive, or educational seminar, you won't typically see a Reform synagogue crashing an Orthodox shul's Passover Seder, or vice versa. It's not snobbery; it's rooted in theology, tradition, and practical realities. Let's unpack why synagogues tend to keep their doors closed to each other's full participation, drawing from history, doctrine, and modern dynamics.

Differences in Jewish denominations play a huge role. Judaism isn't monolithic. Orthodox, Conservative, Reform, Reconstructionist — and even smaller streams like Renewal — all interpret Torah, *Halacha* (Jewish law), and customs differently. For instance, Orthodox Jews adhere strictly to traditional practices, avoiding mixed-gender seating or non-kosher catering that might clash with their standards. A joint event could mean compromising kashrut rules, like serving wine not certified kosher or altering prayer services to suit everyone, which feels like diluting authenticity.



■ Cantor Barry Butensky

Historically, these divides deepened in the 19th and 20th centuries as Jews assimilated differently across Europe and America, birthing denominations to navigate modernity without losing faith.

Cross-synagogue challenges

Today, inter-synagogue activities risk alienating members who see their shul as a safe space for uncompromised observance. Tradition reinforces this isolation too. Synagogues aren't just buildings; they're extensions of the home, like a communal sukkah where rituals stay intimate. Jewish law emphasizes *minyan* (a quorum of ten for prayers), often within one's own community for spiritual purity.

Cross-participation could blur boundaries, especially on sensitive topics like conversion or intermarriage, where views diverge sharply. Funding comes from dues, so synagogues prioritize their flock's needs over outreach that might drain resources. Practical barriers add fuel, and scheduling's a nightmare with varied calendars. Insurance and security also complicate things. Amid rising antisemitism, Synagogues carefully vet guests to avoid risks because a shared activity could expose vulnerabilities.

Not to mention the community dynamics: clergy build loyalty through exclusivity. If your synagogue hosts a rival's event,

it might siphon members. In small towns with one synagogue, this isn't an issue, but in cities like New York or Los Angeles or even in Southwest Florida, competition could be fierce. Or is it really?

Data from organizations like the Union for Reform Judaism shows most events stay intra-denominational, with only about 20% involving loose collaborations, like joint interfaith dialogues where Jews unite against external issues, not mingle rituals.

Exceptions do exist, and they are often externally driven. Post-9/11 or during Israel crises, synagogues team

Today, inter-synagogue activities risk alienating members who see their shul as a safe space for uncompromised observance.

up for solidarity rallies, proving unity when threats loom. Philanthropy bridges gaps when Federations coordinate charity without a full merger. Online platforms like Zoom have nudged tentative steps, like shared Torah studies during COVID lockdowns, but even those revert to silos post-pandemic.

Ultimately, non-participation preserves identity in a globalized world. It's not rejection; it's respect for diversity

within Judaism. If synagogues blended more, we'd lose the mosaic that makes each unique. If you want change, start small. True integration might evolve, but for now, synagogues thrive by staying in their lane, fostering deeper bonds within.

Changing this phenomenon

How could you make it better, meaning get more involvement within all the synagogues in town? To pull synagogues together for more joint activities, start with shared goals over rituals. Organize neutral events like inter-synagogue charity drives or Israel solidarity rallies — issues everyone cares about without clashing.

Set up a town-wide council of clergy to align calendars, maybe meet monthly at a coffee shop to plan events or concerts that bring all denominations together — the commonality of Jewish cultural events. Keep it low-stakes; no shared worship, just fun. Use social media or apps to hype events and get younger folks involved.

Offer incentives, like guest speakers or free childcare, to ease logistics for Orthodox and Conservative families who can't drive on Shabbat. Build trust slowly. If tensions flare, focus on common ground, like fighting antisemitism together. Small wins lead to bigger ones, but don't force it; authenticity matters. Follow the old expression, "It's better to try and fail, than not try at all"

Cantor Barry Butensky serves at Temple Beth Shalom in Cape Coral. 🕊️

Constructive skills for tough conversations

By Rabbi Nicole Luna

Last month, members from Temple Beth El gathered to learn how to do what feels like the impossible — deal with family political differences in a constructive way. Members of the organization, Braver Angels, joined us for a workshop called "Depolarizing for the Holidays." Braver Angels is a national, volunteer-led movement to inspire and equip Americans to practice courageous citizenship across political differences, renew civic culture and build trust. I am honored to have recently joined the Board of the SWFL Braver Angels Alliance.

