



L'CHAYIM

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A Community Win

Federation earns four ENPY nominations and wins a top regional honor for leadership and impact. p. 4



Honoring the Past

Holocaust Museum marks 25 years with education, remembrance, community programs and Triumph 2026. p. 12

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

“L'DOR V'DOR: 30 YEARS OF JEWISH STORYTELLING”

The Jewish Film Festival of Lee & Charlotte Counties returns for its 30th Anniversary — and it's **bigger** than ever.

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(included in the ticket price)

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L'CHAYIM

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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 Partisan political opinions will not be published, but opinions on subjects affecting the Jewish community are welcome.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.

Photographs should be clear, black-and-white or color prints. If you wish a photograph returned, include a stamped, self-addressed envelope of appropriate size.

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MARCH ISSUE EDITORIAL DEADLINE:

Wednesday, February 4



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

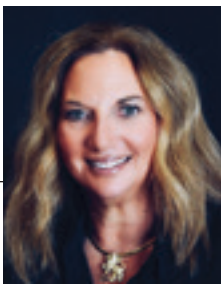
A Jewish Community that is based on Jewish values such as Tzedakah (benevolence), Tikkun Olam (repairing the world) and K'lal Yisrael (taking responsibility for one another).

A heartfelt thank-you

To our community for making 2025 an extraordinary year

FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

■ **Debbie Sanford**



As we reflect on 2025, I am filled with immense gratitude and pride for what we accomplished together as a community. This year was nothing short of remarkable — marked by a record-breaking campaign, a vibrant season of events, and countless moments that brought us together to celebrate, learn, and share our Jewish heritage.

Looking ahead

One of the true highlights for 2026 is the 30th Anniversary Jewish Film Festival. What began three decades ago as a vision has grown into a beloved community tradition. This milestone festival, along with additional films shown throughout the year at venues across our region, will spark meaningful conversations, a deepened understanding, and remind us of the power of storytelling to connect generations and cultures.

We will also create unforgettable memories beyond the screen. Jewish Heritage Day festival and ballgame at the Boston Red Sox stadium are

powerful and joyful celebrations of pride and community spirit. From cheering together in the stands to the excitement of our first-pitch auction, the day will perfectly capture what it means to come together in celebration of who we are, followed by the one and only celebration of community talent at the Jewish Heritage Day festival on Sunday, March 22.

These events — along with so many others throughout the year — were designed with one purpose in mind: to bring people together. To celebrate our shared history, honor our traditions, and create welcoming spaces where everyone feels connected.

Thank-you

None of this would be possible without the incredible support of our donors, sponsors, volunteers, partners, and attendees. Your generosity, enthusiasm, and belief in our mission fueled a record campaign and will make this vision for an outstanding season of events a reality.

Thank you for showing up, for giving back, and for helping make 2025 a year to remember. I am deeply grateful for this community and excited for all that lies ahead as we continue to grow, celebrate, and strengthen our bonds together. 🌟

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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

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An evening of gratitude, impact, and inspiration

By Debbie Sanford, Executive Director

Our recent Major Gifts event was truly an extraordinary evening — one filled with connection, appreciation, and a shared commitment to strengthening our Jewish community. We are deeply grateful to our Major Donors, whose generosity and leadership make our mission possible and whose belief in our work continues to shape a vibrant and resilient future.

This special gathering was an opportunity to pause and say **thank you** — to recognize the individuals whose philanthropic partnership fuels everything we do. From caring for those in need to building Jewish identity, supporting Israel, and ensuring a strong, secure community, our Major Donors are the cornerstone of our impact. Your dedication does not go unnoticed, and we are profoundly thankful for your trust and support.

We were also honored to welcome Mark T. Esper, 27th United States Secretary of Defense, as our very special guest. His presence elevated the evening, and his thoughtful insights sparked meaningful conversation and reflection. Mark’s perspective, experience, and willingness to engage so openly with our community made the evening both inspiring and memorable. We are sincerely grateful to him for sharing his time and voice with us.

Together, the warmth in the room was unmistakable — a powerful reminder



that when leadership, generosity, and purpose come together, incredible things happen. Thank you to everyone who joined us for this meaningful evening

and, most importantly, to our Major Donors who continue to stand with us as partners in impact.

We are stronger because of you! 🌟




Photos by Lucinet Monzone




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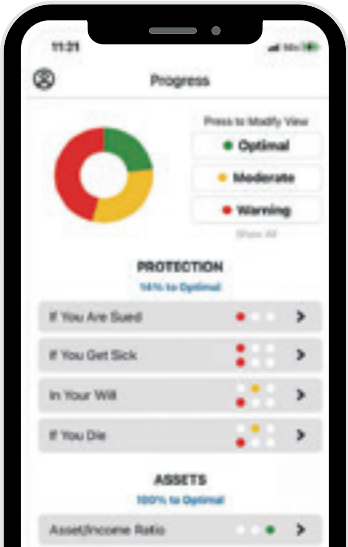
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Celebrating ENPY nominations and a major win!

By Debbie Sanford, Executive Director

We are excited to share some wonderful news with our community. This year, Jewish Federation of Lee & Charlotte Counties was honored with four nominations at the Community Foundation's prestigious ENPY Awards, which recognize excellence in nonprofit leadership and impact throughout Southwest Florida.

For those who may be unfamiliar, the ENPY Awards (Excellence in Nonprofit Performance Yearly) highlight outstanding organizations, leaders, and volunteers who make a meaningful difference in our region. Each category shines a light on the people and programs that help strengthen our community and inspire positive change.

This year, Jewish Federation of Lee & Charlotte Counties was nominated in

four different categories, a remarkable acknowledgment of the dedication, compassion, and hard work that go into our mission every single day.

We are especially proud to share that the Federation won the Community Catalyst Award — one of the most significant honors of the evening. This award recognizes an organization that is a driving force for progress, innovation, and community impact. To be chosen as the Community Catalyst is not only gratifying, it is a powerful



affirmation of the work we do and the lives we touch.

We share this achievement with our donors, volunteers, partners, and supporters, who make everything possible. Your generosity and belief in our mission allow us to show up every day for those who need us, respond in times of crisis, support a thriving Jewish life in Lee and Charlotte counties, and strengthen the broader community.

Thank you for helping us continue to grow, lead, and make a difference. This award belongs to all of us — and we couldn't be more grateful. 🙏

You are not alone

By Debbie Sanford, Executive Director

A few days ago, I lost a friend to suicide. Lee and I are devastated. He was a successful businessman, on top of the world by all outward measures. Homes. Boats. A wonderful husband, father and new grandfather. A full life. He was not Jewish, yet he showed up for our Jewish community again and again. He supported our food pantry, sending canned food and

hurricane supplies after Hurricane Ian. He bought 12 dozen donuts for his entire office during our Krispy Kreme fundraiser. He cared. He gave. He helped. He was what we would call a Mensch.

And no one would have ever known he was suffering. That is why I am writing this.

Suicide does not always look the way we expect it to. Pain does not always

announce itself. Some of the strongest, most generous people are quietly carrying burdens we cannot see. This loss is a painful reminder that success, smiles, and generosity do not protect someone from despair.

If you are reading this and you are struggling, please hear me clearly: **You are not alone.**

I am here if you need someone to talk to. My entire staff is here. The Federation is here.

You are loved. You belong. You are part of a community that protects, supports, and cares deeply for one another.

If you are feeling depressed, overwhelmed, or isolated, there are wonderful resources available to help you

through this moment. If what you need is simply a friend, come to our Lunch Bunch. Ask for a friendly visitor. Reach out. Whatever it is you are facing, it can be addressed — and you do not have to face it alone.

And if you are in immediate crisis or need to talk to someone right now, help is available 24/7 by calling or texting **988**, the Suicide and Crisis Lifeline. Compassionate, trained listeners are there for you.

Please don't suffer in silence. Please don't assume you have to be strong on your own. Your life matters. Your pain matters. And this community is here for you — today, tomorrow, and always.

May his memory be for a blessing. 🙏



TOGETHER we can make a Difference



Jewish Federation
of Lee & Charlotte Counties

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The Federation expresses special gratitude to our Indigent Fund Pacesetters for the example they set for the rest of us.

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Celebrating light and community

By Doreen Kostel, Federation Co-President

How frequently do we imagine a vision of a “good” future, take steps towards it, and then realize that the vision is not fully attainable (for whatever reason). When we are lucky, the vision takes shape in a different way than we could have foreseen. This is what happened to me when I looked around at the Hanukkah Menorah lighting at Bell Tower Shops in December 2025. I had been searching for ways to help the Jewish communities of Lee



Doreen Kostel

and Charlotte counties come together — not by ritual representation at a joint event but by a combined focus on what makes us Jewish: our culture, our learning, our understanding of Torah, our support for those in need, and our care for the Jewish people and Israel. Whether we are practicing Jews or honor Jewish culture and Israel; Orthodox, Reform or Conservative; a havurah or a synagogue, we share values passed down by our parents, our teachers and our ancestors — and supported by those who recognize the importance of our



Rabbi David Arias, Temple Judea; Rabbi Nicole Luna, Rabbi Yitzchok Minkowicz and Rabbi Sunny Schnitzer



Monica Wildonger, JFS and Bryana Garcia, Office Manager



Debbie Sanford, Executive Director

beliefs and history, whether Jewish or of other faiths. I had thought “if we just had a project we could do together” it would work, but what worked was being led in song and dance while lighting a menorah for the world to see. What worked was rabbis sharing a moment of joy together, playing crazy instruments and singing. What worked was members of different congregations smiling and getting chocolate all over their faces from the *sufganiyot*. And what worked was seeing little children all around (OK, sugar highs help), smiling, learning to walk, and listening to the music and joyful noise of people sharing a moment together. Was this change ephemeral or has there been a shift in our community? I vote for a shift, a very hard-fought shift led by Debbie Sanford and her team: Amy Hallock, Monica Wildonger, Bryana Garcia, Dorothy Waldron, Elizabeth



Rabbi Nicole Luna, Temple Beth El; Rabbi David Arias and Rabbi Sunny Schnitzer



Elba, Brittany Salem, Steve Shirey, and buoyed by David Garonzik who specializes in film. These staff members cohesively supported this event (and yes, there was chocolate on a few of their faces too).

Each congregation was represented as well. Representatives shared information about their events and schedules. Passersby were able to meet others they may not have known and to engage in joke-telling, singing, dancing and sharing.

We had many Board members, representing both the Jewish Federation and their individual congregations — not either/or but both. I am so proud to be part of this caring, thoughtful, intelligent and truly unique group of people. We will all help to make our remaining events of the season special: an extraordinary film festival, a day at the ball park, Jewish Heritage Day, and the many specialty events such as PJ Library and the Lunch Bunch. We have made real progress toward a shared vision of planning together and celebrating together.

Sometimes it is just enough to accept that a vision will evolve and watch for ways to support the strength, the beauty and the guiding light that carries us forward.

Am Yisrael Chai



7-foot Menorah, purchased by Bell Tower



Rabbi Yitzchok Minkowicz, Chabad Lubavitch of SWFL; Rabbi David Arias and Rabbi Nicole Luna



The Jewish Federation Annual Campaign provides the resources to strengthen and enrich our Jewish community locally, in Israel and around the world.



YOU MAKE IT HAPPEN!

TRIBUTES

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 Honor of Debbie Sanford

In recognition of all your wonderful achievements.

Carol Lovitch

In Memory of Joyce W. Follador

February 11, 1932 – January 1, 2022

In my heart forever, Mamushka.

Lory Kirby

jewishfederationlcc.org/tribute-memorials

HOW

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
Men's Division
P2G Partnership Together

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& **informed.**



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A year of growth, community and hope

By Monica Wildonger, JFS Case Manager & Food Pantry Coordinator

Over the past year, the JFS Food Pantry has continued to serve as a vital lifeline for individuals and families in our community. Nearly 1,000 people turned to the pantry for support, including 164 new families seeking assistance for the first time. These numbers reflect not only the growing need in our area, but also the trust our community places in Jewish Family Service to provide compassionate, reliable help.

In addition to food assistance, our pantry works closely with JFS Case Management services to address broader challenges faced by our clients. This year, 44 pantry participants were also active case management clients, receiving individualized support to help stabilize their situations and work toward long-term self-sufficiency.

Menorah lighting

One of the most meaningful highlights of the year was our first-ever community menorah lighting at Bell Tower. The event



■ Monica Wildonger

was a tremendous success, bringing together community members in the spirit of light, unity and generosity. We were deeply moved by the response — many attendees generously donated cash toward the food pantry, helping us continue our mission during a season when needs are especially great.

We have also been incredibly fortunate to receive numerous food donations over the past several months. The generosity of our donors — both individuals and community partners — has allowed us to keep our shelves stocked and ensure that those who come to us can leave with dignity and nourishment. We are truly grateful for this ongoing support.

Looking ahead

We are excited to roll out new programs that will expand access to fresh fruits and vegetables for our clients. Thanks to our valued partnership with Harry Chapin Food Bank, and the generosity of donors who

made adequate refrigeration possible, the JFS Food Pantry will soon be able to offer additional fresh and nutritious options to the families we serve. This enhancement represents an important step forward in supporting the overall health and well-being of our clients.

As we enter the new year, we do so with hope and optimism. While

challenges remain, we are encouraged by the strength and compassion of our community. We look forward to an amazing year ahead, with the hope that brighter days are on the horizon for everyone we serve.

Together, we make a difference — one family, one meal, and one act of kindness at a time. ☺



Experiencing the light of Hanukkah

For the first time

By Amy Hallock, Community Events Manager

This past year, I had the privilege of celebrating Hanukkah for the first time, and it was an experience that will stay with me for a very long time. Over the course of some very meaningful days, I was welcomed into traditions that are rich with history, intention and heart, and I quickly came to understand why Hanukkah holds such a special place within the Jewish community.

What struck me most was the beauty of the traditions themselves. The lighting of the Menorah, the prayers. The songs all felt deeply intentional, with each one telling a story of resilience, faith and hope. There was something incredibly powerful about standing together, voices raised in song, reflecting on the miracle of light and what it represents, not only historically but in our lives today.

Equally impactful was the sense of community. Hanukkah is clearly not meant to be experienced alone. Coming together with families, friends and community members created an atmosphere of warmth and connection that was truly special. As someone who works in community engagement, it was inspiring to witness how these shared moments



Amy Hallock

strengthen bonds and create lasting memories.

I also appreciated the opportunity to learn — learning the meaning behind the prayers, the symbolism of the Menorah, and the values that Hanukkah celebrates. Each conversation and explanation added depth to the experience and helped me better understand the significance of the holiday beyond what I had previously known.

And, of course, no Hanukkah celebration would be complete without mentioning the jelly donuts. They were delicious, joyful and a perfect reminder that celebration is meant to engage all senses. Food, laughter, music and tradition all came together in a way that felt both festive and meaningful.

Celebrating Hanukkah for the first time was an honor, and I am grateful to our community for welcoming me so warmly into this beautiful tradition. It reminded me why community matters so much and how powerful it is to come together to celebrate light, connection and shared values.

