



L'CHAYYIM

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



Jewish Federation
of Lee & Charlotte Counties

Resilience & Renewal; Israel Today

**TUESDAY, MAY 5
2:00 PM**

SPECIAL GUEST

Aviva Klompas

Aviva Klompas is a respected global voice on Israel, Jewish identity, and antisemitism. She is the co-founder of Boundless Israel and previously served as Director of Speechwriting for Israel's Permanent Mission to the United Nations. Aviva is a sought-after international speaker and commentator whose work focuses on strengthening understanding of Israel and combating misinformation. She has been recognized by Hadassah Magazine as one of the "18 American Zionist Women You Should Know" and the "Top 100 People Positively Influencing Jewish Life."



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 Partisan political opinions will not be published, but opinions on subjects affecting the Jewish community are welcome.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

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**JUNE/JULY ISSUE
 EDITORIAL
 DEADLINE:
 Wednesday, May 6**



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

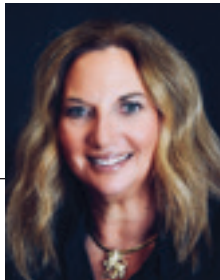
A Jewish Community that is based on Jewish values such as Tzedakah (benevolence), Tikkun Olam (repairing the world) and K'lal Yisrael (taking responsibility for one another).

Peace of mind, purpose and community

What your Federation makes possible

FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

■ **Debbie Sanford**



Just recently, we asked for your support through our Passover Appeal. It is always a meaningful time to give — rooted in our shared story of resilience, freedom and responsibility to one another.

But what happens after you give? What does your support truly make possible? The answer is both simple and profound: peace of mind, purpose and community. **Peace of mind**, first and foremost.

At a time when Jewish communities across the country — and around the world — are facing rising antisemitism and security concerns, your Federation is working every day to ensure our community remains safe, supported and vigilant. Whether through partnerships, security trainings and building assessments, grants to cover security personnel expense at religious schools and preschools around both counties, or simply being a steady presence, we are here so that you can walk into Jewish spaces with confidence and pride.

Purpose

Your dollars do more than fund programs; they create impact. They help keep our food pantry stocked for families

in need. They support emergency assistance when someone is facing a crisis. They allow us to provide case management, guidance and resources to those who may not know where else to turn.

They ensure that, in moments of uncertainty, no one in our community has to stand alone.

Community

Perhaps the most visible — and most meaningful — impact is the sense of connection you help build. From our film series to holiday celebrations, from educational programs to community gatherings, your support brings people together.

In a region like ours, with seasonal residents and a constantly shifting population, creating and sustaining that sense of belonging is not easy, but it is essential, and it is happening every day because of you.

Jewish Federation of Lee & Charlotte Counties may be small in size, but it is strong in purpose. We are passionate, committed, responsive and deeply connected to the needs of our community, and none of it happens without your partnership.

So, when you reflect on your Passover gift, know this: You didn't just make a donation, you helped ensure that someone felt safe. You helped someone find support in a difficult moment. You helped bring people together as a community.

You helped strengthen Jewish life right here at home. And for that, we are deeply grateful. 🌟

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Looking back to look forward

By Doreen Kostel, Federation Co-President

I can hardly believe that my two years as Co-President of Jewish Federation of Lee & Charlotte Counties has come to an end.



Doreen Kostel

These two years have been filled with learning, friendship and progress for our community. The themes that stand out are renewed energy in programming for community building, strengthening our foundation to support Jewish life, and expanding ways to foster safe, vibrant Jewish communities in Lee and Charlotte Counties and around the world.

Building community and connection

When we are not in hurricane recovery mode, the Federation's work centers on building — building community, strengthening connections among affiliated and nonaffiliated members and supporters, and engaging Jews and friends of all ages.

This year, we expanded our cultural programming to reinvigorate community life. With Debbie Sanford's leadership and Amy Hallock's amazing organizational skills, we started the year with our Community Breakfast, featuring Saul Blinken. We relaunched popular programs like JFED Hits the Road, featuring presentations of Holocaust stories followed, of course, by shared meals — one at The Spice King's restaurant in Miami and another at Jo-el's Kosher Deli in St. Petersburg.

Our Film Festival celebrated 30 years of Jewish films in Lee and Charlotte Counties, thanks to the support of David Garonzik and the committed volunteers. The Linda Idelson Culinary Events brought families together to experience Jewish heritage through food and a coffee ceremony. And Jewish Heritage Day has blossomed into a major celebration of food, music and

dancing, made possible by Debbie Sanford's partnership with the Boston Red Sox.

Beyond growing the many programs described above, Amy Hallock, our Community Events Manager, successfully introduced new community-wide gatherings such as the Hanukkah Menorah Lighting, which brought together Jews and friends for music, dancing and — naturally — more food.

Meeting community needs

If you want to know what our charity organization peers think of Jewish Federation of Lee & Charlotte Counties, just take a look at Jewish Family Services, led by Monica Wildonger. There is always need in our community, and our Food Pantry and social services efforts increase each year.