As Jews, we have always known our welfare is intertwined with the place in which we live. The prophet Jeremiah preached to the Jews living in Babylon 2,600 years ago, "seek the peace of the city to which I have caused you to be in exile, for in its shalom, you will find shalom." Shalom here meaning, welfare, prosperity or peace.

The welfare of our country matters to our safety and well-being as Jews. Right now as a society, we know the



■ Rabbi Nicole Luna

polarization feels toxic, the divide seems wider than ever, the language is dangerous. And yet, the vast majority of Americans do not want to participate in a violent cultural war with people who disagree with them. We want to live in a democracy that can advance freedom, safety, opportunity, and justice for every one of us and our families.

So, we gathered to learn the skills of how to lower the temperature in conversations that might take place around the Shabbat table or among our neighbors, how to acknowledge our own biases, and how to engage in a productive conversation about political differences.

We have in our Torah a classic case study of a family where a disagreement went off the rails, pitting husband against wife, brother against brother, leading to deceit and threats.

Our own matriarch and patriarch, Isaac and Rebecca, have a massive disagreement about the future of the Jewish people. Who will carry on the legacy of Abraham and Isaac? Who will be the next leader? What qualities should that leader possess?

Isaac favors their son, Esau. Rebecca favors their son Jacob. One day, Isaac

tells Esau that he is prepared to give him the blessing bestowing his inheritance and status as the next patriarch of the Jewish people. Rebecca overhears Isaac, and instead of speaking to him and discussing her concerns, she instructs Jacob to present himself as Esau and steal the blessing. At this point Isaac is old and can't see well, and though he's a little skeptical, he ultimately blesses Jacob, naming him as heir. When Esau finds out, he is furious and plots to kill his brother.

This is an extreme example! But at its core, this story is about a disagreement in the family about who is most qualified to be a leader, about who should carry on the mantle of God's promise to Abraham. This disagreement had real outcomes. We pray to the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, not Abraham, Isaac and Esau.

Imagine if Rebecca and Isaac had learned the Braver Angels skills for a constructive conversation: Listen, Acknowledge, Pivot, Perspective. **Listen** for the other person's values. **Acknowledge** the other person's view and the

strength of their feelings. **Pivot** gently to shift the conversation and then share your **perspective**. Who knows how the story of our people would have unfolded if Rebecca and Isaac had had that conversation.

Ultimately in our conversations, the point is not to find a magic resolution but to acknowledge differences so they do not become destructive. Perhaps Rebecca and Isaac end the conversation still holding different conclusions, but feeling heard, respected and united in purpose.

We can do the same. We can engage in healthy disagreement with our family and friends. We can lower the temperature of rage and extremism. We can have civil discussions with those we disagree with. We can be proud Jews and learn from the wisdom of our tradition. May the conversations we hold be filled with curiosity and empathy. May they bring us closer together in understanding and with hope.

Rabbi Nicole Luna serves at Temple Beth El in Fort Myers. 🕊️

The welfare of our country matters to our safety and well-being as Jews.

Man was created for the sole purpose of serving G-d

By Rabbi Yitzchok Minkowicz

In the Torah portion and New Book that we start Jan. 10, "Shemot," we read the incident where Moses came upon two Jews (Datan and Aviram) in the midst of an argument. When one man lifted his hand to strike the other, Moses cried out, "*Rasha!* (Evil one!) Why do you strike your fellow?" Moses called him a *rasha* even though he had not yet delivered the blow, as the very act of raising one's hand against another person is forbidden.

Any individual who lifts his hand against another is termed a *rasha*, even if he does not actually hit him. But why is it prohibited to raise one's hand? Why is it considered such a serious transgression?

To explain, man was created for the sole purpose of serving his Maker, to



■ Rabbi Yitzchok Minkowicz

learn Torah and perform mitzvot in accordance with G-d's will.

The human body is comprised of many different limbs, each one of which must be properly utilized in the service of G-d. Some mitzvot are performed with the feet, others through the power of speech, and yet others with the nose. Each and every limb has a specific purpose, designed to carry out its own particular commandments.

So too has the human hand been created to perform G-d's mitzvot. There are many commandments that are done with the hands: donning tefilin, building a suka, lighting Shabbat candles, etc.