L'chayim — to life, to learning and to many more moments of community and celebration ahead. ☺

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Menorah lighting

Thank you!

By Amy Hallock, Community Events Manager

We are incredibly grateful to everyone who joined us for our first community Menorah lighting. Your presence made this celebration truly special. A heartfelt thank you to Bell Tower Shops for generously purchasing the beautiful seven-foot Menorah and for inviting us to celebrate the fifth night of Hanukkah at their wonderful location.

It was a wonderful evening filled with light and community, and we look forward to making this an annual event! 🌟



The Jewish Heritage Day Festival, follows on

Sunday, March 22nd!!

Save the Date



Jewish Federation
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Hosted By:



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Jewish Heritage Game... at the BallPark!



Take Me Out to Jewish Heritage Day!

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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With gratitude from Jewish Federation

By Amy Hallock, Community Events Manager

On behalf of Jewish Federation of Lee & Charlotte Counties, I would like to extend my sincere thanks to everyone who helped make the Linda Idelson Culinary Event on Jan. 12 such a meaningful and memorable evening.

We were honored to welcome our special guest, Beejhy Barhany, Ethiopian Jewish chef and author of "Gursha: Timeless Recipes for Modern Kitchens, from

A special thank you to Custom Roast by Alex for brewing the rich and delicious Ethiopian coffee that elevated the experience, and to Ubah and her family from El Roi Food for preparing the authentic Ethiopian dishes that so beautifully complemented Beejhy's presentation.

I am also deeply grateful to Linda Idelson's dear friends and family who joined us and shared personal stories




Ethiopia, Israel, Harlem, and Beyond," which was recognized by *The New York Times* as one of the best cookbooks of the year. Beejhy's presence, story and culinary traditions brought depth, warmth and inspiration to the evening.

Thank you to The Canterbury School for graciously allowing us to host this event in the Charles & Linda Idelson Kitchen. The space was a perfect setting to honor Linda's legacy through food, culture and community.



that made the evening especially heartfelt.

Finally, thank you to all who attended. Your presence, engagement and support made this night truly special and unforgettable. 



Gathering for friendship and fun

By Elizabeth Elba, Life Enrichment Coordinator

My name is Elizabeth, and I became the Life Enrichment Coordinator with the Jewish Federation last year. I officially started in this role in August 2025, and over the past several months I have enjoyed getting to know our community and helping create opportunities for seniors to connect, socialize, and have fun together.

My main responsibility is planning our free monthly senior luncheons. As many of you know, these gatherings are about much more than just a meal. They



Elizabeth Elba

give people a chance to meet others, catch up with friends, try something new, and feel part of a welcoming Jewish community.

We recently held a luncheon at Amavida Senior Living in Fort Myers to celebrate Hannukah! While I was sadly unable to attend due to being sick, I was still very involved in the planning and was thinking of everyone all day. The event was in wonderful hands with Amy Hallock serving as the point person, and I am so thankful for her help and support.



gift cards, chocolate gelt, and even a giant wooden dreidel. From everything I heard, it was a joyful and relaxed afternoon that left people feeling happy and connected.

Upcoming luncheon

We are excited to keep this momentum going. Our next senior luncheon is Feb. 25 at The Gallery Senior Living in Cape Coral. Each luncheon is free and open to seniors who would like to enjoy a good meal, friendly conversation, and an activity or program.

Share your thoughts

Lastly, I value hearing from our community! If you have an idea for a luncheon program, know of a local business that might like to sponsor a lunch and share their name, or are connected to a senior living community that would like to host us sometime this year, I would love to hear from you.

These events are strongest when they reflect the ideas and energy of the people they serve, and I look forward to many more meaningful gatherings ahead. 🌟

I was glad to hear the positive feedback afterward. The turnout was great, and the food itself was delicious. Several attendees shared that they made new friends and enjoyed sitting and talking with people they had not met before. One of the highlights of the afternoon was Jewish bingo, which brought plenty of smiles and laughter to the room. Prizes included

Building community through youth engagement

A new chapter for families

By Brittany Salem, Youth Engagement Coordinator

As the new youth coordinator, I have made it a mission to strengthen family engagement and enrich youth programming across our Jewish community. Since stepping into the role, I have been focused on creating warm, welcoming, family-friendly events that bring PJ Library families together in meaningful and joyful ways.



Brittany Salem

for all ages. Each event aims to blend Jewish learning with fun, accessibility, and a sense of belonging. But the vision doesn't stop there.

Looking ahead

I am committed to expanding opportunities for older children and teens as well. New initiatives are already under-

way to develop innovative programming that supports the social, emotional, and spiritual growth of our community's youth.

As the community continues to grow, I am beyond excited to collaborate with families, educators and local partners to bring fresh ideas, creative programs and meaningful experiences to all ages.

With a focus on connection, engagement and Jewish joy, the future of youth and family programming looks brighter than ever. 🌟



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At the Holocaust Museum

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

This year, we are celebrating the 25th anniversary of the Holocaust Museum & Cohen Education Center. We want to thank you — our supporters, docents, volunteers, members and, of course, our Holocaust survivor community. Because of you and the many ways you show your generosity, we teach the history of the Holocaust to inspire students and individuals of all ages to take an active role in improving their communities.

All of us at the Museum are especially inspired by the individuals who have played a part, large and small, in making the Museum the world-class institution it is today. One of those individuals was the Museum's founding Board Chairperson Ann Jacobson (of blessed memory).

Ann was just seven when her father was forced from his job because he was Jewish and her family moved to Vienna from Berlin. In 1938, when Germany annexed Austria, her family suffered the same discrimination. Ann and her parents escaped to the United States in 1939. Throughout her life, Ann was a humanitarian and community activist who took part in the Civil Rights Movement and volunteered with nonprofit organizations in Kansas City, Missouri, and Naples, Florida.



■ Erin Blankenship

Ann assisted Golden Gate Middle School teacher David Bell in the creation of their "Out of the Ashes" exhibit. She mobilized the community to take the student exhibition and used it to start a Holocaust Museum here in Naples. She understood the importance of Holocaust education and the impact that our Museum would make in Southwest Florida.

All of us involved with our organization owe a debt to Ann — and our other founders — who had the foresight, will and know-how to make this Museum a reality and the beacon it is today.



Young Ann Jacobson

Current exhibition

Sponsored locally by Patti Bloom, our latest exhibition, "Holocaust by Bullets: 15 Years of Investigation," is presented in cooperation with Yahad-In Unum. Yahad-In Unum is a French organization founded in 2004 dedicated to locating mass grave sites of Jewish victims of Nazi mobile killing units, especially the Einsatzgruppen, in Eastern Europe. It is led by Father Patrick Desbois, a Catholic priest whose grandfather was a French soldier deported to a Nazi prison camp in a Ukrainian town bordering Poland.

The exhibition details the "Holocaust by Bullets: 15 Years of Investigation" as a precursor and model for mass murder crimes that still occur today. It



uses eyewitness testimonies and archival photographs to detail the murders of thousands of Jews by the Nazis and their collaborators in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. If you have not toured the Museum recently, it is a great time to visit, as this exhibition will only be available until April 13.

GenShoah event with guest speaker Erin Blankenship

Feb. 3, 7 p.m. –

Beth Tikvah of Naples

I am honored to share my experience working with the USC Shoah Foundation's "Dimensions in TestimonySM" initiative (DIT). DIT enables people to ask questions that prompt real-time responses from prerecorded interviews with Holocaust survivors. I worked with the Shoah Foundation in 2021 to record four interactive testimonies with Holocaust survivors. Sharing survivor testimonies is one of the best ways to impart the lessons of the Holocaust and using this innovative program to do so allows students and other individuals an immersive experience that allows for personal connection.

This is a free program that is open to the public; however, RSVP is required to office@bethtikvah.us.

Holocaust Film Series

Feb. 15-17, 2 p.m. – Paragon

Pavilion Theater, Naples

Make plans to join us this month as the Paragon Pavillion Theater for a three-day documentary film series where three different documentaries will be presented each day at 2 p.m. You can find additional information about the series at hmcec.org.

Tickets must be purchased on the Paragon Theaters website: paragontheaters.com/venueinfo/paragon-pavilion.

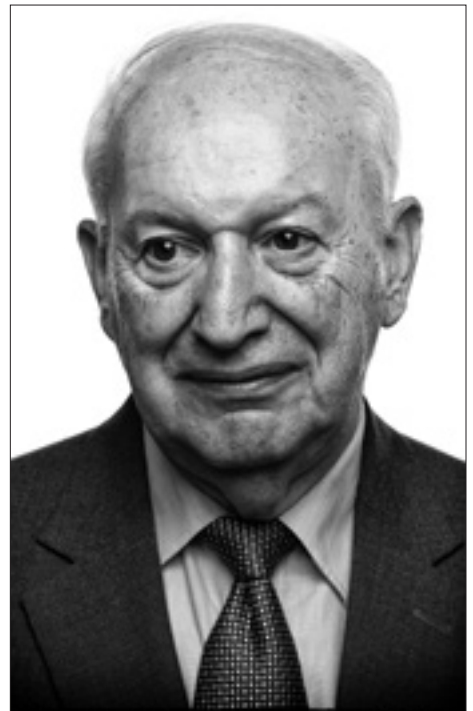
Triumph 2026 Annual Fundraiser

March 4

There's still time to purchase your sponsorship or tickets for this year's Triumph Dinner, Wednesday, March 4, at the Arthrex One Conference Center in Naples. We hope you'll join us to help celebrate our 25th anniversary!

The dinner's theme is "Remembering the Past to Inspire the Future."

This special evening will honor Holocaust survivor and founding Museum patron Rob Nossen with the 2026 Triumph Award. Our first ever Humanitarian Award will be presented to Paula S.



Rob Nossen

Apsell. She is an Emmy® Award-winning Producer of the PBS series NOVA.

For tickets, sponsorships and more information, please visit hmcec.org.

I look forward to seeing you soon at the Museum! 🌍



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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!

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



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

Beth Tikvah invites everyone to this special event to recognize GenShoah and hear Holocaust Museum & Cohen Education Center President and CEO Erin Blankenship talk about her experience with "Dimensions in Testimony," a project of the USC Shoah Foundation.

Genealogy Workshop
Sunday, Feb. 15, 1 p.m.
Located at the Holocaust Museum & Cohen Education center. **RSVP is required**; email liebro@gmail.com.

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. This session will provide a good starting point for further inquiries.

"Our Stories" GenShoah member get-together
Date TBD (tentative Mar. 1), 1 p.m.
Located at a private residence; **RSVP is required**; email liebro@gmail.com.

This event is an opportunity to talk with other Holocaust survivors and descendants about themselves and their family experiences on a specific topic.

GenShoah Readers & Learners book discussion
Thursday, March 12, 11 a.m.
Located at Beth Tikvah. **RSVP is**

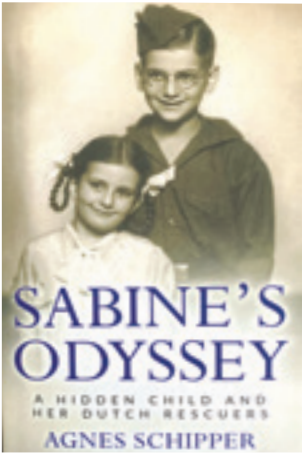
required; email office@bethtikvah.us.


We will discuss "Sabine's Odyssey," facilitated by Estelle Kafer (2G). "Sabine's Odyssey" is a memoir written by Agnes Schipper in honor of her mother's life during World War II and of her father, a member of the Dutch Resistance.

2G Guest Speaker Agnes Schipper
Wednesday, March 18, 2 p.m.
Located at the Holocaust Museum & Cohen Education center. **RSVP is required**; visit: hmcec.org.



Agnes Schipper



Agnes Schipper is the daughter of a hidden child and her father was member of the Dutch Resistance. Agnes was raised as a Catholic — the faith of her parents — and first learned about her mother's hidden Jewish ancestry when she was 20 years old. 



April 2024 Genealogy Workshop



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Nashim Circle at Temple Judea

A women's circle is taking shape

By Linat Bahar

Something meaningful is quietly taking root in our community: a new women's circle, created with the intention of building genuine, ongoing connection between women — beyond roles, titles or expectations.

This group was born from a simple but powerful understanding: women give so much to family, work and community



yet rarely have a consistent space just for themselves. The women's circle offers exactly that: a welcoming place to pause, connect and build a sense of belonging together.

This is not a one-time event, but the beginning of a community. Meeting by meeting, trust grows.

Conversations deepen. Women get to know one another beyond daily routines and responsibilities. The connection


unfolds naturally, without pressure and without the need to perform.

The circle is open to women of different ages and life stages. Each woman brings her own story, experience, sensitivity, strength and together, a shared space is created where all of it is welcome.

At the heart of the group are values of listening, mutual respect, softness and resilience. Through thoughtful conversation and gentle creative experiences,

the circle offers an opportunity not to “fix” but to reconnect to ourselves and to one another.

This women's circle is growing intentionally and gradually with care for intimacy and warmth. It is a community built heart-to-heart, step-by-step, rooted in the belief that when women are connected, the entire community grows stronger.

You are warmly invited to join us. Please contact the synagogue office at 239-433-0201 for additional information. 

“Cuba’s Forgotten Jewels: A Haven in Havana”

With filmmaker Judith Kreith and The Cuba-America Jewish Mission Former President Rabbi Sunny Schnitzer

By Katherine Bernheimer, Bat Yam Temple of the Islands

Judy Kreith grew up hearing the stories of her mother's narrow escape from Nazi Germany in 1938 and her family's good fortune in finding a safe haven in Cuba.

Marion Finkels Kreith spent her teenage years working in the flourishing diamond business in Havana before immigrating to the U.S. in 1946. Marion, who died in January at age 98, had lived in Boulder, Colorado, since 1959 and recently appeared on the cover of *Hadasah Magazine*, where her remarkable

story was featured alongside those of other Holocaust survivors.

Drawn to Cuba by her family's history, Judy became a performer, teacher and choreographer specializing in Cuban dance, visiting the island often throughout the years. Inspired by the thousands of Jewish refugees who survived the Holocaust in Cuba, Judy teamed up with filmmaker Robin Truesdale to tell her mother's fascinating story in the 2017 documentary “Cuba's Forgotten Jewels: A Haven in Havana.”


Bat Yam Temple of the Islands will host a screening of the 47-minute film, with Judy in attendance, Wednesday, Feb. 25, 4 p.m. Cuban dancing and refreshments will follow the screening and talkback.

Bat Yam's Rabbi Sunny Schnitzer is especially delighted to share the Jewish history of Cuba, having served for many years as president of the Cuba-America Jewish Mission, which works to revitalize Jewish life in Cuba. He has visited the island 21 times, leading missions and working with the organization to provide a free pharmacy, kosher butcher, and to build a Jewish senior center, a preschool and a synagogue in the town of Santa Clara.

On her many trips to the tropical paradise that offered her mother shelter during the Shoah, Judy worked with Cuban historians researching the Jewish refugee history of Cuba. Since the release of the film, which has been shown at festivals around the world, she has spoken on the subject to many groups, including a recent conference at the University of Antwerp, Belgium.