Through partnerships with the United Way, Harry Chapin Food Bank, and other area organizations, Jewish Family Services has increased the number of families served, now offering refrigerated food and expanded case management. Elizabeth Elba's Lunch Bunch has grown as well, expanding to new sites and becoming a vibrant program on its own.

Investing in the next generation

We are also extending our outreach to children, parents and teens through PJ Library and our P2G partnerships. Brittany Salem now leads our youth engagement efforts — a greatly valued role for continuity of the Jewish people.

The team behind the work

Behind the scenes, Bri Garcia, Dorothy Waldron and Steve Shirey provide the essential administrative support that keeps everything running smoothly. From facility maintenance to bookkeeping and financial reports to having a friendly voice when fielding the myriads of questions posed of

the Federation, website support and related data management, this "behind the scenes" group keeps things humming.

What stands out about each of our staff members is their willingness to go the extra mile for the Federation's success. Thank you all for your focus and great efforts to build a strong community. A special thanks to Debbie Sanford who both leads these many efforts and had the vision to shape her team into a more productive group.

Leadership and governance

My second heartfelt thank-you goes to my Co-President, Karin Fine and the Board of Directors. This year, we redirected the Board of Directors to be more visible in supporting Jewish Federation of Lee & Charlotte Counties reach into the community — ensuring Board members participate in events, act as ambassadors, and guide our strategic direction. We updated our by-laws to enhance governance and clarified Board-staff relations. Strengthening recruitment and succession planning remains a continuing priority.

Strengthening community security

All of this work takes place amid rising antisemitism and growing concern for community safety. Through the Jewish Federations of North America (JFNA) and the Secure Community Network, we began implementing stronger security measures. We participate in a local Federation

coalition to support security expert John Murtagh, who assessed both Federation and local religious institution needs, helped us to secure federal grants, built strong relations with local police, and consulted on safety plans for events.

Looking ahead, security will be an ongoing focus both locally and nationally. JFNA continues to advocate on Capitol Hill for increased funding, awareness and resources to protect Jewish institutions, and we will support that effort.

Global impact and responsibility

JFNA also leads international resilience efforts to support Israel and Ukraine, partnering with such well-known agencies as the Joint Distribution Committee and Jewish Agency and with smaller, more focused organizations who have been vetted through a grants process. These programs address urgent needs, from mental health to rebuilding kibbutzim and relocation support during crisis. JFNA raised over \$30 million for Operation Roaring Lion alone.

As you consider your giving for the coming year, please remember that supporting the Jewish Federation strengthens both your local community and our global Jewish family.

Finally, to the many community members who offered ideas, comments, advice and your time, please know you are incredibly valued. Jewish Federation of Lee & Charlotte Counties is successful because of you. Thank you for an extraordinary two years. 🌍

Stronger together

How collaboration keeps our community protected

By John Murtagh, Secure Community Network Regional Security Advisor-Florida West Coast

Jewish Federation of Lee & Charlotte Counties has built an exceptional working relationship with its law enforcement partners at the local, state and federal levels — one grounded in trust, coordination and a shared commitment to community safety. This collaboration is not symbolic; it is operational, consistent and highly effective.



John Murtagh

At the center of this effort is the presence of Secure Community Network (SCN) in the community, serving as a critical liaison between the Federation and law enforcement agencies. Through continuous information sharing, joint planning and real-time communication, SCN ensures that intelligence flows seamlessly and that emerging threats are quickly identified and addressed.

Our law enforcement partners at each level, especially the Lee County Sheriff's Office, have demonstrated a proactive posture, increasing patrols and visibility around synagogues, schools and community centers — key places of Jewish life. These visible measures provide reassurance, while behind the scenes, agencies are working in close coordination with SCN to analyze threat streams, monitor extremist trends and disrupt potential risks before they materialize.

This layered approach — combining visibility, intelligence and partnership — extends beyond the local region. Information developed through these efforts contributes to a broader national security picture, reinforcing protections for Jewish communities across the country. 🌍



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Honors & Memorials

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

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

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jewishfederationlcc.org/tribute-memorials

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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	Holocaust Remembrance	Lion of Judah
Jewish Social Club	Jewish Film Festival	Women's Day
Mah Jongg	Community Breakfast	TRIBE
Holiday Senior Visits	Major Gifts-Pacesetters	Annual Meeting
PJ Library	Jewish Heritage Day	Men's Division
Federation Hits the Road-Day Trips		P2G Partnership Together

What do you think?

L'CHAYIM wants to know!

Send your letters and comments to Sharon Hood, L'CHAYIM Editor, at sharon@marketcrank.com.

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Building community through compassion

JFS Food Pantry expands to meet growing needs

By Monica Wildonger, JFS Case Manager & Food Pantry Coordinator

Access to nutritious food is a basic need, yet for many families in our community, it remains a daily challenge. JFS Food Pantry continues to serve as a reliable source of support, dignity and hope for individuals and families facing food insecurity.