The hand is especially suited to perform the mitzva of *tzedaka* (charity). With

our hands we take a coin and give it to a poor person or place it in a *tzedaka* box, as the Torah enjoins us, "You shall surely open up your hand."

The primary function of the hand is to do good for others. When a person argues with his fellow man and lifts his

Indeed, it is a serious transgression to pervert the potential for good into a potential for evil.

hand as if to strike him, he is using that hand to bring him harm — the opposite of the purpose for which it was created.

For this reason, Moses called the man a *rasha*, for it is evil to use the hand which

G-d has created for good in a negative fashion. Indeed, it is a serious transgression to pervert the potential for good into a potential for evil. Moses, therefore, became angry even before the blow was delivered.

A person who hits his fellow and causes him pain commits a sin "between man and his fellow man."

A person who lifts his hand in anger, even though he does not strike the other person, commits a sin "between man and G-d" by distorting the very purpose for which the hand was created.

Let us therefore use our hands — and all our limbs — to carry out G-d's will and serve Him. For that is the true purpose for which man was created.

Rabbi Yitzchok Minkowicz serves at Chabad Lubavitch of Southwest Florida. 🕊

CHABAD LUBAVITCH OF SOUTHWEST FLORIDA Fort Myers

(239) 433-7708 • www.Chabadswf.org

The Southwest Florida Jewish community gathered to celebrate the long-awaited dedication of Mikvah Bashka, a magnificent new mikvah at Chabad Lubavitch of South-west Florida.

The elegant refreshments that graced the tables were sponsored by Taryn Sasser and Amy Fox, who dedicated the evening in personal ways — Taryn in memory of her beloved mother, Shaina bas Shmuel, and Amy in honor of her daughter's birthday.

From devastation to renewal

The original mikvah was destroyed during Hurricane Ian, leaving a void in the community's spiritual life, which has now been transformed into a breathtaking, state-of-the-art mikvah that radiates serenity and holiness.

The new Mikvah Bashka features custom marble sinks, imported high-end tile, stunning glass shower doors, a sophisticated filtration system from Israel, and more. Every detail reflects devotion, craftsmanship, and a profound commitment to purity and beauty.

A tribute of love

The mikvah was lovingly dedicated by Arlene Silver in memory of her dear mother, Bernice Orkin Kaye, whose Hebrew name, Bashka, now graces the building. During the moving ribbon-cutting ceremony, Arlene stood side by side with Shani Minkowicz, marking a moment of deep emotion and triumph.

Inspiring words and united hearts

At the dedication ceremony, Rabbi Yitzchok Minkowicz spoke on the profound significance of the mikvah in Jewish life while expressing deep gratitude to the many donors, supporters, and friends who made this dream possible.

Arlene Silver shared touching reflections about her mother and her hope

that Mikvah Bashka would continue to inspire Jewish women for generations.

Barry Finver, the mikvah's designer, spoke about the intricate halachic and architectural challenges of building a kosher mikvah.

Partners in purity

A heartfelt acknowledgment was given to Mikvah USA, whose partnership, expertise, and unwavering support made the rebuilding of Mikvah Bashka possible. From the earliest stages of planning through the final stages of completion, Mikvah USA ensured every detail met the highest standards of beauty and holiness.

Rabbi Hershy Indig of Mikvah USA, along with his colleagues Rabbi Berger and Rabbi Rosenberg, who personally spearheaded the fundraising campaign for this specific mikvah, traveled from New York to celebrate this joyous milestone.

Blessings from Washington

In a touching display of support, U.S. Senator Rick Scott sent heartfelt

greetings from Washington, D.C. He commended the community's perseverance and unity in rebuilding after the devastation of Hurricane Ian, noting that "the rebirth of Mikvah Bashka stands as a shining example of faith overcoming adversity, and of Florida's strength to rebuild not only our homes, but our hearts."

A celebration of community

Among the many guests in attendance were community pillars Betty Rubenstein, Dr. Jonathan Daitch, Steve Levine, Oren Barsheshet, and David Bergner, all of whom played vital roles in the rebuilding efforts.

Also present was the Minkowicz's son, Rabbi Peretz Meir Simcha Minkowicz, and his wife, Sheina, who assist in countless community projects.