Through firsthand survivor accounts, the film takes us back to 1940s Havana — an era at once tumultuous, heartbreaking and intoxicating — to reveal an immigration success story. With a stunning musical score of Jewish melodies and

the pulsating music of Havana, the film merges the realities of two vastly different yet intermingled cultures, bringing this colorful and uplifting piece of history to light.

This event is free to the public. RSVP is preferred by emailing batyamsanibel@gmail.com. 

“Cuba’s Forgotten Jewels: A Haven in Havana”

With filmmaker Judith Kreith and The Cuba-America Jewish Mission Former President Rabbi Sunny Schnitzer

Where:

Bat Yam Temple of the Islands, 2050 Periwinkle Way, Sanibel, Florida, 33957

When:

Wednesday, Feb. 25, 4 p.m.

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Women's Simcha Circle

Jewish love, boundaries and caring for ourselves

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

February often frames love as something we give to others. Jewish tradition offers a fuller picture — one where *ahavah* (love) also includes caring for ourselves with wisdom and intention.



■ Toby Buerger



■ Ashley Kogan-Weed

In Judaism, love is not self-sacrifice at all costs. It is balance. We are taught to love others as ourselves — not instead of ourselves. That distinction matters, especially for women who are often conditioned to say yes, carry more, and stretch beyond what is sustainable.

Jewish self-love is practical



Chanukah Paint Night

and grounded. It shows up in everyday choices, such as:

- Pausing before saying yes, asking yourself, “Do I have the capacity for this right now?”
- Creating time for rest without guilt, honoring the value of *menuchah* (rest).
- Speaking honestly and kindly, even when it feels uncomfortable.
- Recognizing that healthy boundaries preserve relationships rather than damage them.

The Women's Simcha Circle offers a different kind of connection — one rooted in shared life stages, busy schedules and honest conversation. In supportive, judgment-free spaces, women remind one another that having limits is not a weakness; it is wisdom.

Rabbi Luna notes, "Caring for oneself is also about nurturing friendships that matter. Friendships that sustain us remind us who we are and help us grow."

At Temple Beth El, these conversations unfold naturally through connection, reflection and shared experience. Love becomes less about perfection and more about presence.

This February, may we expand our understanding of love to include self-respect, balance and the quiet strength of walking alongside one another.

To learn more or connect with us, visit facebook.com/womenssimchacircle. 



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Temple Beth El's mission to Cuba

By Rabbi Nicole Luna, Temple Beth El

The colors were bright and vivid. Riding in the 1950s technicolor convertible cars in Havana was a highlight of our time in Cuba, stopping at the Hotel Nacional de Cuba, a historic Spanish-style hotel by the sea, where we enjoyed mojitos and stories about the mafia and casinos that used to dominate the hotel. Then, we drove to old Havana.

Yet, just like Joseph's coat of many colors in the book of Genesis, the colorful convertibles concealed a painful truth. We witnessed lines of people waiting for their bread rations, laundry hanging from the balconies of crumbling and decrepit buildings, mounds of trash spewing onto the streets. We heard stories of salaries that cannot feed families, shortages of basic goods, and a medical system struggling to function. Attendance at Shabbat services in Havana was lower than usual because of mosquito-borne viruses.



Rabbi Luna and 38 congregants and friends of Temple Beth El

In Joseph's story, it takes him a while to see past the bright colors of his coat and notice the shades of gray surrounding his family. Joseph's turning point begins when checking on his flock a man approaches him and asks, "mah t'vakesh?" ("What

are you looking for?") Joseph ultimately replies to the man, saying, "*Et a-chai ani m'vakesh*" ("I am looking for my brothers.")

This trip was more than an interesting experience or a new place to travel. We went to learn about and be with the Jewish community. We found our brothers and sisters in Havana. They remain dedicated and committed to Judaism and the Jewish people despite crisis and scarcity. More than 90% of the Jewish community fled Cuba after the revolution in 1959. Until the early 1990s, people were afraid to be outwardly religious under communism. Today, there are only about 1,000 Jews left in Cuba, primarily in Havana.

common across Cuba due to crumbling and outdated infrastructure. There are no rabbis left in Cuba, so the *B'nai Mitzvah* Tutor Coordinates Services lead Shabbat worship with the students after their *b'nai mitzvah*. I was honored to coordinate with them to lead a joint Shabbat service and deliver the sermon.

We chose a service that allowed us to share our melodies sung beautifully by our volunteer soloist, Jim Waldorf, and accompanied by our volunteer pianist, Hal Eskin. At the end of services, the children came up and we put our arms around each other, swaying and singing "Adon Olam." We were in awe of this community that endures hardships and still comes together every Friday evening to find comfort in community and reach out to God.

The biblical Joseph ultimately ends up in prison, and when he sees that two other prisoners are upset, he asks them,



We visited the Sephardi Center and found Samuel who proudly told us there is no antisemitism in Cuba. While the Cuban government is anti-Israel, he said he could walk from one end to Cuba to another with a *kippah* on his head and no one will bother him.

We visited the Orthodox congregation and found Jacob who serves as a *shochet*, a person certified to slaughter an animal in a kosher way. He explained he is one of the few people in Cuba who has the necessary state-permission to kill a cow. According to him, if you kill a person, you spend eight years in jail, but if you kill a cow, you get 20 years in jail.

We spent Shabbat at El Patronado, a conservative synagogue that serves as the center of Jewish life in Havana. We brought hundreds of pounds of medicines, toiletries and bug spray. When we arrived, they didn't have electricity. Blackouts are

"*Madua p'neichem ra'im hayom?*" ("Why do you appear downcast today?"). Joseph's greatest spiritual development came by looking for his brothers and being present with other people's suffering. We too grew spiritually by coming to Havana — by listening, praying, learning and supporting. We cultivated a Judaism that insists we not look away.

We experienced Cuba's color and cracks at the same time. We witnessed how people can live with very little material possessions and still carry immense dignity and joy. Jewish life survives in Cuba because of people showing up for each other. This is the sacred task of the Jewish people. May we continue to appreciate the beauty of Cuba's color and work together to heal its broken cracks.

For more information about upcoming Cuba mitzvah mission trips, contact president@templebethel.com. 🌐



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Jews By Choice

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

By Dawn Wineinger, Temple Beth El member and volunteer

Jews By Choice meets via Zoom on the last Thursday each month from 8 to 9 p.m. in a relaxed and comfortable format. 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, if you have questions and/or need to talk with like-minded individuals in a friendly, non-judgmental atmosphere, we invite you to attend Jews By Choice.

For more information contact me at d.wineinger@yahoo.com.

A Jewish 12-step recovery group

Every Saturday at 11 a.m. via Zoom

Courtesy of Temple Beth El

Folks in search of recovery are invited to experience the Twelve Steps from a Jewish perspective 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 Twelve 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, a 12-step fellowship that offers a recovery program for those affected by someone’s addiction, will be meeting in the community room at Jewish Federation of Lee & Charlotte Counties.

The disease of addiction can affect family members and friends of addicts physically, emotionally and spiritually. In

the group meetings, these family members and friends share their experiences, strengths and hopes to help each other and themselves.

Addiction is a family disease. It affects the relationships of those close to the addict: parents, spouses, siblings, children, longtime friends and employers. If someone’s addiction is affecting you, first you must help yourself. Just

come to a meeting. You will hear 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 over 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 jogo118@gmail.com or 239-470-4827.

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What do older people prefer to be called?

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

By Rabbi Barbara Aiello

As Dorothea and her granddaughter Lisa waited in the long supermarket checkout line, a young man abruptly left sneering, “You can stand there and wait for ‘Gramps’ to count out his pennies. I’m finding another line.”

As Lisa watched her grandmother frown, she said, “How disrespectful! Calling that old guy ‘Gramps.’” Dorothea nodded, “‘Old guy’ isn’t such a good choice either.”

Lisa acquiesced, “If ‘Gramps’ and ‘old guy’ are wrong, what’s the right thing to say?”

This question is a timely one, especially when the way someone is described can lead to upset, hurt feelings or misunderstanding.

Dorothea explained, “Years ago persons with disabilities were called ‘crippled’ or ‘handicapped.’ Persons with differences lobbied hard for terms that focused on the positive — on the individual — terms that didn’t lump them together in a group. I wish we’d do the same for older people.”

In the *AARP The Magazine* article, “Who You Calling ‘Young Lady’?” (Feb. 2, 2018), authors Amanda Duarte and Mike Albo tackle what they term “ageist



■ Rabbi Barbara Aiello

language” and emphasize that patronizing terms describing older adults are harmful and hurtful.

Gerontology specialists and professionals who work with older adults explain that terms like “over the hill,” “feisty,” “Blue-Hairs,” “Gramps,” and even “the elderly” are demeaning. Older adults report that when they are addressed as “sweetie” or “honey” and are told that they are “adorable” or “cute,” they feel as though they are being treated like children.

The Association for Jewish Aging Services uses the term “aging population,” while most academic journals and *The New York Times* stylebook caution against using “the elderly,” instead advising that “older adults” and “seniors” are the preferred descriptors.

Interestingly, even the term “senior citizen” has fallen out of favor with some.

Susan Jacoby, author of “Never Say Die: The Myth and Marketing of the New Old Age,” takes issue with the term “senior” to describe older adults. In a recent *The Atlantic* article, she says, “The word ‘senior’ is one of the most common euphemisms for old people and happens to be the one I hate the most.”

Also in *The Atlantic*, author Joe Pinsker poses the question in the article, “When Does Someone Become ‘Old’?” (January 2020). He found that “it’s surprisingly hard to find a good term for people in late life.”

So, let’s ask the experts: the seniors themselves. What do older adults in our own community think and feel about how they are described and addressed?

Michael R., a man in his 70s, says, “I prefer ‘old person.’ It’s short, sweet and that’s what we are.” Josie C., who just turned 70, votes for “mature person” and advises that how one prefers to be

names. I guess we’re like all the other groups. We say stuff to each other that we wouldn’t want others to say to us.”

Larry K., who will be 99 in July, takes a practical approach. “Doctors, nurses, caregivers, like that, they should ask us how we like to be called and then proceed with caution,” he says. “Don’t go using words you don’t understand. There’s a Yiddish word, ‘altakaker,’ that is offensive. I won’t define it. Just take my advice and don’t say it.”

Authors Amanda and Mike emphasize, “except for a few incredibly insensitive jerks, most of us are increasingly careful to avoid using hurtful language toward people different from us.” Also stating, “Why eliminate hurtful language? The answer is simple — because it hurts.”

As Lisa remarked, “Sticks and stones can break my bones but names can really hurt me.”

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. ☺

Interestingly, even the term “senior citizen” has fallen out of favor with some.

addressed is related to “a person’s own view of their place in life.”

Carol K., in her 90s, gets straight to the point. “I have no problem with being referred to as part of ‘the elderly.’ I mean, that’s what we are.”

Frank J. observes, “when we ‘oldsters’ get together we call each other ‘geezer,’ ‘codger,’ and ‘old coot,’ but we don’t want younger people calling us those



INSPIRING EMPOWERING YOUR PASSION WOMEN

2026

SUNDAY, MARCH 15, 2026 AT 11:00AM

HELD AT AN ELEGANT COUNTRY CLUB IN NORTH NAPLES

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.

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2026 INSPIRING WOMEN HONOREES



Rabbi Ariel Boxman
Community and Spiritual Leader
and Jewish Educator



Jane Schiff
Philanthropist and
Community Leader



Sylvia Simko
Global Zionist and
Community Leader

Discover the wines from way down south

By Jerry Greenfield, the Wine Whisperer

Newcomers to the wine world usually make their first pleasurable discoveries in the wines from traditional regions, like California, Italy, and France. But there's a lot more to explore, because so many other countries and regions have made their mark on the international wine scene in the past 20 or 30 years. Most are usually cultivating popular international varietals like Pinot Noir, Cabernet Sauvignon and Chardonnay, so even though the regions might not be so familiar, at least the varietals are.

One country that has risen to prominence on the international scene is Chile, and there are several good reasons. First, Chile is a long narrow country on the southwest coast of South America. In



■ Jerry Greenfield

The trade tasting of Chilean wines that I recently attended opened my eyes to several new discoveries, and they all offer great quality at reasonable prices. Sample widely.

Montes Alpha Chardonnay Aconcagua 2020 (\$24) – Light lemon yellow color in the glass with aromas of citrus and green apple. There is noticeable minerality on the

nose as well. Notes of lemon, yellow flowers and honeysuckle on the palate. Wine Whisperer rating on a scale of 100: WW 89

Viña Garcés Silva Boya Pinot Noir 2020 (\$20) – Wild berries, big purple flowers and herbs. A big wine, darker in the glass than the usual Pinot. Highly aromatic cherry and strawberry notes and dry rose petals. One of my tasting companions detected flavors of raspberry Twizzlers, and she was right! WW 91

Santa Rita Floresta Chardonnay Limari Valley 2021 (\$20) – The nose and palate both pick up green apple, pineapple and creamy lemon curd, balanced by notes of lemon peel. Nice! WW 90

Miguel Torres Cordillera de los Andes Chardonnay 2023 (\$20) – Zippy, vibrant acidity with simple

direct flavors of apple, grass, and lime. WW 89


Concha y Toro Amelia Pinot Noir 2023 (\$55) – Spending 12 months in French oak gives this wine plenty of dimension and complexity, with notes of sour cherry, plum and baking spice. Very well-balanced considering the full-bodied, 14% alcohol content. WW 90

Terra Noble Algarrabo Pinot Noir 2023 (\$15) – Very fruit forward with characteristic cherry and strawberry notes right up front. Light ruby color in the glass, and the acidity kicks in on the finish. WW 88

Ask the Wine Whisperer

Q: What grape is Beaujolais made from?
Denise B., Bonita Springs

A: The Beaujolais wine region is known for the red wine made from the Gamay grape. The region is just south of Burgundy. Some wine experts consider Beaujolais a part of Burgundy while others see it as a separate region. It is characterized by very light, fruity flavors and low alcohol content. The release of “Beaujolais Nouveau” on the third Thursday of every November is practically a national holiday.

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 



fact, it's about 2,700 miles long and 110 miles wide. The good news for us wine lovers is that virtually all of the country lies along the Pacific coast. The cool waters of the Humboldt Current affect the coastal climate and temperature range in ways that are perfect for the cultivation of fine wine grapes.

The area, in certain ways, is similar to the conditions along the best wine-growing regions of California. The fog that flows into the vineyards through the Templeton and Petaluma gaps in Paso Robles and Sonoma, respectively, influences the temperature variation (the “diurnal swing”) between day and night in just the right way. The same is true of the “sea smoke” that drifts up the river canyon into the Sta. Rita Hills area outside Santa Barbara.

The second major influence is that several noted winemakers from France and other countries have migrated to Chile's best winegrowing regions, lured by the appeal of the microclimates offered by the coastal areas. Alexandria Marnier, whose family is behind the famous French liqueur Grand Marnier, founded Casa Lapostolle in the Apalta subregion. Her Casa Lapostolle wines are very highly regarded, especially the luxury Clos Apalta bottling. The late Paul Pontallier, who was the winemaker at France's legendary Chateau Margaux, found his way down there in 1984 and established Viña Aquitania with several Chilean and French partners.