As a proud United Way partner and a hub of the Harry Chapin Food Bank, JFS is committed to ensuring that no one in our community goes without essential groceries. Each week, the pantry provides food in a welcoming, respectful environment where every person is treated with care.

While the pantry was recently closed in observance of the Passover holiday, JFS extends warm wishes and hopes that everyone had a meaningful and joyful Chag.

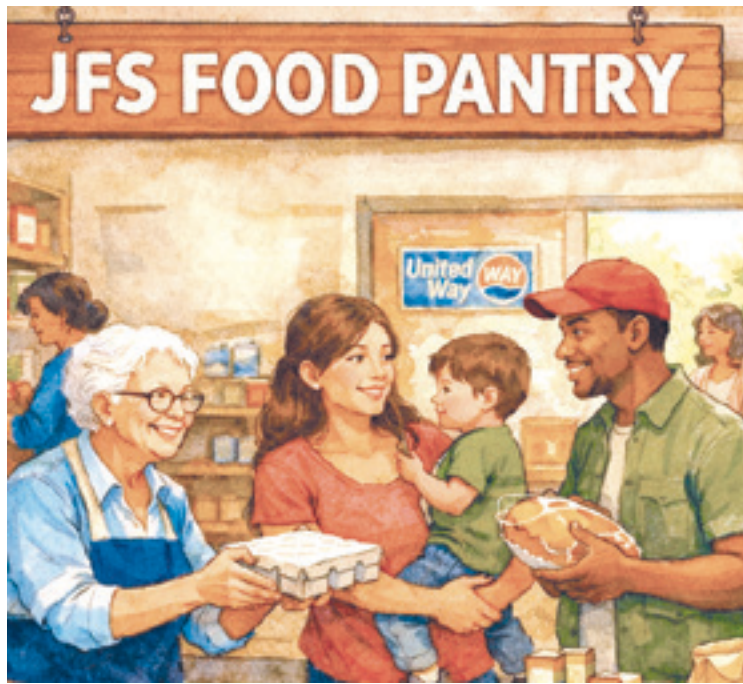


Monica Wildonger

community receive consistent and nutritious support. In addition, diapers are available to parents every 30 days, easing the burden on young families.

Beyond food distribution, the pantry serves as a place of connection and compassion. During times of extreme weather, JFS opens its doors as a safe space, offering relief from the heat in the summer and warmth during colder days.

The mission of the JFS Food Pantry goes beyond providing food; it's about strengthening the community, one family at a time. Residents are encouraged to visit, volunteer or support the pantry's ongoing efforts to make a lasting difference. 🌍



JFS Food Pantry

Location:

9701 Commerce Center Court,
Fort Myers, FL 33908

Contact: Monica Wildonger,
LPN, Case Manager & Food
Pantry Coordinator

Phone: 239-481-4449, ext. 1

Email:

casemanager@jfedlcc.org

Website:

jewishfederationlcc.org

New hours and offerings

The pantry is currently open Wednesdays from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. To better serve the community, JFS has expanded its hours to include Thursdays from noon to 6 p.m. These new evening hours are designed to accommodate working families — many of whom are often overlooked but still struggle with food insecurity.

JFS is also proud to introduce “Share and Care” boxes for seniors, helping ensure that older members of our

PJ Library brings community together

By Brittany Salem, Youth and Family Engagement Coordinator

March was filled with joy, celebration and meaningful connection for our PJ Library families. We were thrilled to come together as a community to celebrate Purim in partnership with Temple Judea and Temple Beth El. Families enjoyed a festive and fun-filled atmosphere at the annual Purim Carnival, creating special memories through games, activities and shared traditions.

Later in the month, our community gathered once again to celebrate Jewish Heritage Day at JetBlue Park in Fort Myers. It was a vibrant afternoon filled with community spirit, culture, beautiful Israeli music and delicious Israeli food. Events like these highlight the strength and warmth of our local Jewish community and provide wonderful opportunities for families to connect.

As a part of our P2G (Partnership-2Gether) consortium — a global partnership program that connects Jewish communities around the world with regions in Israel — we were eagerly expecting the Israeli youth delegation and looked forward to welcoming them into our community for a week. Due to the current circumstances, they were unfortunately unable to come to the U.S. in March; however, we are excited to share that they



Brittany Salem

will visit us after the High Holidays. We look forward to planning meaningful opportunities for them to connect with our community during their stay.

Looking ahead

We are excited to continue our programming after Passover with one of our favorite

recurring events, the PJ Library Book Swap, held twice a year at Temple Beth El. Our next Book Swap will take place Friday, May 1, at 6 p.m., in conjunction with Tot Shabbat. Families can enjoy pizza, connect with friends and browse a wide selection of PJ Library books to take home. We encourage everyone to bring their gently used PJ Library books to exchange for new reads!

We are also excited to announce a special beginning-of-summer celebration! Join us Sunday, May 17, at 3 p.m. at Ultimate Ninjas Academy in Fort Myers for a fun and interactive PJ Library kick-off event. Families will enjoy an action-packed ninja course experience, followed by drinks and snacks. We hope that all our PJ Library families will join us for this exciting and energetic afternoon!