Local Shluchim join in celebration

Adding to the sense of unity and shared mission, local Chabad Shluchim joined in the celebration, underscoring the close bond and mutual support that connect Chabad centers throughout the region.

Among those present were: Rabbi Shalom and Devory Katz, Chabad Israeli Center of Fort Myers; Rabbi Mendy and Luba Greenberg, Chabad of Bonita Springs; and Rabbi Yossi Labkowski, Chabad of Cape Coral.

Honoring the legacy

Inside the mikvah, beautiful plaques adorn the walls, honoring the generous donors and supporters who brought this vision to life.

A portrait of the Lubavitcher Rebbe, the guiding light behind the global Chabad movement, graces the entrance. Nearby hangs a stunning photograph of Bernice Orkin Kaye, lovingly commemorating the woman whose name and spirit lives on in Mikvah Bashka.

A spiritual conclusion

Mikvah Bashka stands as more than just a building. It is a shining reminder that from every storm, new light can emerge.

Join us!

Please feel free to join Chabad Lubavitch of Southwest Florida (5620 Winkler Rd., Fort Myers, FL 33919).

Prayer services are held Friday nights at 5:30 p.m., Saturday mornings at 10 a.m., and Saturday evenings at 5:30 p.m. An educational Kabbalah class is held Saturday mornings at 9 a.m. Kiddush & Farbrengen is held Saturday afternoons at 12:15 p.m.

Classes are available online at www.youtube.com/@Rabbiminkowicz.

For information and to join, call 239-433-7708, visit www.Chabadswf.org or email Chabad@Chabadswf.org. 🕊



TEMPLE BETH SHALOM
Cape Coral

(239) 772-4555 • www.templebethshalomcc.org

My name is Lynne Laufer, and I am a member of Temple Beth Shalom in Cape Coral. I am so proud to be a Jew and to have a place where we come together in peace, to pray and celebrate our faith. There has been so much death, destruction, and devastation — and so many tears. So much has changed since Oct. 7, 2023.

Yet out of that day arises such strength, togetherness, support, unity, brotherhood, and love. We Jews, have sustained such horrible attacks on us in the last 5,700 years. Somehow, we have survived, endured, and grown stronger. But, in order to increase that strength, we need each other; more today than yesterday and even more so in the future. We **need** a place to congregate, worship, talk, commiserate, share nachos, and help each other. We need Temple Beth Shalom.

As Philip Roth said, “A Jew without Jews, without Judaism, without Zionism, without Jewishness, without a temple or even a pistol, is just the object itself, like a glass or an apple.”

With war wagging in the Middle East, global terror reaching new heights, and antisemitism on the rise, I thought it’s a good time to reflect on why I’m proud, more than ever, to be a Jew.

Proud to be a Jew

I’m proud to be a Jew, because Jewish people don’t kidnap, torture, and kill others; we don’t teach our children hatred;

our rabbis don’t excite us to the point that we want to kill others. I’m proud to be a Jew, because even when Israel is accused of killing innocent civilians, we apologize for loss of life instead of celebrating death. I’m proud to be a Jew when the Israeli Army wants innocent civilians to leave their homes before the bombing begins.

I’m so very proud to be a Jew living in the United States and be a member of Temple Beth Shalom. We might not be the largest temple in Southwest Florida, but we certainly, and absolutely, are the mightiest.

My earliest memory of being Jewish was going to synagogue with my Orthodox grandfather when I was about three-years-old. I did not participate in the Jewish religion for the next 20 years. It wasn’t until the day my three-year-old son came home with rubber bands on

Bema, I feel thousands of years of history on my shoulders. Behind me is the ark containing our sacred torahs, and I’m proud to be a Jew.

When I see the memorial boards which hold the names of our dearly departed ones, and when I feel the light from the eternal flame shining on me, I’m proud to be a Jew. Standing in front of friends and relatives with love in my heart, I’m proud to be a Jew. I see Cantor Barry Butensky and acknowledge his wisdom, guidance and love which makes me proud to be a Jew.

In today’s world, where so many in our community are hungry, I feel, as a Jew, that it is our responsibility to help those people. I am so proud of Temple Beth Shalom, who sponsored a food pantry with Iglesia Vida. I am proud that we distributed more than 300 bags of groceries to those in need.



Dr. Motti Charter, son of Barbara and Harvey Charter of Temple Beth El



Thanksgiving food drive



his wrists because his friends told him that he had killed Christ that I knew I had to do something so my children would grow up knowing the pride of being Jewish.