Bat Yam Temple of the Islands proudly presents the next free program in our 2025-2026 Education Series

CUBA's FORGOTTEN JEWELS

A film and a discussion led by the film's producer Judith Kreith and Rabbi Sunny Schnitzer who led the CubaAmerica Jewish Mission



Wednesday, February 25, at 4pm
Bat Yam Temple / Sanibel Congregational UCC
2050 Periwinkle Way, Sanibel

“Cuba's Forgotten Jewels” was born of the tales that Marion Kreith told her daughter, co-director Judy Kreith, over the years. Marion escaped war torn Europe as a young girl with her family, evading Nazi capture and crossing the Atlantic to a tropical paradise. In this film, her story mingles with the personal accounts of other refugees who recall their escape to Havana and the challenges they face in an exotic and unfamiliar land. With a stunning musical score of Jewish melodies and the pulsating music of Havana, the film merges the realities of two vastly different yet intermingled cultures, bringing this colorful and uplifting piece of history to light.



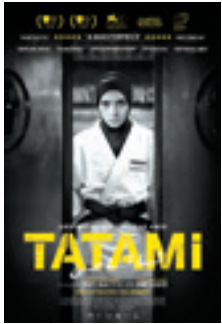
Admission is free
with an RSVP preferred to:
batyamsanibel@gmail.com



THE JEWISH FEDERATION

30th Annual Jewish Film Festival

SUNDAY, FEB. 1 - SUNDAY, FEB. 7



“TATAMI”

Sunday, 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”

Tuesday, 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”

Wednesday, 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”

Friday, 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”

Tuesday, 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”

Thursday, 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 Nesher 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.

Special Guest Talk Back Immediately Following the Film

106 MINUTES • HEBREW WITH ENGLISH SUBTITLES • ISRAEL • NARRATIVE

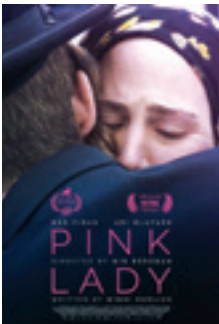


“WELCOME TO YIDDISHLAND/ JEWS IN MUSIC”

Thursday, 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”

Thursday, March 5 at 6:30 p.m.

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”

Wednesday, 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

2025, MARCH 29



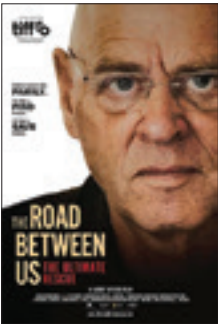
“CHARLES GRODIN: REBEL WITH A CAUSE”

Sunday, 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.

Special Guest Talk Back Immediately Following the Film

93 MINUTES • ENGLISH • USA • DOCUMENTARY



“THE ROAD BETWEEN US”

Thursday, 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.

Special Guest Talk Back Immediately Following the Film

95 MINUTES • ENGLISH • CANADA • DOCUMENTARY



“SONG OF ASCENT/ALON MY BROTHER”

Tuesday, 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”

Thursday, March 26 at 6:30 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

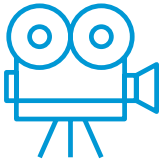
2026 Jewish Film Festival of Southwest Florida

Regal Belltower, Fort Myers
Individual film tickets: \$14, On Sale 12/1/2025
Festival Pass: \$168, On Sale 11/1/2025
www.jewishfederationlcc.org/jff2026

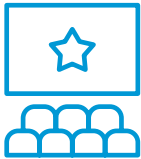
FILMS & DATES
“Tatami” - Sunday, Feb. 1 at 3 p.m.
“The Ring” - Tuesday, Feb. 3 at 6:30 p.m.
“Once Upon My Mother/The Last Jews of Guantanamo” Wednesday, Feb. 11 at 6:30 p.m.
“Matchmaking 2” - Friday, Feb. 13 at 3 p.m.
“Never Alone/Ice Cream Man” - Tuesday, Feb. 17 at 6:30 p.m.
“Air War” - Thursday, Feb. 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” Sunday, March 15 at 3 p.m.
“The Road Between Us” - Thursday, 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!



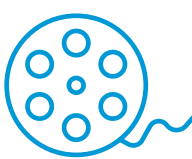
General admission ticket open seating for all films.



Festival Passes available on Saturday, Nov 1, 2025.



Individual tickets available on Monday, Dec. 1, 2025.



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

Interesting films, Grammys, a surprise PBS series 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.

“Dracula”

Opening in theaters Feb. 6, “Dracula” is an English-language film made in France, directed and written by Luc Bresson, a Frenchman.

Here’s much of the plot, but not the ending: In the 1400s, Prince Vladimir of Rumania (Caleb Landry Jones) is battling the Muslim Turks. His beloved wife, Elizabeth, is killed during this battle and Vlad renounces God and becomes Dracula.

For four centuries, Dracula seeks the reincarnation of Elizabeth. This changes when Dracula meets with Hacker, a Parisian attorney. It’s a “boring” business meeting, but during this meeting Dracula realizes that Mina, Hacker’s wife, is the reincarnation of Elizabeth. Vlad wants Mina and Hacker, of course, wants her too.

Zoë Bleu Sidel, 31, plays Mina. “Dracula” is her first big film part. She has also been a part-time fashion model

and a part-time ballet dancer. Lately, she is dating **Hopper Penn**, Sean Penn’s actor son.

Zoe’s mother is actress **Rosanna Arquette**, now 63. Rosanna’s well-known siblings are actors **Patricia Arquette** and **David Arquette**. The three siblings had a Jewish mother and a non-Jewish father.

Zoe’s (Jewish) father is **John Sidel**, now 59. He was married to Rosanna



from 1994 to 1999. Zoe is Rosanna’s only child. John, an American, is a political scientist, and he’s a faculty member of the prestigious London School of Economics.

“Dreams”

This drama opens in theaters on Feb. 27. It follows the secret affair of wealthy socialite Jennifer (Jessica Chastain) with a Mexican ballet dancer and undocumented immigrant (Isaac Hernandez).

To date, “Dreams” reviews have been very good. It was written and directed by **Michel Franco**, 46. “Dreams” is the 10th film that Michel has written and directed. His work is getting much more notice in recent years.

His Jewish father was born and raised in Mexico, and his Jewish mother grew-up in Haifa, Israel, and moved to Mexico.

“Shrinking”

Well, here’s a heads-up — “Shrinking,” a drama/comedy series on Apple+, returned with new episodes starting on

Jan. 27. It’s a “prestigious” streaming series, so there are no more than 12 episodes per season, and you’ll wait for a year (!) to see a new episode.

Harrison Ford, 83, and **Jason Segal**, 45, have star roles in “Shrinking.” Jason and **Brett Goldstein** co-created “Shrinking.” Brett, a British “landsman,” also writes and stars in “Ted Lasso,” Apple’s biggest hit.

Grammy Awards

This year, the Grammy Awards ceremony will air on CBS, Sunday, Feb. 1, 8 p.m. I define the Grammy Awards this way: It is for excellence in a lot of stuff, but mostly music. Only the most popular categories — those that make money — are shown on the Grammys TV broadcast.

For reasons too difficult to shortly explain, the number of Jewish Grammy nominees who are viewable via the TV broadcast, has shrunk about 90% in the last 20 years.

Here are two Jews nominated in big categories this year: **Jack Antonoff**, 41. He got seven (!) Grammy nominations: mostly for producing and writing songs for singers Sabrina Carpenter and Kendrick Lamar; and there’s Linkin Park, a veteran rock band, which is up for a best rock record Grammy and the best rock record performance. Their (Jewish) lead guitarist is **Brad Delson**, 48.

“Finding Your Roots”

Henry Louis Gates will be getting a lot of Jewish eyeballs soon. I will explain. He’s famous as the host of “Finding Your Roots,” the celebrity ancestry program on PBS. The 12th season of “Finding Your Roots” began on Jan. 6. There are 10 episodes each season. Four episodes were available in January; four more will premiere in February; and then the show takes a hiatus in March. The 2026 “Finding Your Roots” series ends with two episodes in April.

This season, two Jewish celebs will be featured: actress **Lizzy Caplan**, 43, and billionaire **Barry Diller**, 83. Lizzy’s episode sneaked up on me; her episode premiered Jan. 27. But you can catch it for free on the PBS app and website. Barry’s show will be April 14. (I’ll give a lot of background on him in my April column).

“Black and Jewish America: An Interwoven History”

Here’s the “biggie” news. Henry Louis Gates is also the host of another PBS series. It’s a new series entitled “Black and Jewish America: An Interwoven History.”

Here’s part of the PBS publicity release: “[It’s] a four-part docuseries that explores the complex relationship between Black Americans and Jewish Americans — forged in shared struggle, tested by division.”

The first episode premieres Tuesday, Feb.3, 9 p.m. The remaining three episodes will premiere the following Tuesdays: Feb. 10, Feb. 17 and Feb. 24. 🌍



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.



Jewish Federation
of Lee & Charlotte Counties

IF YOU WOULD LIKE MORE INFORMATION ON BECOMING A LION, FEEL FREE TO CONTACT EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, **DEBBIE SANFORD**, AT DEBBIESANFORD@JFEDLCC.ORG

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Mailbag!

By Brian Simon

One of the things I enjoy about writing this column is the feedback I get from people in the community. Sometimes they ask me questions. Today’s column is kind of a “mailbag” segment, only instead of “mail” or even “e-mail” the questions came through face-to-face encounters with people in the community. Except for the ones I made up.



■ Brian Simon

Question: Brian, where do you get your ideas for your column?

Answer: This is a great question because it has two possible meanings: one is straightforward, and the other is more subtle — code for “Why in the world did you think anyone would want to read about **that**?”

This is not very scientific, but I usually wait for inspiration to strike. Maybe it’s something I read or something that crosses my mind. For the last three columns, the inspiration came early. Sometimes, though, I’m still waiting for inspiration as the deadline nears.

The story about hugging your spiritual leaders after High Holy Days actually came before High Holy Days, but I loved talking with Rabbi Luna, Rabbi David and Cantor Butensky, and I knew they would have interesting things to say. The story about spelling Hanukkah came from thinking about how I never really know if I’m spelling it right. And the story about the letter W came from a random thought, “W is the weirdest letter.” Once I have the idea, I start googling for information, and if I start finding good stuff, I know the story will work.

Q: Would you write an article about Jewish Disability Month?

A: This question came from Roz Shraiar when we were at the community break-fast. Good timing Roz! It’s now called Jewish Disabilities Awareness, Acceptance and Inclusion Month because why use three words when you can make it twice as long and require punctuation!

When I first heard about this, I assumed that the most common disability for Jews is that we can’t read Hebrew, but no! JDAAIM is observed in February. The goal is to raise awareness and inclusion for people with disabilities in Jewish communities.

Our forefather Jacob became partially disabled after wrestling with a divine being who wrenched Jacob’s hip at the end of struggle. Although he walked with a limp for the rest of his life, Jacob earned the name Israel as a result of the struggle and also was allowed to use

special parking spaces. And he always told people it was an old football injury.

Our ancestor Moses also suffered from a disability, or so he claimed, when he was trying to get out of being chosen by God to speak to Pharaoh on behalf of the Jewish people. Moses protested that he was “slow of speech and slow of tongue.”

The Jewish National Fund is one of many organizations which supports JDAAIM.

Q: What are your favorite kind of columns to write?

A: I really like when I find quirky stuff that turns out to be true. The W story was like that. Maybe the best example was the story about the permanent calendar. That started from an article I read in *The Atlantic* about the seven-day week, and the more I researched, the more crazy stuff I found about attempts to change the calendar to make it more standardized. My stories may be funny, but they’re usually not **that** funny, so I need some strange-but-true facts to make them work.

I also really liked the Purim spiel I wrote in 2021, which Keith Grossman helped me with. It’s the only column I asked the editor to reprint the following year. I read that in front of our congregation at synagogue, and it got a lot of laughs.

Q: Do you remember all the columns you’ve written?

A: I definitely forgot one. Rabbi Mendel Gordon called me a little while ago and made reference to a story I wrote about wearing a *kippah* outside of synagogue, and I could not for the life of me remember what he was talking about. I finally found it. The story was five years old. Sometimes, I go back and look at old stories, and I usually remember something about them. But not always.

Q: Do people ever tell you they don’t like your column?

A: Yes. This is a column for a Jewish audience. What else should I expect? I consider it sign of respect that they have high expectations. There’s a scale that goes from, “I really liked your story,” at the top. The next step down is, “Your story was interesting.” Then, “I read your column this month” (no other comment). And the bottom is, “I usually like your stories but not this one.”

Q: Will next month’s column be better than this?

A: We can only hope. 🕊

THE COMMUNITY-WIDE WOMEN’S HEALTH SYMPOSIUM

For Women...By Women

SPOTLIGHTING FEMALE PHYSICIANS SHARING THEIR EXPERTISE

Presented By



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Jewish Federation of Lee and Charlotte Counties
Women’s Cultural Alliance

SUNDAY, APRIL 26, 2026
1 PM - 4 PM

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Program of the Day
The program is presented “In Conversation”

Why Women are Special -

The first session will present a Keynote Speaker delivering remarks about “Why Women are Special” for 20 +/- minutes with a Q & A to follow. She will explain why women’s care has been different from men’s care over time and it does lead to differences in treatment, although it is starting to change in recent years. Following the Q & A, a Break is set for standing up, stretching, taking a healthy snack which will be provided or using facilities.

Women’s Life Cycle-

The second session will be a panel discussion about a Women’s Life Cycle” focusing on various aspects not all but such as: postpartum depression, IVF, perimenopause, menopause, anxiety and depression. This session has a different moderator and is a two (2) person panel - one doctor from NCH and Lee Health. The timing is 30 minutes for the panel and a Q & A to follow the same as above.

Know Your Body-

The third session will also be a panel discussion about the# 1 cause of Women’s Death and therefore also a health issue in women’s lives: the Heart. This session has a different moderator and is a two (2) person panel - one doctor from NCH and Lee Health. The structure and timing are the same as above.

Stay connected all month long at
www.JewishFederationLCC.org



GENERATIONS OF THE SHOAH SOUTHWEST FLORIDA

genshoah@hmcec.org

Tzedek, tzedek tirdof, Robert H. Jackson and more

By Ida Margolis and Shelley Lieb

The above from Deuteronomy 16:20 is translated as 'Justice, justice, thou shalt pursue.' The word justice is repeated, perhaps as a reminder that society must continually strive toward justice, and that justice must be pursued constantly and actively.



Ida Margolis and Shelley Lieb

Recently there was a new film "Nuremberg" dealing with one of the Nuremberg Trials and, of course, with justice. On the 80th anniversary of the Nuremberg Trials, it is important to remember that the trials are enormously important to history because they changed how justice and accountability were viewed.