We look forward to seeing you at these upcoming events and continuing to build strong connections within our community. 🌍

Jewish Federation
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PJ Library

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Lunch Bunch fun

By Elizabeth Elba, Life Enrichment Coordinator

On March 18, Lunch Bunch gathered at Discovery Village The Forum for a warm and welcoming afternoon of good food and great company. Many thanks to Discovery Village The Forum for hosting us in such a beautiful room and making everyone feel so comfortable.



Elizabeth Elba

Guests enjoyed a delicious buffet lunch that included bagels and lox with all the fixings, Israeli couscous salad, fresh fruit, vegetable soup, and brownies for dessert. It was a perfect

opportunity to catch up with friends and meet new faces in the community.

After lunch, the group came together for a fun game of Jewish trivia bingo. This was not your typical bingo game. Instead of calling out the words, participants were given the meanings and had to match them to Yiddish and culturally familiar terms on their cards. Words like “nosh,” “shtick,” and “gefilte fish” brought laughs and a bit of a challenge as everyone tested their knowledge.



Prizes were awarded to the winners, including scented candles, gift cards, Jewish Federation items, and specialty chocolates. The game brought lots of energy to the room and was enjoyed by all!

We are very grateful to Discovery Village The Forum for their generous hospitality.

Looking ahead, Lunch Bunch will continue to meet each month. On May 30, we will gather at the Jewish Federation offices, and on June 30, we will meet at Temple Judea.

For more information about upcoming lunches, please check the website, or contact me at elizabeth@jfedlcc.org or 239-481-4449, ext. 4. 📞

Looking back, moving forward

By Amy Hallock, Community Events Manager

It's hard to believe that nearly a year has passed since I began my journey with Jewish Federation of Lee & Charlotte Counties. What has felt like a whirlwind has also been deeply meaningful, filled with moments of connection, celebration and community spirit that I will not soon forget.



Amy Hallock

This past season has been a full and vibrant one. From holiday gatherings to community-wide events, each opportunity to come together has reflected something truly special about our Jewish community. There is a unique energy that emerges when people gather not just to attend, but to participate, to connect, and to create shared experiences. Whether it was families celebrating traditions, friends reconnecting, or new faces joining for the first time, each event added another layer to the strength of our community.

One of the most powerful aspects of this season has been the sense of pride and belonging that has been carried through each gathering. Most recently, Jewish Heritage Day at the Red Sox

game offered a wonderful reminder of how meaningful it is to celebrate Jewish identity, not only within our own spaces but out in the broader community as well. Seeing so many come together in such a joyful and visible way was truly special.

Moments like these do not happen on their own.

They are made possible by the generosity, support and dedication of so many. I would like to extend a heartfelt thank-you to our sponsors, partners, volunteers and every individual who showed up and participated. Your involvement is what transforms events into experiences and helps bring our community to life in such a meaningful way.

As we take a moment to reflect on all that we have shared, we also look ahead with excitement. There is so much more to come, and I am grateful to be part of a community that continues to show up, support one another and find joy in being together.

Thank you for making this past season so memorable. I look forward to all that we will build together in the months ahead. 🌟



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With gratitude

A Night Fit for a Queen, March 10

By Amy Hallock, Community Events Manager

We extend our heartfelt appreciation to all who contributed to the success of the Lions of Judah and Pomegranates event, “A Night Fit for a Queen.” The evening was a beautiful celebration of leadership,

generosity and the enduring strength of our community.

We are especially grateful to our valued partners and supporters: FineMark Bank and its dedicated staff; Congress Jewelers; Whip’N Willow Photography;

Shani Minkowicz; Bri Garcia; Brittany Salem; and Florida Academy of Massage. Your professionalism, creativity and generosity elevated the experience and helped create a truly memorable evening for all in attendance.

Thank you for your meaningful partnership and for helping us honor and uplift the women who inspire and sustain our community each and every day. 🌸



Photos by Whip’N Willow Photography

Jewish Heritage Game at the ballpark!

By Amy Hallock, Community Events Manager

There was so much pride and joy at our March 9 Jewish Heritage Game at JetBlue Park as the Boston Red Sox took on the Philadelphia Phillies.

Thank-you to everyone who showed up, showed spirit and made the day a true celebration of community and connection. 🌸



Jewish Heritage Day

By Amy Hallock, Community Events Manager

Thank you to everyone who joined us for Jewish Heritage Day on March 22. It was a vibrant day filled with community, culture and

connection. From our incredible vendors and talented dancers to the inspiring talent show, children's activities and lively entertainment, there was truly

something for everyone to enjoy.

We are so grateful to our partners, participants and attendees who helped create such a meaningful and festive

experience. Your energy and spirit made the day unforgettable, and we look forward to many more opportunities to celebrate together as a community.