Together with friends, we formed the temple in Staten Island. I was so proud of being Jewish and making sure that our ancestors did not die in vain. When I stand on the

I am proud that we are reaching out to the community in so many other ways as well. We provided musical entertainment for senior residents at American House Fort Myers, The Gallery at Cape Coral, and Shell Point Retirement Community. We hosted an Israeli dinner featuring a frontline report by Dr. Motti Charter about the conflict in the Middle East, and Cantor Barry regularly reaches out to Jewish War Veterans.

Save the date!

Don’t miss our concert with Cantor Azi Schwartz at Broadway Palm on Feb. 2. We are proud to bring this important event to Lee County! 🎵

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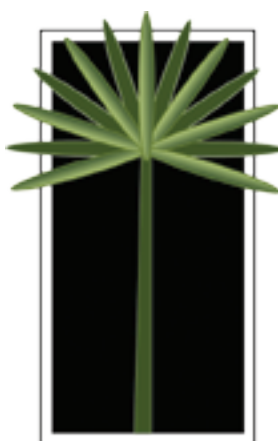
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TEMPLE SHALOM
Charlotte Harbor & the Gulf Islands


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Temple Shalom, the center of Jewish life in Charlotte County, welcomed Chanukah in a big way. Children and adults worked together to create holiday decorations and to make Chanukah cookies, dreidels from marshmallows, candy kisses and pretzel sticks, and custom Hanukkah cards. On Dec. 14, the congregation gathered to light the large menorah on the Temple’s front lawn, to sing Chanukah songs, and enjoy holiday treats.

“Tour of Italy”
The next big event on the Temple Shalom calendar is the “Tour of Italy” dinner dance on Sunday, Feb. 1. It features the music of the celebrated quartet, The Goldtones. It’s a reservations-only party

that sells out quickly, so we encourage everyone to write in for more information at shalompc06@gmail.com.

Temple Shalom Community Seder
It’s not too early to circle April 2 on your calendar. This is the date of the Temple Shalom Community Seder. Details will follow in the coming months. Events at Temple Shalom in Port Charlotte, including Shabbat services held every Friday at 7:30 p.m., are open to all.

Temple Shalom is located at 23190 Utica Avenue in Port Charlotte. Visit our website for more information: templeshalomfl.com. 



Friends Anna and Jenya make cookies with Temple Shalom member Barbara Solomon

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TEMPLE JUDEA
Fort Myers**(239) 433-0201 • www.tjswfl.org**

Join us in January at Temple Judea! Temple Judea Religious School resumes in January, and Temple Judea Preschool is alight with fun and learning for our young children. Check the website for the date and time of Friday evening B'Kef Shabbat.

For information about the adult education classes led by Rabbi Arias, visit our website or contact the office at 239-433-0201.

Ongoing programs

Chaverot women's group events continue in January. Look for emails and contact Jodi Cohen at jodi@jodi-cohen.com or 608-513-9737 for additional information.

To participate in Hazak, contact Joyce Rosinger at gjrosinger@gmail.com or 239-437-1566.

Temple Judea continues to accept food donations for the Cadkin Foundation

Food Pantry at Jewish Federation of Lee & Charlotte Counties. There are collection envelopes near the front door for contactless monetary or gift card contributions. Contributions may be mailed. Please call the office to ensure your contribution has been received.

Temple Judea is conducting in person services with an online Zoom option. Synagogue members can use the Zoom ID and password as published in our weekly megillah. Non-local residents may contact the synagogue for information.

Regularly scheduled events


Friday evening Shabbat services at 6:30 p.m.

Saturday morning Shabbat services at 9:30 a.m. Kiddush luncheons are served every Shabbat.

If interested in sponsoring a Kiddush, please contact JoAnn Lewin at jalewin2@aol.com.

Morning Minyan has resumed and takes place Mondays at 9 a.m.

Co-President Jan Klein's Monday morning meetings will be at Temple Judea, 11 a.m.-3 p.m.

We would love to see you in person or via Zoom. 

TEMPLE BETH EL
Fort Myers**(239) 433-0018 • www.templebethel.com**

Happy Secular New Year! January highlights begin with a celebration of our new members with a delightful brunch at the gracious home of Carolyn Gora. Thanks to all the membership committee volunteers who put this together!