The chief U.S. prosecutor at the trials, Robert H. Jackson, has been described as one of the "most accomplished forgotten men of the 20th century" (*Smithsonian*



Robert H. Jackson (Photo by Ray D'Addario, courtesy of the Robert H. Jackson Center)

Magazine, 2025). Legal scholar John Q. Barret described Jackson as a patron saint who should be known for much more than bringing the Nazis to justice. Even Chat GPT notes that it was U.S. Supreme Court Justice Robert H. Jackson whose vision shaped both the trials and the moral framework that endures today.

"We must never forget," he declared, "that the record on which we judge these defendants is the record on which history will judge us tomorrow." His legacy challenges us to uphold justice not only in moments of global crisis but in our daily defense of human dignity and the rule of law.

Some readers may be familiar with his legacy, the Jackson Center in Jamestown, New York. Or by this quote of his: "The wrongs which we seek to condemn and punish have been so calculated, so malignant, and so devastating that civilization cannot tolerate their being ignored because it cannot survive their being repeated."

That is why the Holocaust Museum & Cohen Education Center teaches the

lessons of the Holocaust, and GenShoah promotes Holocaust education as well as human rights.

"Dimensions in Testimony"

A program honoring GenShoah will take place at Beth Tikvah on Tuesday, Feb. 3, 7 p.m. Holocaust Museum & Cohen Education Center President and CEO Erin Blankenship will speak about "Dimensions in Testimony," an initiative from the USC Shoah Foundation that enables people to ask questions of Holocaust survivors based on pre-recorded interviews.

GenShoah gatherings

The mission of GenShoah also includes connecting descendants of Holocaust survivors to one another and thus presents many activities throughout the year. Recently GenShoah has its annual Potluck

brunch that brought many members together. In addition to the opportunity to schmooze and learn about the background of those attending, member Linda Denning spoke about the fascinating book and beloved story "Hana's Suitcase: The Quest to Solve a Holocaust Mystery" by Karen Levine. Thanks to all who worked on making this a successful event, to those who attended, and to those who provided delicious dishes and shared stories.



Linda Denning presents a review of the book "Hana's Suitcase" at the GenShoah potluck



GenShoah potluck attendees Lois Lourie and Michael Gurtman



Marina Berkovich (left) with Rene and Sam Geist at the GenShoah potluck

Other opportunities to share stories will be at a get together with 2G GenShoah members on Sunday, March 1 at 1 p.m.

On Sunday, March 8 at 1 p.m. in Sarasota, our local group has been invited to a Generations After Summit sponsored by the Jewish Federation of Sarasota-Manatee Generations After group.

For more information about these programs, other GenShoah programs, and general information about GenShoah SWFL, email genshoahswfl@hmcec.org.

CHAVURAT SHALOM OF SOUTHWEST FLORIDA
chavuratshalom@gmail.com

Honoring trees, tradition and community

By Cheryl Fulmer, Ellen Feingold and Marcia Rudin

February, the coldest month in Southwest Florida, brings the earliest promise of a warming trend. The Hebrew word for the month of February is *Shevat*. And *Tu B'Shevat*, literally translated as the 15th of Shevat, is celebrated as the New Year for Trees — the Rosh Hashanah for Trees — Israeli Arbor Day. This year it falls on Feb. 2.

In modern day terms, *Tu B'Shevat* is the Jewish Earth Day, a day when Jews make a special effort to recognize our role as stewards of our precious earth. In Israel it is a celebration of the agricultural wonders of Israel and the foods that grow abundantly in Israel. It is customary to eat the Seven Species mentioned in our Torah: wheat, barley, figs,

dates, grapes, olives and pomegranates. It is the time of year when we plant new trees, and donate to the Jewish National Fund, the tree-planting nonprofit that has helped make Israel green after centuries of destructive landscape practices.

December events

Members of Chavurat Shalom who were in Fort Myers and Sanibel on Dec. 14, 2025, gathered at the home of Myra Klahr for the celebration of Chanukah to enjoy good food, good company and the lighting of the first candle of Chanukah.

Jane Picker, a longtime member of the Sanibel community, was our guest lecturer on Dec. 16, 2025. She is a respected scholar about Russia and a retired legal

educator from several U.S. law schools. She presented her perspective on the conflict between Russia and Ukraine — at times provocative — and answered questions. Jane studied the Russian language at Swarthmore and Soviet Law at Yale Law School where she met her future husband, Sidney Picker.

The Pickers started the Russian-United States Legal Education Foundation (RUSLEF) to fund the non-tuition expenses of Russian students who qualified to attend U.S. law schools. To date, a total of 125 Russian students travelled to the U.S. for a year at a law school where they earned the Master of Law degree (LLM). Many of the students stay in touch with Jane and helped to celebrate her recent 90th birthday via Zoom. The program continues to this day but on a limited basis.

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.

Tuesday evenings

All other activities take place on Tuesday evenings at 7:30 p.m. On the first Tuesday of the month, Marcia Rudin hosts our informal “schmoozes” via Zoom. On the second Tuesday of the month, Dr. Ellen Feingold leads our “Torah Talk” discussion of the current Torah portion. The third Tuesday of the month is saved for Len Minsky Current Events, led by Dr. Don Bachman. On the fourth Tuesday of the month, we enjoy lectures by Chavurat Shalom members and outside speakers arranged by the program committee Irene Skolnick and Barry Fulmer.

Chavurat Shalom is an informal group from every Jewish religious tradition that meets via Zoom to worship and learn together. We welcome people of all faiths from Sanibel, Fort Myers, other Southwest Florida locations, and from all over the country. We are not affiliated with any Jewish organized movement. Our group is community-led. Each person has an equal voice in it and may participate to whatever extent desired.

All Chavurat Shalom activities are held via Zoom, with in-person get togethers planned whenever possible. Everyone is welcome to attend. Check our website chavuratshalomofsouthwestflorida.org or email chavuratshalom@gmail.com to get information and the schedule. ☺

HADASSAH Collier/Lee Chapter
(732) 539-4011

From Henrietta Szold to today

Plus, Hadassah events you can't miss!

By Shelley Einhorn, President Collier/Lee Chapter of Hadassah

Henrietta Szold's greatest accomplishment was the creation of Hadassah, the Women's Zionist Organization of the United States. Under her direction, Hadassah became the largest and most powerful Zionist group in the United States, focusing on fundraising establishing hospitals, food banks, nursing schools, and social work programs. Henrietta's work helped create the medical, educational and social service infrastructure that helped turn the dream of a Jewish state into a workable reality.

Hadassah is still carrying on the work that was started by Henrietta. The results of her “Practical Zionism” can be seen today in Hadassah's two world class Hospital campuses in Jerusalem and the youth villages she founded to save the children who left their homelands as Nazis invaded Eastern Europe.

More than 100 years later, Hadassah is still advancing Henrietta's legacy by empowering women to put their values into action. Hadassah continues to build a strong community in the U.S. and Israel. In 2005, the Hadassah medical organization earned a Nobel Peace Prize nomination for bringing advanced medical care to all regardless of race, ethnicity, or nationality.

We invite you to attend any of our upcoming events.



Shelley Einhorn

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 Hadassah's Fifth Annual Inspiring Women Luncheon

The annual luncheon honoring local women whose work and efforts make a difference in our communities

April 26 – Women's Health Symposium

A symposium to collaborate, inform, and empower 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.

I hope to see you at one — or all — of these events!

Am Yisrael Chai ☺

Upcoming services and events

Our Chavurat Shalom programs are underway for the winter season. All times are Eastern Standard Time.

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. Each service is a bit different and reflects the selections of that week's leader.

The weekly Shabbat services are coordinated by Drs. Ellen Feingold and Kathy Zoss and include volunteer participants. This gives our membership an

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Sic Transit Gloria Mundi

Thus Passes the Glory of the World

By Marina Berkovich, JHSSWF President

We often fail, individually and as a society, to view historical events and achievements through the appropriate lens of the times. What is appropriate now would undoubtedly be scorned then, and frequently, vice versa. Also, we learn best through individual stories and this story is, chronologically, the first in Southwest Florida Jewish history.



Marina Berkovich

On March 2, 1849, U.S. Congress awarded Brigadier General Twiggs a ceremonial sword. He was an original member of the Aztec Club of 1847, a military society of officers who had served in the Mexican War. By 1850, he was about to ceremonially “lose a daughter” to Brevet Lieutenant Colonel Abraham C. Myers, who was serving in the United States Army as chief quartermaster of the Department of Florida under General Twiggs’ command. Myers, a West Point graduate and Seminole Wars veteran, was the son of Jewish-Americans of South Carolina religious and political prominence.

In early-1850, as preparations were made for the wedding of the then-almost 39-year-old Myers to a southern belle at

the tender age of 17, Marion, the newly rebuilt fort on the Caloosahatchee River was completed. The previous two forts that the U.S. Army built and operated there were destroyed: Fort Dulaney, in Punta Rassa, by a hurricane in 1841; and Fort Harvie, built in 1841 and abandoned in 1842 at the end of the Second Seminole War, then subsequently burned, presumably by the local tribes, as we’d say



Abraham Myers’ gravestone in Alexandria, Virginia, Sept. 27, 2023 (Credit: Fourthords)

in today’s lingo, in an act of resistance to the occupiers.

To everyone’s surprise, the new fort was named after the soon-to-be General Twiggs’ son-in-law, and on Feb. 14, 1850, the City of Fort Myers was officially begat. Newly relocating Southwest Florida residents love this historical fact. Named after a Jewish man? It is not a uniquely unfathomable historical fact, precious to Jews but not necessarily to non-Jews.

The mysterious “C” in Abraham C. Myers is often decoded as Charles, but this historian guesses it originated from a somewhat more Jewish name, like Chaim. Myers’ life, like most lives of the time, was subjected to twists and turns of the still new United States, complicated by the Civil War, his southern honor, and his young bride’s sharp tongue. Marion called Mrs. Jefferson Davis, Varina, a word that is now considered a racial slur.

His professional responsibilities led to a “blame the Jew” moment after he was put in charge of the Confederacy’s provisions. Some say Davis could not wait to retaliate, then ousted Myers following a lengthy and loud process in the Confederate capital of Richmond, Virginia. Later, Myers rejected a new appointment, only to be blamed again for the ultimate loss. His life eventually led him away from both his Judaism and the United States. Myers’ famous son, Lieutenant General John Twiggs Myers, was born in Germany, where the Myers’ family was exiled until 1876.

Want to know more? Sign up for our newsletter at jhsswf.org.

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

February facts for every Jewish Floridian

Feb. 14, 1850:

Fort Myers was established and named after Colonel Abraham C. Myers, the great-grandson of Charleston’s first rabbi.

Feb. 1, 1860:

Rabbi Morris Jacob Raphael of New York City gave the first invocation by a rabbi at a U.S. Congress session.

Feb. 20, 1939:

Isadore Greenbaum courageously rushed the stage during the largest Nazi rally in U.S. history (approximately 20,000 attendees) in Madison Square Garden (New York City), was beaten by Bund security and arrested by the New York City police.

Feb. 14, 1949:

The Israeli Knesset convened for its inaugural session.

Feb. 1, 2003:

The first Israeli astronaut, Ilan Ramon, perished in Space Shuttle Columbia’s mission STS-113 reentry into the Earth’s atmosphere.

Holocaust Museum & Cohen Education Center

You’re invited to a special evening to celebrate the Museum’s

25th Anniversary

Triumph Dinner

Remembering the Past to Inspire the Future

Wednesday, March 4, 2026

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Emmy Award-Winning Producer
of PBS NOVA and filmmaker of
“Resistance: They Fought Back”



CORRECTION

In the January issue, I mistakenly included an incorrect photo. I sincerely apologize to Jane and her family. The correct photo is here.



Jane Schiff with her father, Herbert H. Schiff

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

Students began the year by diving into the meaning of Tu Bi'Shvat, the Jewish New Year of the Trees. Through hands-on learning and the preparation of special foods connected to the holiday, students explored themes of gratitude, growth and environmental responsibility. These

a warm and welcoming community Shabbat dinner, featuring a pasta bar enjoyed by families of all ages. This celebration also marked our first Religious School Shabbat of the new year, allowing students to experience Shabbat as a shared community ritual beyond the classroom walls.



Morah Hannah and her class

completed our confirmation class. Her return as an educator is a powerful reminder of the lasting impact of Jewish education and community.


Building Jewish language and confidence

Since returning from winter break, students have made impressive progress in their Jewish Life vocabulary. They have been learning the Hebrew letters *Dalet*, *Chet*, and *Pey*, along with key words and phrases including *d'var Torah*, *d'rasha*, *d'varim*, *chesed*, *chodesh*, *chup-pah*, *Purim*, and *parsha*. Their growing fluency reflects both their dedication and enthusiasm,

and by the end of the school year, these terms will be second nature.

Jewish community, growing together

We are excited for this upcoming summer as we embark on another week of Jewish Summer Camp. This year we are doing a summer of *koach* and strength. There will be activities of team building, games, along with arts and crafts. Check out the Temple Beth El website for registration information or reach out to our Religious School Coordinator Allison Fego at religiousschool@templebethel.com.

Together, these moments reflect a Religious School community rooted in learning, kindness and celebration. Through study, service and shared experiences, our students are discovering what it means to live Jewishly — building values and memories that will last well beyond the classroom. 



All our students, Rabbi Luna, Moreh Nathan and Religious School Coordinator Allison Fego rehearsing for Hanukkah Celebration

activities helped bring the holiday's deeper message to life while strengthening students' connection to the land of Israel.

Gathering around the Shabbat table

Our congregation came together for

Living our values

One of the most meaningful moments of the season was Mitzvah Day, when students, teachers, and families joined together to put Jewish values into practice. Families created heartfelt cards for troops in Israel, helped prepare sandwiches, participated in plantings, and

took part in additional service projects. Through these experiences, students learned firsthand why performing *mitzvot* matters and how small actions can make a big impact.

Preparing for Purim:

As excitement builds for the upcoming Purim Carnival, students baked homemade *hamantaschen* and reviewed the Purim story. They proudly explained why the cookies are shaped like triangles, connecting holiday traditions with Jewish history and storytelling in a fun and meaningful way.

Welcoming Morah Hannah Shraiar

This year brought a special full-circle moment with the arrival of Morah Hannah Shraiar, our new 3rd/4th grade teacher. A graduate of our Religious School program herself, Hannah celebrated her bat mitzvah here and later



Joshua & Abby Fego and Zara & Iris Luna-Bord ready for Hanukkah



Religious school families partying at our Hanukkah Celebration

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TEMPLE JUDEA RELIGIOUS SCHOOL
Fort Myers
Tehila Cherubino, Director of Education

The Torah teaches us, “עץ הַחַיָּה” ‘For man is a tree of the field’ (Deuteronomy 20:19). With these few words, the Torah offers a powerful image that speaks to our lives, our responsibilities and our future.

Tu B’Shvat, the 15th day of the Hebrew month of *Sh’vat*, is known as the birthday of the trees. On this day, we celebrate growth, renewal, and our deep connection to the land. The Torah instructs us to care for the Earth, with many laws devoted to protecting trees and respecting the land. It is no coincidence, then, that the Torah compares human beings to trees.