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Jewish Federation
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Beyond our walls

Holocaust Museum's community outreach

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

The Holocaust Museum & Cohen Education Center is a place students, tourists and locals visit to learn a deeper understanding of how the Holocaust happened and what it means for us today. However, the Museum goes far **beyond its walls** to reach thousands of individuals throughout Southwest Florida. We've developed a community engagement program that allows us to tell our message in housing developments, libraries, churches and other community centers.



Erin Blankenship

Holocaust Museum & Cohen Education Center

The importance of reaching middle and high school-aged students cannot be underscored enough. Students make up the vast majority of those we impact. However, there are many adults that know little, if anything, about this difficult history. Judging by community response, there is genuine interest in our mission and a desire to learn.

The Museum's community engagement program includes traveling exhibits that are not only available



Docent training with Eva Schaller at "Holocaust By Bullets"

free of charge, but our staff delivers and installs them. We also conduct presentations that might include a staff member speaking on a subject of choice or a survivor or a descendant of a survivor telling the story of their Holocaust experience. We tailor the presentation based on the needs of those who invite us.

Plus, we offer several public programs throughout season at venues other than our own, like March's Antisemitism Lecture, or the film series we offered at Paragon Pavillion Theaters in February.

Many of these opportunities allow us to interact with those

outside of the Jewish community, sometimes reaching people who know nothing about the Holocaust. We also meet people who end up wanting to help accomplish our mission; people who become volunteers, docents and supporters of the Museum.

We would love to come to your community too! If you would like a member of our staff or our speakers bureau to make a presentation at your venue or to your club or civic group, contact Community Engagement Manager Sara Gottwalles at 239-263-9200, ext. 211 or Sara@hmcec.org. You can also visit our website: HMCEC.org.



PopUp Museum at South Regional Library



Carlisle Community Survivor Presentation



Shelley at Immokalee High



Julie Cohen at Mercato

Nashim Women's Circle at Temple Judea

By Linat Bahar

In today's fast-paced world, opportunities for women to gather in a warm, elegant and meaningful setting have become more valuable than ever. Our Nashim Women's Circle was created with this vision in mind: to bring women together each month for enriching experiences that strengthen friendships, foster community and create joyful shared moments.

More than simply a social event, the Women's Circle has become a beautiful part of Jewish community life in South Florida. Each gathering offers a thoughtfully planned evening where women can relax, connect, learn and enjoy one another's company in an inviting and

gracious atmosphere. These monthly events provide a special opportunity to step away from daily routines and enjoy time that feels uplifting, refined and genuinely enjoyable.

This past March, during the joyful month of Adar, our Women's Circle hosted a wonderful evening centered on discovering the most flattering colors for each woman. Our guest presenter, Mrs. Debbie Grass, led an engaging and insightful program on personal color selection, helping participants better understand which tones and shades enhance their natural beauty, complement their features and bring greater confidence to their personal style.

The evening was not only informative but also full of warmth and celebration. Women enjoyed a glass of wine, a beautifully served dinner, delicious desserts and the pleasure of gathering together in wonderful company. The room was filled with conversation, laughter, smiles and the unmistakable joy that comes from sharing meaningful time with other women in the community.

What makes the Women's Circle so special is the unique blend of elegance and connection. Each event is designed to be both enriching and welcoming, offering interesting content and a true sense of belonging. New friendships are formed, existing bonds

are strengthened and the community itself grows stronger through these shared experiences.

As our Women's Circle continues to grow, so does its impact. These gatherings are a reminder that community is built not only through tradition, but also through friendship, presence and the simple beauty of coming together.

We look forward to many more evenings of inspiration, warmth, laughter, and connection in the months ahead. Because sometimes the most meaningful way to strengthen a community is simply to bring women together — beautifully, thoughtfully and with heart.

Ahavah

Temple Beth El's new LGBTQ+ group

By Dawn Wineinger, Co-Chair of Ahavah at Temple Beth El

I am proud to announce the newly formed group, Ahavah. Ahavah, the Hebrew word for love, is meant to provide a safe, joyous and fully affirming home for LGBTQ+ Jews, their families and allies.

Our goal is to promote a vibrant, inclusive environment through social gatherings, educational programs, advocacy and support. Ahavah is committed to bringing more joy, color and diversity to the Jewish community. Whether you

identify as LGBTQ+, are questioning, or are a proud ally, we welcome you to join us!

Look for us on June 13 at the 2026 Pride-SWFL Festival in downtown Fort Myers, from 2 to 10 p.m.

For more information or to join our mailing list, please contact me at dawntw10@gmail.com.

Let us work together to make our community a space of true belonging. 🌍

Jews by Choice

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

By Dawn Wineinger, Temple Beth El member

Jews by Choice is a group for recent converts, those exploring conversion, and Jews seeking to reconnect with their roots. The group meets via Zoom the last Thursday of

the month from 8 to 9 p.m.

Each month we discuss a topic in Judaism suggested by one of our participants. This month we are discussing Erev Shabbat Blessings. The meetings

are informal. There is always time for discussion or questions.

Jews by Choice is a friendly, nonjudgmental group. If you have questions and/or need to talk with

like-minded individuals in a friendly atmosphere, Jews by Choice is the place for you.