Upcoming events

Rabbi Luna continues her live, adult education classes every Wednesday at 4 p.m. She also has a live "Lunch & Learn" at noon on the third Thursday of each month. Online weekly, the rabbi conducts "Coffee & Chat" Mondays at 11 a.m. See our calendar for the weekly Zoom event information.

The Women's Simcha Circle is holding a dinner event at Tacos & Tequila Cantina on Thursday, Jan. 8 at 6:30 p.m. RSVP by contacting the office or registering through the calendar.

Our Sisterhood begins the year with the return of Sheryl Faye as Susan B. Anthony. If you saw her as Ruth Bader Ginsburg, you do not want to miss this performance on Sunday, Jan. 11, at 4:30 p.m. Please register online.

On Jan. 9 and 16, our Friday evening services will be gifted with the voice of Cantor Murray Simon. All our welcome.

Our Men's Club has its next event is Sunday, Jan. 25, at 1 p.m. when Dr. Tom Cimarusti returns to TBE with another educational and entertaining event. Register online through our calendar.

Please note

On Jan. 19, the Temple offices will be closed and "Coffee & Chat" will be cancelled for the Martin Luther King, Jr. holiday.

Save the date

You don't want to miss these upcoming events!

Feb. 1 – Mitzvah Day

This event is an annual highlight with many community-focused projects for all ages and abilities. Project beneficiaries include: Children's Network of Southwest Florida; Community Cooperative food bank; Gladiolus Food Pantry; Israel Defense Forces; Lee County Homeless Coalition; Jewish Federation of Lee &

Charlotte Counties; first responders, and more.

Feb 14 – Fabulous Fifties Party

Sisterhood is holding a "Sock Hop" on Feb. 14 at 6 p.m. Have fun with music, food, an auction, live performances and more. **Register online!**

March 21-26 – TBE Cruise

Have you registered for the TBE Cruise to the Eastern Caribbean yet? To reserve your spot on Royal Caribbean's *Freedom of the Seas*, call Brian at 561-451-4511.

Recurring programs

Our recurring Temple Beth El programs continue:

- Drop off nonperishable food items in the lobby shopping cart whenever the Temple is open.

- Join the weekly Torah Study led by Rabbi Luna on Saturday mornings at 9 a.m. via Zoom. No prior study experience is required. Register through the Temple calendar.

- Our Book Club selection for Jan. 7 is "What to Do about the Solomons" by Bethany Ball. Explore the lives of members of a kibbutz community the first Wednesday of every month. The Feb. 4 selection will be "The Goddess of Warsaw" by Lisa Barr. Register through the Temple calendar.

- Tot Shabbat, a kid-friendly service, is Friday, Jan. 9 at 6 p.m. and Saturday, Feb. 7 at 10 a.m. Bring your kids; bring your

grandkids. Come for the fellowship, the fun, and the food! Please RSVP at 239-433-0018 so we're sure to have enough.


- History & Heritage of Our People is the third Tuesday of the month at 7 p.m. via Zoom.

- Shabbat services are open to all on Fridays at 7:30 p.m. We are live in the sanctuary, via Zoom, and streaming on Facebook.

- New year, new opportunity for recovery. Our 12-Step Recovery Group meets at 11 a.m. every Saturday via Zoom. We are a fellowship of people seeking a path to recovery via Judaic spiritual principles and the 12-Steps, using the book, "Twelve Jewish Steps to Recovery" by Rabbi Olitzky and Stuart Copans, M.D., second edition.
- Are you a recent convert, exploring conversion or seeking to reconnect with Jewish roots? "Jews by Choice" meets online the last Thursday of every month from 8 to 9 p.m. Zoom details are on our calendar.

There's always something happening here at TBE, and our members make it happen: Current Events, Theology & Life, Francophone & Hispanophone, Solo Travelers, Caring and Visitations.

Follow us on Facebook and Instagram: [@TempleBethElFortMyers](https://www.facebook.com/TempleBethElFortMyers). You can always contact the office at 239-433-0018.

Let's pray for peace in the world in this brand new 2026. Temple Beth El ... **where everyone matters.** 

COMMUNITY FREE SYNAGOGUE
Fort Myers**(239) 247-4556 • www.fortmyerssynagogue.com**

A heartfelt thanks to our many volunteers who helped with our Hanukah First Night Latke Dinner! We are also grateful to Publix, whose continued support helps keeps these holiday meals free and open to all.