Like trees, people need a nurturing environment in order to grow, develop, and thrive. A tree draws nourishment from its surroundings, reaching upward toward the light while remaining firmly

anchored below. So too a person grows through learning, guidance and community, while drawing strength from values passed down through generations.

This comparison is not merely poetic; it is deeply meaningful. Trees provide fruit, shade and shelter. In the same way, human beings are meant to contribute positively to the world around them — through acts of kindness, learning and responsibility. At the same time, the metaphor reminds us of life’s fragility and the importance of protecting both our environment and one another.

The true strength of a tree lies in its roots. Roots provide stability, nourishment and resilience, especially during storms. For human beings, our roots are our faith, our traditions and our connection to our people and our land of Israel. Jewish education is the way we nurture



Channukah Celebration at Temple Judea

those roots. Through learning, practice and shared experiences, we give our children the inner strength to remain grounded even during life’s challenges.

Our Religious School plays a vital role in this process. By teaching the next generation, we connect our children to their Jewish roots, to the land of Israel, and to a living tradition that has endured for thousands of years. Through

education and community involvement, we ensure that our values are not only preserved but continue to grow.

On *Tu B’Shvat*, we are reminded that the fruits we nurture today become the trees of tomorrow. When we invest in our children — their learning, their identity and their connection to the Jewish people — we are planting seeds for a strong and vibrant future. 🌱

Chabad FGCU
Estero
Rabbi Mendel Gordon

Our fall semester has been an amazing success for Jewish students at Florida Gulf Coast University with many students taking their time in college to dive in and grow their own Jewish connection.

I would love to share with you a few of the highlights.

Jewish festival and march of Jewish pride
In the center of campus on the library

lawn, we had a real boost of Jewish pride with a full festival with booths of a variety of Jewish themes from challah braiding, Jewish name necklaces and even a Jewish food tasting wheel.

That was followed by a special march across campus with more than 30 students marching wearing *kippahs* with songs of Jewish pride and a special Jewish rap concert from Nosson Zand.

Ryan, who normally feels shy of displaying his Judaism in the open, says that it feels different here, as he rolled up his sleeve to put on *tefillin*.

A big shout out to our students leadership team and all our volunteers that invested many hours into making the event a success.

Chabad *shule* — with almost 1,000 people together. For others, like Ryan, it was his first time celebrating the full 24 Shabbat experience.

And they brought back all that Jewish energy to FGCU to share with others.

Regular programming
This is besides all the regular weekly programming with 15 to 25 students joining us every Friday night for Shabbat dinner; also, students are taking special extracurricular Jewish classes to explore their heritage.

And a special *mazal tov* to Jenna and Bailey, our first Jewish couple who met at Chabad and recently got engaged.

Chabad services Jewish students of all levels of observance at Florida Gulf Coast University, Florida SouthWestern State College, and other college age students in the area.

If you know any Jewish students at FGCU or other nearby colleges, please reach out to connect them with the local Jewish student community.

For more information or to help make that connection, please reach out to Rabbi Mendel at Rabbi@chabadfgcu.com or call 239-355-8481. 🌟

New York City Shabbaton
What a weekend to remember as our students joined 2,000 Jewish students from around the world to spend Shabbat together in Crown Heights Brooklyn.

The weekend was jam packed with concerts, workshops, tours of a vibrant Jewish community and even a visit to the gravesite of the Rebbe Rabbi Schneerson, a special place that thousands from all over the world come to pray.

Jay shared that his highlight was praying together in 770 — the central

Kids

SUMMER 2026

JEWISH OVERNIGHT CAMP SCHOLARSHIP

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MORE INFO...
Contact Debbie Sanford
debbiesanford@jfedlcc.org

jewishfederationlcc.org/scholarships

Candle lighting times:

- Feb 6: 5:56 p.m.
- Feb 13: 6:01 p.m.
- Feb 20: 6:05 p.m.
- Feb 27: 6:09 p.m.

The basic Jewish unit

By Rabbi David Arias

In Haifa, from our house to the synagogue, we walked one kilometer. Here in Fort Myers, we do about the same distance. One challenge of moving from Israel to the U.S. has been adapting to different measurement units. In nearly every other country, we know that one meter equals 100 centimeters; one centimeter equals 10 millimeters; and one kilometer equals 1,000 meters. I admit that, so far, I still don't know how many ounces are in a gallon or how many ounces are in a pound. However, the basic Jewish value remains the same everywhere: family.

Family, or *mishpaha* in Hebrew, is the basic unit of Jewish tradition. Looking at the first Mitzvot we read in the Torah, they are all directed toward that symbolic and vital group of people. Adam and Eve were commanded to create their own family as they were told “be fruitful.” The first Mitzvot given to Noah



■ Rabbi David Arias

were for him and his children. Additionally, the first Mitzvah the Israelites received, even before the Torah was given, was a family or communal Mitzvah. In *Sh'mot* (Exodus) chapter 12, we learn about the uniqueness of the month of Nisan, being the first month of the year. We also read about the Pesah sacrifice: “Speak to the whole community of Israel and say that on the tenth of this month each of them shall take a lamb to a family, a lamb to a household.” The first Jewish ritual for a people about to be set free is to feel the closeness of a family, the warmth of those we grew up with. A family is a small congregation, which means that a congregation is also a kind of family. And like in every family, there will naturally be people we feel more connected to than others.


In Israel, there is a special day to celebrate family, *Yom Hamishpaha*. This day falls on the 30th of Sh'vat, two weeks after Tu BiSh'vat. The date also commemorates the *yahrzeit* of Henrietta

Szold, an exceptional woman and passionate Zionist leader who founded Hadassah, the Women's Zionist Organization of America. Henrietta studied at the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York, and although she was accepted as a student during a time when women were not allowed to join rabbinic studies, she made a deal with the dean of the

A family is a small congregation, which means that a congregation is also a kind of family.

Rabbinical School, Rabbi Prof. Solomon Schechter: she would study, but she wouldn't receive rabbinical ordination. Henrietta's commitment to the Jewish people didn't depend on any title or ordination; she found multiple ways to support the growing Jewish population

in the land of Israel, especially in the medical field. Because of her determination, passion and vision, she was called *אם כל הילדים*, the mother of all children, even though she didn't have her own children. That's why her *yahrzeit* was established as the official Family Day in Israel. Family is not only about genetics and genealogy; it's about caring for each other, supporting one another, and being willing to grow together, despite all the disagreements around. The story of Pesah and the entire book of *Sh'mot* that we are beginning to read these weeks is about these family bonds, about a sister taking care of her brother, Moshe. It's about someone — Moshe — who can't just simply watch as his brothers are being mistreated. Redemption will only be possible when we genuinely and deeply recognize the fundamental needs of our basic Jewish unit: the family.

Yom Hamishpaha Sameah!
Rabbi David Arias serves at Temple Judea in Fort Myers. 

Tu B'Shevat

Rosh Hashanah La'ilanot — Happy New Year Trees!

By Cantor Barry Butensky

The Festival of Tu B'Shevat rolls around on the 15th day of the Hebrew month of Shevat, right when winter starts giving way to hints of spring. Back in Israel, you'd see almond trees bursting pink while the rest the north and west scrape ice off windshields, and here in Southwest Florida, we keep our pools heated for at least another month.

It's this quiet Jewish holiday that slips under most radars, yet for folks who love it, nothing beats the mix of ritual, fruit and a bit of tree-hugging guilt. Picture me handing you a plate: four cups of wine, escalating from white to red, and a Seder plate piled with figs, dates, olives — whatever's in season where you are. At its core, Tu B'Shevat celebrates the new year for fruit trees, a quirky ancient rule that once let farmers tithe their orchards properly. Rabbinic brains figured: if sap's climbing trunks




■ Cantor Barry Butensky

in Shevat, that's planting season zero. Fast forward, and mystics in 16th-century Safed turned it mystical: Kabbalah geeks saw eating 15 fruits as ladder-rungs up the Tree of Life. Sweet pomegranate for kindness, sour *Etrog* for judgment — balance them out, you've basically done yoga for your soul. Nowadays kids in Hebrew school shove apple slices at each other, giggling because tradition says you're meant to lean back after the first sip like you're on Passover vacation. Parents whisper, plant a sapling, save the planet — easy sell when the room smells like cinnamon and citrus. In *kibbutzim*, they haul saplings onto communal dirt, every kid digs a hole deeper than their regrets, then races to water it before the next bell. I've heard elders joke it's the only holiday where calories count as mitzvah

points. Out here in diaspora land, synagogues get creative. Last year one Toronto minyan swapped wine for craft cider — kosher enough, locals argued — then drove an hour north to a maple bush and tapped trunks like vampires at brunch. Folks in Oakland rent rooftops, string fairy lights between sukkah frames left over from Sukkot, and toast with medjool dates so sticky your fingers stick to the Kiddush cup. Point is, nobody's gate-keeping: bring your gluten-free challah, your vegan charoset, or your half-lit menorah still on the shelf. Funny thing — climate change's messing even with this. Israel hit record heat last Tu B'Shevat; almond blossoms popped two weeks early; orchards panicked. Farmers prayed rain, the second coming of Tefillat Geshem, specifically

I've heard elders joke it's the only holiday where calories count as mitzvah points.

on the Chag of Shemini Atzeret, which marks the transition to Israel's rainy season, while city kids facetimed their cousins in Brooklyn asking, “Yours blooming yet?” It's that global thread: same fruit, different skies. Makes you think twice before trashing a banana peel. At the end of day, Tu B'Shevat isn't fireworks or fasting, it's pause. Pick up a carob pod, crack it like gossip, and remember dirt feeds us more than doom-scrolling does. Fifteen fruits, 15 blessings, and one tree you swear you'll check on come March. If that's not winter's quiet revolution, what is? *Chag Sameach* — Happy New Year for Trees!
Cantor Barry Butensky serves at Temple Beth Shalom in Cape Coral. 



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A city illuminated

Fort Myers makes history with its first downtown Menorah.

By Rabbi Yitzchok Minkowicz

Downtown Fort Myers was transformed by warmth, joy and radiant light as the city marked a historic milestone with its first-ever public Chanukah Menorah lighting. Hosted by Chabad Lubavitch of Southwest Florida, under the leadership of Rabbi Yitzchok and Shani Minkowicz, the event brought together families, civic leaders and community members for an unforgettable celebration of faith, unity and hope.

The Menorah was proudly displayed and lit at Common Ground Pocket Park, a central and symbolic location in the heart of downtown. As the flames were kindled, they illuminated not only the park but the spirit of the entire community, marking a powerful moment for Jewish life in Fort Myers and Southwest Florida.

This gathering carried especially deep meaning as it took place in the wake of a tragic antisemitic attack in Sydney, Australia, which reverberated painfully throughout Jewish communities worldwide. In response to fear and uncertainty, the Fort Myers community chose strength, pride and visibility. The public Menorah lighting became a clear and confident statement: Jewish life will continue to shine brightly, and darkness will always be met with light.

From the moment guests arrived, the park buzzed with Chanukah spirit. The festive atmosphere was enhanced by the comforting aroma of freshly made doughnuts and sizzling potato latkes, served alongside warm drinks that helped create a welcoming and family-friendly environment. Children delighted in hands-on Chanukah arts and crafts, while a lively clown and face painting brought smiles, laughter and vibrant color to the celebration, ensuring that Chanukah came alive for all ages.

At the heart of the evening stood the towering Menorah — radiant, dignified and deeply meaningful. Community members and local dignitaries were honored with lighting the candles, each flame representing another step toward greater unity, faith and hope. With every candle lit, the sense of shared purpose and communal pride grew stronger.

The historic nature of the event was formally recognized through special proclamations. A proclamation from the



■ Rabbi Yitzchok Minkowicz

city was read by the mayor, acknowledging the significance of Fort Myers hosting its first public Menorah lighting and celebrating the values of religious freedom and cultural inclusion. In addition, a county proclamation was read by Shani Minkowicz, further underscoring the importance of this milestone not only for the Jewish community but for the entire region.

Adding another layer of inspiration to the evening, dedicated Chabad *bochrim* moved throughout the crowd, offering Jewish attendees the opportunity to put



on *tefillin*. For some participants, this marked the very first time they had ever done so, creating deeply personal and meaningful moments of connection to Jewish tradition. These quiet yet powerful interactions highlighted the essence of Chanukah — rekindling the Jewish soul one light at a time.

As the evening progressed, music, singing and dancing filled the park. Circles formed, hands joined and spontaneous joy took over as the celebration evolved into a powerful expression of Jewish pride and communal togetherness. Conversations flowed, connections were strengthened and a sense of belonging permeated the crowd.

**Jewish life will
continue to shine
brightly, and darkness
will always be met
with light.**

In a meaningful gesture of gratitude and partnership, doughnuts and latkes were delivered to members of the local police and fire departments, thanking them for their service and recognizing

their vital role in keeping the community safe. This act reflected the strong relationship between Chabad Lubavitch of Southwest Florida and local first responders, emphasizing mutual respect


and appreciation.

The celebration was further enriched by the presence of fellow Chabad *shluchim* and community leaders, including Rabbi and Mrs. Yossi Labkowski of Chabad of Cape Coral and Rabbi and

Mrs. Mendy Gordon of Chabad at Florida Gulf Coast University, who joined in honoring this milestone for Jewish life across Southwest Florida.

Throughout the eight days of Chanukah, the Menorah remained illuminated in downtown Fort Myers, serving as a visible and lasting symbol of faith, resilience and hope. Its presence sent a clear message to all who passed by: light overcomes darkness, unity overcomes division, and a community that comes together shines brighter than ever.

This historic Chanukah celebration will long be remembered as a defining moment — one that illuminated not only a city but the hearts of all who took part.

Rabbi Yitzchok Minkowicz serves at Chabad Lubavitch of Southwest Florida. 



That place just right

By Rabbi Bruce Diamond

Elder Joseph Brackett’s famous pre-Civil War Shaker hymn, “Simple Gifts,” is literally the “muzak of my life.” It has been my “ear worm” since I can remember, and it won’t be going away anytime soon. I hadn’t given the “why” much thought until recently.

Is there a place where each of us “ought to be?” I believe that there is, and



■ Rabbi Bruce Diamond

I mean “place” quite literally. Sorting humans along racial lines is a historically tragic mistake since the concept of race is both genetically and anthropologically a null category.

However, some of us are mountain people while others are flatland/ocean types. It’s like our cousins, the mountain and lowland gorillas, who share close to 95% of their DNA with us. Although a trained primatologist can distinguish subtle adaptive differences, they are essentially the same creature. But if you clustered a bunch of them together and let them loose, instinctively some would find their way to the mountains and others to the lowlands.

I am happiest, often exhilarated and certainly most at ease in mountain settings. I felt more alive when I lived by Oregon’s Cascades and in New Hampshire’s White Mountains. Growing up, my best times were at the family summer homes by Kauneonga Lakes in the Catskills. I feel lost and easily disoriented without mountains on the horizon.