For more information contact me at dawntw10@gmail.com. 🌍

Nar-Anon support meetings

By Joann Goldman

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

Addiction is a family disease; it affects the relationships of those close

to the addict — parents, spouses, siblings, children, longtime friends and employers. In the group meetings, these family members and friends share their experiences, strengths and hopes to help each other and themselves.

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

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

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

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

For more information, please contact me at jogo118@gmail.com or 239-470-4827. 🌍

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TBE welcomed as WRJ Sisterhood District Affiliate

Day of Action event in the works as well

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

This past March, Women of Reform Judaism (WRJ) officially welcomed Temple Beth El back as a Southeast District Affiliate. During the WRJ Southeast District Conference, held the weekend of March 14, Ashley had the honor of receiving our charter in person.

As a District Affiliate, WRJ provides valuable assistance and support to our Sisterhood as we carry out our mission of sisterhood, spirituality and social action. As a member of Sisterhood at Temple Beth El, you are automatically a member of WRJ through this affiliation, as well as a member of Women's Simcha Circle if you fall within our generational range.

When asked about the decision to rejoin, Sisterhood President Karen



■ Toby Buerger



■ Ashley Kogan-Weed

Quanstrom shared, "The Sisterhood Board of Directors unanimously voted to rejoin WRJ. This vote reflects Sisterhood's commitment to supporting a community greater than our own. Greater numbers translate to greater influence."

Day of Action

In April, WRJ organized a Day of Action for Sisterhoods to engage their communities. Temple Beth El's Sisterhood and Women's Simcha Circle will partner to host a Day of Action focused on combating antisemitism. More details to come — stay tuned!

Additionally, Women's Simcha Circle is planning a day trip in June to The Florida Holocaust Museum in St. Petersburg. Follow the Women's Simcha Circle Facebook page for more information.

To join

To learn more about TBE Sisterhood or Women's Simcha Circle, email Toby Buerger at tobytbe@gmail.com or fill out the "More Information" form on Temple Beth El's website: templebethel.com/request-for-information1.html.



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Ellen Weiss, Executive Director
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Together, we are ensuring a Jewish future.

A Jewish 12-Step recovery group

Every Saturday at 11 a.m. via Zoom

Courtesy of Temple Beth El

If you are Jewish in search of recovery support, a standard AA class may not suffice when the higher power references are not Jewish.

Folks are invited to experience the 12-Steps from a Jewish perspective on Saturdays at 11 a.m. via Zoom. This group includes those recovering from alcohol, drugs, and other addictions such as food, gambling, sex, shopping, etc.

The 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.

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Strengthening Jewish traditions

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

By Rabbi Barbara Aiello

George and Irv have a great deal in common; both are in their 90s. Walking together every day means that, as they like to say in unison, “We’re fit as fiddles — whatever that means!”

What might be even more significant is that George and Irv are both great-grandfathers; George to three boys and Irv to twin girls.

“It’s hard to believe our grandsons have kids,” says Irv as George nods in agreement and says that both grandsons are intermarried (“to lovely girls,” says Irv) and both families share interfaith religious traditions (“sort of,” says George).

What both *great-zaydes* share with each other — and universally with many Jewish grandparents and great-grands — is the desire to keep Jewish traditions alive for the youngest generation.

“That’s when we hit on a great idea,” Irv says. George chimes in, “We came up with a plan. Let’s celebrate our Hebrew birthdays and show the kids how to celebrate theirs!”

Irv was born on June 6, 1932. He determined the date that his secular birthday fell on the Hebrew calendar by checking with “Mr. Google.” Irv searched “converting to a Hebrew



■ Rabbi Barbara Aiello

date,” and found that on the Hebrew calendar, his birthdate corresponds to the Hebrew date, 2nd Sivan. This year, 2nd Sivan falls on May 18.

George added, “So, that’s how we get two birthdays. Two different calendars, two different days.” George calculated his Hebrew birthday as well. His secular birthday, Sept.

15, 1935, converts to Aug. 30 this year.

When George and Irv told the grandkids about their Hebrew birthdays and how they planned to celebrate, the children were intrigued. They asked, “Could we have Hebrew birthdays, too?”

“Bingo!” said George who winked at Irv.

The two great-grandfathers got to work. Their plan was to celebrate Irv’s May Hebrew birthday first. They gathered Jewish themed decorations: a huge banner sporting “Happy Birthday” in Hebrew, and a Jewish holiday board game. They ordered a DoorDash delivery of bagels, lox and cream cheese, baklava and birthday cake.

George crowed, “I found an old CD of Jewish music. Then, I found my CD player! I’m patting myself on the back, because we whooped it up with ‘Hava N’gila.’”

Irv added, “Don’t forget the gifts. I got gift cards from CVS, an electric toothbrush and a crossword puzzle book. And lots of nice cards, too.”

As far as celebrating Hebrew birthdays go, George and Irv’s great-grandkids were all in. Both *zaydes* had meetings with their respective grandkids and each child converted their “normal” birthday to the Hebrew date, found the new date on the Hebrew calendar and planned their celebrations.