The Community Free Synagogue congregation gathers each Friday evening at 6 p.m. to share a traditional Sabbath Eve meal. All are welcome. Feel free to bring a dish, side, salad, wine or a dessert for the social hour that follows worship. Please no dairy for the meal.

Qabbalat shabbat, the Sabbath Eve service welcoming the *shabbat*, follows at 7 p.m. Worship leans towards the traditional.

The meal and worship are at the CFS home on the Unity campus (11120 Ranchette Road).

Weekly Sabbath morning Torah Study with the rabbi is from 9:30-11 a.m. only via Zoom. The synagogue Zoom room is easily accessible via the CFS webpage. Visit www.fortmyerssynagogue.com.


Now in its 21st year, CFS is an award-winning "open community resource" that has garnered national attention for its innovative approach to Jewish congregational life. It does not sell memberships or conduct fund-raising. All of its events are free and open to all, thanks to the continued voluntary participation and support by the hundreds of local Jewish households who have made CFS their congregational home.

The Community Free Synagogue is a God-centered "intentional community" driven by strongly embraced traditional



The rabbi puts finishing touches on the Hanukah menorah he designed and built in his garage. It was lit to start his congregation's First Night Hanukah Celebration.

Jewish values. It was designed to create a harmonious setting, free from "money and politics" better to pursue its mission of "Study, Worship and Benevolence."

Our synagogue is led by Rabbi Bruce Diamond, who has served our Fort Myers community for 30 years. He holds his ordination and Doctor of Divinity from Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion in Cincinnati and was a member of its President's Circle. He also served our country as a chaplain in the U.S. Air Force and was a visiting scholar at Florida Gulf Coast University, teaching Social Ethics and Critical Thinking Skills. In keeping with traditional Jewish values, he does not accept a salary from the congregation. 

**BAT YAM TEMPLE OF THE ISLANDS
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Email: batyamsanibel@gmail.com
Website: batyam.org
Services: October through April
For more information on our service times and programs, please write to batyamsanibel@gmail.com or PO Box 84, Sanibel, FL 33957

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Friday Evening 5:30 P.M.
Saturday Kabbalah Class 9:00 A.M.
Shabbat Services 9:30 A.M.
Kiddush Luncheon 12:00 P.M.
Hebrew School of the Arts Sunday 10:00 A.M - 12:30 P.M
JLI Classes Monday 7:00 P.M.
Torah Study Tuesday 7:30 P.M.
Women's Weekly Class Wednesday 11:30 A.M.

**CHABAD OF CHARLOTTE COUNTY
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Rabbi Simon Jacobson
Phone: 941-833-3381
E-mail: chabadpg@yahoo.com
Web site: chabadofcharlottecounty.com
Services: Saturday at 10:00 a.m. followed by a kiddush
Torah study: Wednesday at 8:00 p.m.

**CHABAD LUBAVITCH
OF SOUTHWEST FLORIDA
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5620 Winkler Road
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Rabbi Yitzchok Minkowicz
Phone: 239-433-7708 • Fax: 481-9109
E-mail: rabbi@chabadswf.org
Web site: chabadswf.org
Services: Friday 5:15 p.m.;
Saturday Kabbalah
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Kiddush at noon
Minyan: Monday & Thursday 7:00 a.m.

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Web site: fortmyerssynagogue.com
Sabbath Eve Dinner every Friday at 6:00 PM
followed by worship at 7:00 PM
Torah Study on Zoom every Sabbath morning
from 9:30-11:00 AM
Meeting Room ID: 527 117 7864
Passcode: 435419
Rabbi Bruce Diamond, D.D.
Cantoral soloist Traci Pavel

**CHAVURAT SHALOM OF SWFL
CHAVURA**

PO Box 722
Sanibel, FL 33957
Chavuratshalom@gmail.com
Web site:
chavuratshalomofsouthwestflorida.org
Cheryl Fulmer, President
Shabbat services - 7:30 p.m. every Friday
Schmooze - 7:30 p.m. 1st Tuesday
Torah Talk - 7:30 p.m. 2nd Tuesday
Current events - 7:30 p.m. 3rd Tuesday
Speakers - 7:30 p.m. 4th Tuesday