Mountain gorilla

I moved down here 28 years ago from the White Mountains after my parents, youngest brother and his brood left New Hampshire to take up full-time residence in Florida. For quite a while, I longed for what I had left behind, often imagining the summer storm clouds rolling

in from the east like a mountain range. And for several years, my boy and I would drive back to spend a month at our cottage in Bethlehem in the White Mountains, the highest town east of the Rockies, and enjoy time with my friends at the Bethlehem Hebrew Congregation.

I still keep a large photo montage in my home study of that cottage, the synagogue and the nearby Ammonoosuc River, whose cold mountain waters I would wade into to trout fish early nearly every morning except *shabbes*. (Back then I was a killer.)

**“‘Tis a gift to be simple,
‘tis a gift to be free, ‘tis
a gift to come down
where you ought to
be. And when we find
ourselves in that place
just right, ‘twill be
in valley of love and
delight.”**




Western lowland gorilla

My wife, God love her, loves the beach and its open vistas and spends a lot of her free time on them whenever possible. I don’t like beaches; mostly, I feel listless and very bored, except at sunsets in the summer, when clouds on the horizon feel like mountains to me. Oceans and prairies do very little for me. I am that mountain gorilla; she, the lowlander. I am so grateful that she has lots of family down here who also enjoy the beach with her.

In general, I hardly ever generalize — but here comes a really big one. In our ancient religious imagination, mountains

are home, and some mountains are even places where we can meet God. Flatlands are wilderness to us; lowland river valleys, captivity and exile. You know, as in Psalm 23’s famous line: “Even when I walk in the valley of the shadow of death.”

Even when we are in places like this, many of us Jews still have mountain souls. So for us, here in this little corner of the big *Galut*, that “place just right” must be within us.

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



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A blessing for today

Lessons from Jacob and “Fiddler on the Roof”

By Rabbi Nicole Luna

Occasionally as a rabbi, I get invited to do some unexpected rituals, and early this month, I had the opportunity to do something both meaningful and fun. I was invited to Broadway Palm Dinner Theatre to bless the cast and crew of “Fiddler on the Roof.” I stood on the stage with 25 cast members, all dressed in their *shtetl* costumes before one of the final dress rehearsals, to share words of blessing.

When I was thinking about how to connect the cast of “Fiddler on the Roof” in 2026 to Jewish *shtetl* life in 1905, I thought back to an even earlier story, the story of our biblical patriarch, Jacob. In many ways, Jacob is the original Tevye. Tevye starts out by saying, “Because of our traditions, everyone knows who he is and what God expects him to do. Tradition!” This is essentially what Jacob says to his grandchildren at the end of his life. He says, “Through them let my name and the name of my fathers, Abraham and Isaac, be recalled, and let them greatly multiply within the land!” (Genesis 48:15-16).

It is clear what role the grandchildren, Ephraim and Manasseh, are expected to play. Who must remember the grandparents and the great grandparents? Who must ensure their name endures? Who must grow and multiply in the land given to their ancestors? The grandchildren! Tradition! Jacob is making sure that Ephraim and Manasseh not only know where they come from but that, through them, Jacob, his father Isaac and his grandfather, Abraham, are remembered — that their names be recalled. In other words, that the tradition be passed on.

But just like Tevye, Jacob’s own children do not always act in ways he expects or appreciates. In a scene worthy of a Broadway production, Jacob lies on his deathbed and summons his sons, saying to them, “Gather ‘round that I may tell you what shall befall to you in days to come.” (Genesis 49:1).




■ **Rabbi Nicole Luna**

His sons stand around their father, and in his final words, Jacob revokes Reuben’s status as the first-born, warns that Simeon and Levi are too violent, and prophesies that Issachar will be subjected to forced labor. He praises Judah, and especially Joseph, but it is clear that, like Tevye, Jacob has been disappointed and confused by his children’s choices. However, the Torah still states that he blesses them. The blessing was not an approval of every choice. It was the act of a parent saying, “I see you.”

It mirrors the same blessing that Tevye gave his daughter Chava, who married a Russian Christian. He does not agree with her life choices, famously saying, “Can I deny my own daughter? On the other hand — how can I turn my back on my faith? My people? If I try and bend that far, I’ll break!” And yet, when she shares that she and her husband are leaving, he murmurs, “God be with you.” Love endures through heartbreak, disappointment, even betrayal — from the biblical Jacob, to Tevye, to today.

Both “Fiddler on the Roof” and the story of Jacob end with the unknown, with a sense of hope. At the end of Genesis, Joseph dies in Egypt and says to his kin, “God will surely take care of you and bring you up out of this land to the land that God promised to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob.” (Genesis 50:24). Tevye and his family head to America, a different sort of Promised Land. Both stories end between memory and hope, between tradition and tomorrow.

As we enter into a new secular year and as the Jewish community continues to face an unknown future with determination and faith, we do what Jews have always done in moments like this: we proclaim *L’Chayim* — to life, not because the road is easy or the ending is clear, but because life, with all its risk and promise, is worthy of blessing. *L’Chayim* to memory and to hope, to tradition and to tomorrow.

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

Love endures through heartbreak, disappointment, even betrayal — from the biblical Jacob, to Tevye, to today.

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A lesson of Tu B'Shevat

By Rabbi Sunny Schnitzer

The Gregorian calendar month of February beings in 2026 on the 15th of Shevat in the Hebrew calendar. The 15th of Shevat is, of course, known as Tu B'Shevat. The Hebrew letters representing the number 15 are *Tet* and *Vav*, which can be pronounced as *Tu*. The sages of the Talmud, in Tractate Rosh HaShanah, designated this day as the New Year of the Trees. In practical terms, it was the day on which a tree was considered mature enough so that its produce could be tithed in the days when the Temple stood in Jerusalem.

It may seem counterintuitive that during the coldest and wettest days of winter in much of the Northern



■ Rabbi Sunny Schnitzer

Hemisphere, when the trees are barren and seem devoid of life, Jewish tradition perceives the first signs of springtime. The 11th-century French sage Rashi explains that even though the trees look lifeless, by Tu B'Shvat, the sap begins to run within them. The sap — indicating the trees coming back to life and starting to nurture the future buds and fruit — usually starts to flow when the weather is still below freezing at night and starts to rise just above freezing during the day.

Soon the first buds of springtime, beginning in ancient Israel with almond and olive trees, will appear. Their delicate blossoms will beautify the landscape. Their flesh and oils will nourish

the people. The heavy soaking winter rains (*Malkosh*) will cease, transitioning to the gentler spring rains (*Geshem*). The ground will be softened as it warms, making planting of grains and vegetables possible.

But beyond these practical considerations, Tu B'Shevat carries a deep spiritual significance

Tu B'Shevat is the holiday of hope. It reminds us that darkness and cold do not last. No matter how bleak the landscape looks today, renewal and restoration are just around the corner.

Living as we do in the land of eternal summer, Florida, we can forget what it

feels like to live without warmth and light. We forget what it is like to experience the world in hibernation.

The message of the trees, the message of Tu B'Shevat, is to know that spring will come, and with it will come change and new life. So too, we need to know that the difficulties of our time will pass. The darkest part of the winter comes just before spring. Tu B'Shvat teaches us that

if we keep our faith in God and ourselves, our greatest days still lie ahead.

Rabbi Sunny Schnitzer serves Bat Yam Temple of the Islands.

No matter how bleak the landscape looks today, renewal and restoration are just around the corner.



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The Leo Rosner Foundation is the main sponsor of the Shared Scholar program and reception.

CHABAD LUBAVITCH OF SOUTHWEST FLORIDA Fort Myers

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In the day following the shocking antisemitic attack on a Chanukah gathering in Sydney, Australia, the Jewish community of Southwest Florida came together — not in fear but in strength. With quiet resolve, visible pride and deep unity, community members gathered to affirm an enduring Jewish message: light will always overcome darkness.

On Sunday afternoon, families, seniors, children and community leaders assembled at Castle Golf in Fort Myers for a public Chanukah Menorah lighting organized by Chabad Lubavitch of Southwest Florida. What might have been a moment overshadowed by anxiety instead became a powerful expression of faith, resilience and collective hope.



The gathering carried deep emotional weight. News of the attack in Sydney had reverberated through Jewish communities worldwide, leaving many shaken and searching for reassurance. Yet in Fort Myers, the response was clear and unmistakable. The community chose to stand openly, proudly and together — transforming grief and concern into unity and light.

Rabbi Yitzchok Minkowicz and his wife Shani Minkowicz welcomed attendees with warmth and heartfelt words, acknowledging the pain felt across the Jewish world while offering strength and perspective. Rabbi Minkowicz reminded the community that throughout history, the Jewish response to hatred has never been retreat but illumination.

“Chanukah teaches us that even a small amount of light can dispel tremendous darkness,” Rabbi Minkowicz shared. “When our brothers and sisters are attacked simply for being Jewish, we do not hide. We gather. We shine brighter.”

Those words resonated deeply with those in attendance, setting the tone for an afternoon marked by dignity, courage and resolve.

The honor of lighting the Menorah was given to Dr. Jonathan Daitch and Dr. Larry Bernstein, respected members of the Southwest Florida Jewish community. Standing proudly before the assembled crowd, they recited the Chanukah blessings as the flames were kindled. As each candle was lit, the Menorah grew



brighter — each flame serving as both a remembrance of the ancient Chanukah miracle and a living response to modern-day hatred.

Attendees stood shoulder to shoulder, some holding candles, others holding children close. The atmosphere was solemn yet uplifting, emotional yet empowering. Tears mixed with quiet smiles as the blessings were sung, reflecting a shared sense of purpose and solidarity.

Adding to the strength of the gathering was the presence of 10 rabbinical students who joined the Southwest Florida community throughout Chanukah. Six students were already serving locally, and they were joined by an additional four rabbinical students who traveled from the Coral Springs Yeshiva to lend their support, energy and inspiration. Their presence brought warmth and vitality, reinforcing the message that the Jewish people stand together, across cities and generations.

Throughout Chanukah, these students engaged the community through daily prayers, meaningful conversations and uplifting activities, helping ensure that the spirit of the holiday reached every corner of the community.

Their dedication underscored the idea that Jewish continuity is strengthened not only through public moments but through personal connection and shared commitment.

For many in attendance, the Menorah lighting was deeply personal. In a time when antisemitism feels increasingly close and frighteningly real, standing together in a public Jewish gathering carried profound significance. The Menorah stood tall, its light shining openly and unapologetically — a symbol of Jewish endurance and faith.

As the final blessing was sung, the crowd lingered. People shared embraces, words of comfort, and reflections on the meaning of the moment. What began as a response to tragedy evolved into a powerful affirmation of Jewish life, continuity and courage.

Chanukah is a story of miracles, but it is also a story of bravery — the courage to remain faithful, visible and united in the face of adversity. On this particular afternoon in Fort Myers, that courage burned brightly.

The message was clear and unwavering: **We respond with light. We stand together. And we will prevail.** 🕯️

CHABAD LUBAVITCH OF SOUTHWEST FLORIDA Fort Myers

(239) 433-7708 • www.Chabadswf.org

Our community mourns the passing of Reb Leima ben Naftali Hertz, beloved father of Rabbi Yitzchok Minkowicz, rabbi of Chabad Lubavitch of Southwest Florida, who passed away on Sunday, Jan. 4.

Reb Leima was a man of quiet strength, deep faith and steadfast values.

He lived a life rooted in integrity, humility and dedication to family and Yiddishkeit. Those who knew him were touched by his sincerity, warmth and simple goodness, which left a lasting and meaningful impression.

The *levaya* took place Monday, Jan. 5, passing by 770 Eastern Parkway, a



moment of deep significance and connection to the enduring legacy of Chabad and Jewish continuity. The burial followed at Old Montefiore Cemetery, attended by family, friends and community members who gathered to pay their final respects.

During the days of mourning, the Minkowicz family was deeply comforted by the outpouring of love, support and heartfelt *tefillas* from the community. These expressions of care and unity

served as a powerful reminder of the strength found in shared faith and communal bonds.

May the memory of Reb Leima ben Naftali Hertz be a blessing. May his *neshama* merit a pure and elevated *aliyah* and may Rabbi Minkowicz and his family be comforted among the mourners of Zion and Jerusalem. May we know no further sorrow. 🕯️

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Passover is around the corner! Or, more precisely, it is at the Sanibel Community House, and you are invited: Wednesday, April 1, 5p.m.

Bat Yam Temple of the Islands has seating for members and non-members alike, on a first-reserved basis. If you sign up now, the discounted early-bird price is \$60 per adult and \$30 for children. Children under 5 years of age are free.

Sign up and mail your check by Feb. 15 to Bat Yam, Temple of the Islands, P.O. Box 84, Sanibel, Florida 33957-0084. All are welcome!

Passover is the holiday that retells the Israelites' deliverance from slavery in Egypt.

The Seder plate is the centerpiece of the table — with all the essential categories on the plate — parsley represents spring, a charred egg reminds us of the burnt offering, lamb shank stands in for the sacrificial lamb, *haroset* (mix of fruit, wine and nuts) is the *mortar* used by slaves to build Egyptian cities, the maror (bitter herbs represent the bitterness of slavery).

There is also a small bowl of salt water (the salt of our tears). We eat *matzah* (unleavened bread) and drink four cups of wine as we make a blessing over liberty. The youngest member of the family asks the question, “*Mah nishtanah halaylah hazeh*” (‘Why is this night different from all other nights’)?

The answer is because freedom needs to be cherished, and on this night, we remember what it feels like not to be free.

Around Passover tables, we reenact a ritual that is not yet complete. We pass on the story to our children through reading the Haggadah, asking the four questions, explaining what the symbols on the Seder plate mean, enjoying the delicious meal, drinking the four cups of wine, looking for the Afikomen, welcoming Elijah, and singing all the Seder standards. This is our mitsvah — to teach our children.


There has always been a custom of intellectual banquets, during which religion and philosophy were discussed. It is to this idea that the Jews turned when deciding how to celebrate the story of our liberation from Egypt. It is this celebration of our freedom, which is recorded at Passover every year. Rabbi Sunny Schnitzer will be talking to us about the essence of the holiday,

which commemorates the Biblical story of Exodus.

Around the Passover tables in 2026, Jews will feel that our history has become vividly alive. Part of the service says, we must feel as if we personally left Egypt. This year we do not need that prompt. On the one hand, we are liberated Jews, and on the other hand, we are painfully aware of the rise of antisemitism — not only in far-away Australia, but right here on American soil.

This year we are living history. Rather than exhort Pharaoh to “Let my people go!,” we could say to the world, “Let my people be!” Generation after generation hands the story of Passover on to future generations. We never take liberty for granted.

Our Passover Seder is a highlight of our year, so please join us and add to the celebration.

A Chag Sameach to all! 

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TEMPLE BETH SHALOM
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My name is Arlene Cohen, and I am a member of Temple Beth Shalom in Cape Coral. What is a *mensch*? It is described as a person of integrity and honor. A *mensch* is someone who acts with kindness, generosity and integrity, even when not expected.