As each child celebrated, the *zaydes* took the opportunity to talk about their lives as Jewish children. “I went to Hebrew school 84 years ago,” George said. “I told the kids all about going to *cheder* in Poland.”

“We cleared everything with the parents,” Irv said. “Didn’t want to upset the appletart with the kids’ mom and dad. We told them they’d get an invitation, and George and I would do all the work.”

George said, “We get to push a little *Yiddishkeit* and have fun doing it.”

Jewish tradition would agree. In one of Judaism’s most important texts, the “*Pirke Avot*” (“Ethics of the Fathers”) we

read about milestone life events that call for celebration.

When a boy reaches three years, he gets his first haircut. At five, Jewish children begin their study of the Torah. Mishnah study begins at age 10; then, it’s ages 12 and 13 for Bat and Bar Mitzvah, and at 15 our kids dive into the Talmud. As Irv would say, “Each achievement means party time!”

In Psalm 65, we read, “You crown the year with your goodness, and your paths overflow with abundance.”

“We’re crowning the year twice,” George reflects. “For the *kinderlach*, how bad can it be?”

Rabbi Barbara Aiello served the Aviva Campus for Senior Life in Sarasota, Florida as resident rabbi for 10 years. Her most popular

columns are now published in her book, “*Aging Jewishly*,” available from Amazon books. Rabbi Barbara now lives and works in Italy where she is Italy’s first woman rabbi and spiritual leader of Italy’s first Reconstructionist synagogue. Contact her at Rabbi@RabbiBarbara.com. 📧

What both great-zaydes share ... is the desire to keep Jewish traditions alive for the youngest generation.



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Jewish connections and a 100-year-old Mensch!

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.

Six films with Jewish connections open in theaters this month.

"The Devil Wears Prada 2"

The "biggie" is "The Devil Wears Prada 2," which opens on May 1. It is the sequel to the 2006 film, "The Devil Wears Prada," which was got great reviews and made a ton of money.

"The Devil Wears Prada" (2006) was based on a 2003 novel of the same name written by **Lauren Weisberger**, now 49. The novel (and the film) was very much based on Weisberger's time as an assistant to Anna Wintour, the now legendary head editor of *Vogue* magazine.

Aline Brosh McKenna, 58, wrote the screenplays for both the 2006 and 2026 films. (Yes, Brosh is Jewish. McKenna is her husband's name). She's also written many other hit films.

David Frankel, 66, who directed the 2006 film, returned as the director of the new sequel. He's directed 11 other "intelligent" films and most

have made "some" money, but nothing like the original 2006 film.

Meryl Streep returns in "The Devil Wears Prada 2," as Miranda, the head editor of *Runway* fashion magazine. Anne Hathaway played Andi, a "lowly" assistant to Miranda in the 2006 film and returns as the features editor of *Runway* in the new sequel.

In the 2026 film, *Runway*, like many print magazines, is in financial trouble. Miranda has to go to Emily Charlton, a former "Miranda-assistant," to invest in the magazine. Emily Charlton (played by Emily Blunt) is now the head of a major fashion company.

It's fairly clear that **Pauline Chalamet**, 34 (Timothée's sister), **B.J. Novak**, 46, and **Rachel Bloom**, 38, have pretty good roles, but their characters' names aren't "out now." (It's a silly marketing thing that film producers do).

"Animal Farm"

Opening in theaters on May 1, "Animal Farm" is an animated film based on the famous 1945 novella written by George Orwell. Orwell took on Stalin's horrors

after Stalin became the dictator of the Soviet Union. Animal characters stood in for Stalin, **Trotsky**, etc.

Nicholas Stoller, 50, wrote this film's screenplay. **Seth Rogen**, 43, has a star role as Napoleon, a boar, who leads a revolution and becomes a harsh ruler.

"The Sheep Detectives"

This mystery-comedy opens on May 8. The sheep are animated and they interact with "real" humans. The official premise is that "a flock of sheep set off to solve the mystery of who murdered George, their beloved [human] shepherd."

Craig Mazin, 55, wrote the screenplay (which is based on a 2005 novel). **Molly Gordon**, 32

(known for her role in "The Bear"), plays George's daughter. **Brett Goldstein**, 45, voices a Norfolk Horn sheep.

"In the Gray"

This action-thriller opens on May 15. The official premise is as follows: "A secret elite team of agents is tasked with reclaiming a vast fortune stolen by a ruthless tyrant."

Jake Gyllenhaal, 45, co-stars as Bronco, a "good guy." **Fisher Stevens**, 62, has a supporting role.

"Magic Hour"

This four-character film also opens on May 15. The premise: "A couple escape to the desert to navigate their relationship."

Daveed Diggs, 45, and **Katie Aschilton** play the couple, Charlie and Erin. **Brad Garrett**, 65, plays Erin's friend, and **Susan Sullivan** plays Erin's mother.