**TEMPLE BETH EL
REFORM**

16225 Winkler Road, Fort Myers, FL 33908
Rabbi Nicole Luna
E-mail: rabbiluna@templebethel.com
Learning Tree Preschool Director: Ronni Vega
Ronnilearningtree@gmail.com
President: Michael Altman
Email: President@templebethel.com
Phone: 239-433-0018
Office Manager: Karen Kagan
Email: manager@templebethel.com
Web site: templebethel.com
Shabbat services: 7:30 p.m. Friday
Torah study 9:00 a.m. Saturday
Religious School: 9:30 a.m.- Noon Sunday
Mazel Tots (0-5 yrs. old). Sunday 11:00 a.m.
Religious school coordinator: Allison Fego
Religiousschool@templebethel.com
Judaica Gift Gallery
Affiliated: Union for Reform Judaism

**TEMPLE BETH SHALOM
REFORM**

702 S.E. 24th Ave., Cape Coral, FL 33990
President: Helene Glocer
Phone: 239-772-4555
Spiritual leader: Cantor Barry Butensky
Email: templebethshalomcommunications@gmail.com
Web site: templebethshalomcc.org
Services: 7:30 p.m. Friday
Saturday morning Torah Service/Torah
study twice monthly at 10:00 am
Enrichment night every Wednesday
at 7:00 p.m. via Zoom.
Shabbat 10:30 a.m.

TEMPLE JUDEA

CONSERVATIVE
14486 A&W Bulb Road
Fort Myers, FL 33908
Rabbi David Arias
E-mail: rabbi@tjswfl.org
Co-Presidents: Jan Klein & James Mann
E-mail: giaof3@gmail.com
Religious School Coordinator:
Tehila Cherubino
E-mail: tehila@tjswfl.org
Preschool Director: Suki Kelly
templejudeapreschool@gmail.com
Phone: 239-433-0201 • Fax: 239-433-3371
E-mail: tjswfl@gmail.com
Web site: tjswfl.org
Services: 6:15 p.m. Friday and 9:30 a.m.
Saturday Minyan: 9:00 a.m. Monday
Religious School: Sun. 9:30 a.m. - noon;
Wed. 4:30 - 6:00 p.m.
Early childhood education: Preschool, M-F,
ages 18 months-5 years;
"Mommy & Me," 12 months-2 years
Affiliated: United Synagogue of
Conservative Judaism

**TEMPLE SHALOM CHARLOTTE
HARBOR AND THE GULF ISLANDS
REFORM**

23190 Utica Ave., P.O. Box 494675
Port Charlotte, FL 33949-4675
President: Judith Migdol
Phone: 941-625-2116
E-mail: Shalompc06@gmail.com
Web site: templeshalomfl
Organizations: Sisterhood; Brotherhood
Affiliated: Union for Reform Judaism

**SHALOM LIFE CENTER
TRANS DENOMINATIONAL**

Rabbi Lawrence Dermer
Phone: 239-218-3433
Email: info@shalomlifecenter.org
Web site: shalomlifecenter.org

COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS

- AIPAC
(American Israel Public Affairs Committee):
Jacki Waksman - 954-653-9053
- AJC (American Jewish Committee):
Brian Lipton - 941-365-4955
- Anti-Defamation League: 561-988-2900
- B'Nai B'rith International: 941-302-4500
- Chabad Jewish Student Life at FGCU
Rabbi Mendel Gordon - 347-452-0489
mendelgordon@gmail.com
- Chevra Kadisha: Taryn Sasser
- Generations of the Shoah SWFL: 263-9200
- Hadassah - Collier/Lee Chapter:
Joyce Toub - 518-330-1559
- Hazak 55+ Chapter:
Joyce Rosinger - 239-437-1566
- Israel Bonds: Regional Headquarters:
800-622-8017
- Jewish Community Services:
239-481-4449
- Jewish National Fund:
Joshua Mellits, Director, Western Florida
941-462-1330 ext. 865
Memorial Tree Planting in Israel
1-800-542-8733
- Jewish War Veterans:
Post 400: Commander
Harvey Charter - 239-246-3151
- Mikvah Bashka of Southwest Florida:
Nechamie Minkowicz - 239-822-2784

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FOR MORE INFORMATION

Contact Jewish Film Festival Coordinator
David Garonzik at jewishfilmfestival@jfedlcc.org