The leaders and members of Temple Beth Shalom are *menschs*. In November, when the government threatened to do away with the SNAP program that offers food assistance to families in need, we organized and distributed food packages to more than 100 families. Seeing the impact this food drive made on the community, we then sponsored a Turkey Feast and distributed more than 125 Thanksgiving dinners with all the trimmings.

Not only did our members work hard, I'm thankful to our children, Kenneth, Lauren and Aaron who shopped, loaded

cars and set up the food stations. This is how we teach our children about doing for others. This is how we show them what being a *mensch* is all about.

Children routinely participate in synagogue life. They open the Ark, bring the microphones to people who are reading or speaking during the service. They help manage the Zoom camera for those online, they help set up and break down the tables for the *onegs* and *kiddushes* and help decorate for events. Other children help set up the classroom for religious school, decorate the *sukkah* and put things away when they are done. Everyone, young and old, is invited to participate in any way that they are able. Full participation by our members is an important part of our mission.

Feb. 2 is an important date for us. It is the culmination of more than a year of work by Cantor Butensky and his



Hanukkah event at Bell Tower



Lighting the candles



Hanukkah Sing Along



we were too small to pull it off. While it hasn't always been easy, we managed to pull it all together for a performance unlike any other we have seen in Southwest Florida.

We are extremely grateful to Cantor Butensky for pushing us to think big, to attempt things that we thought we could never do. Our congregation went from planning bake sales to hosting a world famous cantor. Since Cantor Butensky arrived three years ago, we have expanded our horizons, learned and grown in ways we never thought possible. Best of all, despite the ups and downs, the members have not only remained friends but deepened their relationships.

Thank you Cantor Barry Butensky and Presidents Helene Glocer and Maxine Morris for leading the way. With your strength and guidance we will continue to serve our synagogue and community. 🌟

concert committee. Cantor Azi Schwartz, from the Park Avenue Synagogue, and his entourage will perform at the Broadway Palm Dinner Theatre in Fort Myers. He will perform to a sold out audience. When we first started planning this, we were told that it would never work; that

TEMPLE SHALOM
Charlotte Harbor & the Gulf Islands

(941) 625-2116 • www.templeshalomfl.com

As we reported last month, Temple Shalom, the center of Jewish life in Charlotte County, lit up Hanukkah with songs and treats. Here are some pictures from that joyous event.



Our congregation gathered for the lighting of the Menorah on the front lawn. Then, Musical Director Dr. David Katz led the singing of Hanukkah songs. Temple Shalom member David Sommer directed the North Port High School chorus in a performance of holiday music. Inside the temple, it was time to enjoy latkes with the trimmings and special Hanukkah desserts.



Temple Shalom Port Charlotte members and guests enjoy latkes and holiday desserts

Holidays are highlights of the Temple Shalom calendar. This month, the Temple Brotherhood will plant new flowering shrubs to celebrate Tu B'Shevat, the new year for blooming trees.

Temple Shalom Community Seder
Temple Shalom invites the entire community to our annual congregation Seder on the second night of Passover, April 2. Details and registration information will be available soon; contact shalompc06@gmail.com.
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.



Temple Board President Judi Migdol prepares to light the Hanukkah Menorah



Jewish Heritage Day

Presents

SOUTHWEST FLORIDA JEWS

got Talent

Think you've got what it takes?
Come Celebrate Jewish Pride, Community & Talent!

- 🎤 Calling All Performers! 🗨️ Now Seeking Contestants!
- 🏆 Prizes for 1st, 2nd & 3rd Place
- 🍔 Kosher Food 🏠 Local Vendors 🎵 Entertainment

Be part of our Jewish Heritage Day Celebration - your moment is waiting!

SUNDAY, MARCH 22, 2026 (2-5 P.M.)
JetBlue Park | 11500 Fenway South Drive | Fort Myers

SIGN UP TODAY AND SHINE ON STAGE.
AMY HALLOCK, EVENTS@JFEDLCC.ORG

jewishfederationlcc.org/calendar



TEMPLE JUDEA Fort Myers

(239) 433-0201 • www.tjswfl.org

February is busy at Temple Judea. Temple Judea Religious School continues on Sunday morning and Tuesday afternoon with Tehila Cherubino and her teachers.

Shabbat B'Kef family Shabbat services for families is Friday, Feb. 13, 5:30 p.m.

Temple Judea Preschool is alight with fun and learning for our young children.

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

Join us on Feb. 8 for "World Wide Wrap" where Rabbi Arias will share

information and history about tefillin. We welcome first-timers and those who are experienced. A short Shacharit service will follow with bagels, schmear, lox and coffee. Please RSVP to Bernie King-Smith at 845-399-1101 or wombat2ny@gmail.com.

Exciting news

Chaverot has been renamed Nashim Circle and has a new focus. All Jewish women are welcome to join our Nashim Circle events. In the spirit of continued community building, we are widening our outreach to include all local Jewish women,

and invite them to join our warm, inspiring and creative women's community.

Nashim Circle, literally means Women's Circle, and reflects the desire to bring all Jewish women together to learn, celebrate, make art and support each other. Contact our office at 239-433-0201 for details.

Ongoing programs

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 are at 6:30 p.m.

Saturday morning Shabbat services are at 9:30 a.m. Kiddush luncheons are served every Shabbat. If you are interested in sponsoring a Kiddush, please contact JoAnn Lewin at jalewin2@aol.com.

Morning minyan Monday at 9 a.m. resumes Oct. 20.

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

Mitzvah Day is Feb. 1! Thanks to all who participate in this Temple-wide effort to support the Fort Myers community.

Upcoming events

On Thursday, Feb. 5, noon, celebrate *Tu B'shvat* with the rabbi for Lunch & Learn mocktails. Bring your lunch — snacks and drinks will be provided. Register online through the calendar.

The big Super Bowl Sunday party is Feb. 8, 5:30 p.m., at the home of TBE President Michael and Kayreen Altman. Register online through the calendar. **Thank you** to our generous and gracious hosts!

Jerry Ziedenberg returns with four incredible lectures on Feb. 9, 16, 23 and March 2! Learn about: the Holocaust and Palestine immigration under the British Blockade; the 1,500 Jewish Holocaust survivors imprisoned on a Pacific Island, the sinking of a refugee ship that changed the struggle of the Jewish state; and the Tehran children and how more than 1,000 surviving orphans were brought to Israel.

All lectures are held via Zoom at 7:30 p.m. Thank you, Jerry!

Sisterhood's next Ladies who Lunch is Feb. 12, noon, at KJ's Steakhouse on U.S. 41 in Fort Myers. Join us for fun and food. Remember, Sisterhood or Temple membership is not required. However, **a reservation is needed.**

Individuals who volunteer their time are critical to our future. Join us the evening of Friday, Feb. 13 when our 2026 TBE Board is installed. We are also celebrating the Stein baby naming. *Mazel Tov* to the Stein family on such a happy event. All are welcome!

On Feb. 20, services will honor and celebrate the *B'nai Mitzvah* of Ron and Myrna Wohl. *Mazel tov* on this milestone followed by an outdoor *Oneg*, weather permitting.

On Feb. 27, our final February Shabbat, we are honored to have Rabbi Dr. Danny Schiff as guest speaker for services and again the next evening at 6 p.m. for *Havdalah*. He is a noted teacher, author and researcher in Jewish ethics. Following *Havdalah*, there will be hors d'oeuvres

and a book signing for "Judaism in a Digital Age."

Save the date

Our major fundraiser of the year is our Sisterhood Sock Hop! Music, food, auction items, live performances and lots of nostalgia. Register online. See you there — whether you dance or not, let's support our community!

Recurring programs

Our recurring Temple Beth El programs continue:

- Drop off nonperishable food items in the lobby shopping cart whenever the Temple is open.
- Come to Torah Study led by Rabbi Luna via Zoom — no prior study experience is required — Saturday mornings at 9 a.m. On Mondays at 11 a.m., there is Coffee & Chat via Zoom with the rabbi as well.
- Book club is held Feb. 4 at 2:45 p.m. We will discuss "The Goddess of Warsaw" by Lisa Barr. Please join us the first Wednesday every month through the TBE calendar.
- Tot Shabbat, a kid-friendly service, is **not** on Friday in February, but will be at 10 a.m. on Saturday, Feb. 7. It's a Shabbat playdate. In March, we are back to Friday night on March 6 at 6 p.m. Bring your kids; bring your grandkids. Come

for the fellowship, the fun, and the pizza. 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 held Fridays at 7:30 p.m., live in the sanctuary, via Zoom, and streaming on Facebook.
 - 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. Discuss the delights and challenges of converting and reconnecting in a confidential and safe setting. Zoom details are available on our calendar.
- There's always something happening here at TBE, and our members make it happen. Follow us on Facebook and/or Instagram: @TempleBethElFortMyers. You can always contact the office at 239-433-0018.

Temple Beth El ... **where everyone matters.** 🌐

COMMUNITY FREE SYNAGOGUE Fort Myers

(239) 247-4556 • www.fortmyerssynagogue.com

Mazel tov to Helen Baxter and Justin Saucier who were joined in marriage by the rabbi on the afternoon of Friday, Jan. 30. Both work for the Lee County Sheriff's Department.

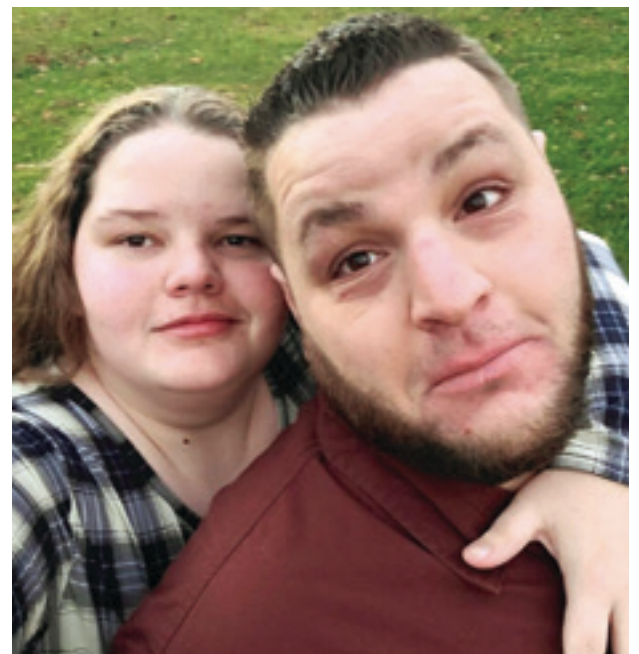
Congratulations to Donna Girasa who will be called to read from the Torah as a *bat mitzvah* during Sabbath *shaharit* on Feb. 7 at our synagogue on the Unity campus (11120 Ranchette Road). Worship begins at 10 a.m., followed by a luncheon tendered in her honor. All are invited and welcome!

Now in its 21st year, the Community Free Synagogue meets on the Unity campus (11120 Ranchette Road) in South Fort Myers. Shabbat Eve begins each week at 6 p.m. with a traditional *shabbat* meal, followed by worship at 7 p.m. with a social hour at its conclusion. If you plan to attend dinner, consider bringing a non-dairy dish, side dish, salad, a bottle of wine or dessert. There is no charge for the meal. The service tends towards the informal and is highly participatory.

The rabbi teaches Torah via Zoom every *shabbat* morning starting at 9:30 a.m. Log on information is on the synagogue's website at fortmyerssynagogue.com. If you do not operate a computer, the rabbi will arrange for you to join him at his home as he teaches and leads the Torah discussion.

Everything is always free at CFS, and memberships are not for sale. There are no fundraising solicitations.

The synagogue's purpose is maintaining a relaxed, harmonious setting for prayer, study and benevolence. 🌐



Helen Baxter and Justin Saucier

BAT YAM TEMPLE OF THE ISLANDS
REFORM

Friday evening services at 7pm at the Sanibel Congregational United Church of Christ,
2050 Periwinkle Way, Sanibel
Spiritual Leader and Cantor:
Rabbi Sunny Schnitzer
President: Janice Block Chaddock
Vice Presidents:
Sandra Teger, Annette Pacyga
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

CHABAD
OF BONITA SPRINGS/ESTERO
ORTHODOX

24611 S. Tamiami Trail
Bonita Springs, FL 34135-7024
Rabbi Mendy Greenberg
Phone: 239-949-6900
Web site: JewishBonita.com
Services: Saturday at 10:00 a.m. followed by a Kiddush

CHABAD JEWISH CENTER
OF CAPE CORAL
ORTHODOX

1716 Cape Coral Pkwy. W.
Cape Coral, FL 33914
Rabbi Yossi Labkowski
Phone: 239-963-4770
E-mail: info@chabadcape.com
Web site: chabadcape.com
Sunday - Friday 8:00 A.M. Shacharit
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
ORTHODOX

424 W Henry St
Punta Gorda, FL 33950
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
ORTHODOX

5620 Winkler Road
Fort Myers, FL 33919
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 class 9:00 a.m.; Shacharit 10:00 a.m.;
Kiddush at noon
Minyan: Monday & Thursday 7:00 a.m.

**SYNAGOGUES &
JEWISH ORGANIZATIONS
IN LEE & CHARLOTTE COUNTIES**



Jewish Federation
of Lee & Charlotte Counties

www.JewishFederationLCC.org

COMMUNITY FREE SYNAGOGUE
CONTEMPORARY TRADITIONAL

The Unity Campus 11120 Ranchette Road
Fort Myers, FL 33966
Phone: 239-247-4556
E-mail: synfree@comcast.net
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



Jewish Heritage Day

Come Celebrate Jewish Heritage, Community & Talent!

**SUNDAY
MAR 22 | 2026**

JetBlue Park | 11500 Fenway South Dr. | Fort Myers

2-5 P.M. ~ Festival under the big tent!

Plenty of seating and a large security presence.

Community Celebration at the Park!

No game scheduled — the park is ALL OURS!

✓ Easy in & out ✓ Convenient parking



Come eat, shop, dance, and celebrate together!
A joyful day of community, culture, and connection.



Featuring:

ENTERTAINMENT

- ✓ LIVE DJ
- ✓ ISRAELI DANCERS
- ✓ TALENT SHOW
- 👉 (SEEKING COMMUNITY PERFORMERS)!
- 🏆 PRIZES FOR 1ST, 2ND & 3RD PLACE

Sign up today and shine on stage!
Amy Hallock, events@jfedlcc.org

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- ✓ TEMPLE BETH EL JUDAICA SHOP

PJ LIBRARY KIDS ZONE

- ✓ BOUNCE HOUSE • ARTS & CRAFTS
- ✓ FAMILY-FRIENDLY FUN

COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS

- ✓ JNF, BBYO, HADASSAH
- ✓ TEMPLE JUDEA
- ✓ TEMPLE BETH EL
- ✓ COMMUNITY FREE SYNAGOGUE
- ✓ TEMPLE BETH SHALOM
- ✓ JEWISH WAR VETERANS
- ✓ BAT YAM TEMPLE OF THE ISLANDS
- ✓ CHABAD OF SOUTHWEST FLORIDA & MORE COMMUNITY PARTNERS JOINING US!

Free Admission & Open to the Public!

Registration required for security purposes:
JewishFederationlcc.org/calendar