"Star Wars: The Mandalorian and Grogu"

It's way too complicated to relay the plot here, but it is a "real" Star Wars franchise movie. Opening May 22, it was directed and written by **Jon Favreau**, 58. He is responsible for the creation of the Mandalorian TV character.

"Life on Earth: Attenborough's Greatest Adventure"


Here's a special program with a special Jewish connection. On May 6, PBS will premiere "Life on Earth: Attenborough's Greatest Adventure." This program tells you everything you might want to know about David Attenborough's nature program and his life. This year is the 50th anniversary of the program, and it is David Attenborough's 100th birthday!

David and his older brother, Richard, were teens in England (1938) when their (Christian) parents told them that they wanted to house two German Jewish sisters, Helga and Irene Bejach (ages 12 and 13), who needed to be housed. England let some Jewish children leave Nazi Germany and find housing in the U.K. (Only children; no adults).


David and Richard treated them like their sisters. Shortly after WWII ended, the Bejach sisters found out their parents died in Auschwitz. The Attenborough parents then legally adopted the sisters as their daughters. Not long after, the sisters left for America; they had an uncle there. They married Jewish men and lived good lives in America. They had children and grandchildren.

Richard, an Oscar-winning actor and director, died in 2014, age 90. Irene died in 1994 and Helga in 2005. David came to America in 2020, and he organized a reunion for all the Bejach descendants.

What a mensch! He deserves his real formal title: Lord Attenborough. 🌟



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Saying goodbye

By Brian Simon

How do you say goodbye? With my wife and children, I always say, “I love you.” I think it’s important to remind my loved ones that they’re my loved ones. For another thing, I want those to be the last words they hear when we part.



■ Brian Simon

Obviously, you can’t say goodbye to everyone that way. It would be awkward, like that Goldfish commercial where the guy accidentally says, “Love you,” when finishing a Zoom call with a business associate.

I was taught that Jewish people should say the Shema before we go to sleep because those six words should be the last from your lips each night. The Torah literally says to recite them when we lie down and when we get up. But that’s not the point of my story.

Saying goodbye is a funny kind of a ritual at the end of the conversation. There’s a wind-down, and then a little bit of a dance. You can’t just say, “K, bye!” and leave.

First, there’s the indication that you’re ready to end of the conversation: “Well,

it was nice talking with you ...” or “Hey, listen, I have to run, but ...”

And that’s just the beginning of the process. Then, the other person has to acknowledge that the conversation is coming to a close and maybe offer a summary of something you talked about.

“Yeah, I’m glad to hear your mom’s doing better ...”

And now there’s a question of how many things you have to say to each other before you can finally say goodbye. Maybe you have to offer your own callback to something they shared in the conversation.

“Thank you. And that’s awesome about your son’s soccer team.”

Another go to is, “Say hi to (fill in the name) for me.” I think it’s funny that one way of saying goodbye is by asking your counterpart to say hello to someone else.

Finally, somebody says, “All right.” And maybe the other person says,

“Ok.” And at that point, it’s okay to say goodbye.

The one blessing of texting is that we’ve disposed of all the ritual that goes with the goodbye.

“r u coming?”

“On my way.”

That’s it. No further discussion needed. If that were a phone call, it would have taken two minutes — about 15 seconds to confirm whether the person was coming and another minute and a half to say goodbye.

I mean, sometimes we go too far in the other direction. You’re

never quite sure if that last text was the end of the conversation or if you’re supposed to respond. The thumbs up emoji is usually sufficient to signal that we’re done communicating.

Even in the world of TV news, which is a one-way conversation, it’s always awkward for the anchor to sign off. Tom Brokaw used to say four different things: “That’s nightly news for this Wednesday. I’m Tom Brokaw.

The thumbs up emoji is usually sufficient to signal that we’re done communicating.

Thanks for watching, and I’ll see you tomorrow night.”

Dan Rather tried out, “Courage,” as a sign off on CBS. People made fun of him for using it, so he switched to, “That’s part of our world tonight.”

Each of us has our own signature sign off. George Carlin had a bit about all the ways to say goodbye.

“We say, bye-bye, so long, see you later, take it easy, be cool, hang in there. Sometimes you get in a rut with the way you say goodbye. You know what I do? Every month, I change the way I say goodbye. Whether I need to or not, every month I start using a different phrase.”

So, anyway. That’s about all I have to say about saying goodbye. Thanks for reading. Say hi to your friends for me. I’ll see you around.

Oh, and I’ll be back with another column next month. I don’t want anyone to get the wrong idea. This is just a story about saying goodbye. It’s not actually goodbye. 🙌



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More than a number

By Ida Margolis and Shelley Lieb

When we think about what was lost during the Holocaust, our first thought is the 6 million who were murdered. That's only the starting point. Each of these people had a home, a community, a family, a history, perhaps a profession, specific talent or expertise. So much was lost to the world because of each individual death.



Ida Margolis and Shelley Leib

DellaPergola's estimates. By the end of World War II in 1945, the Jewish population of Europe had shrunk to 3.8 million, or 35% of the world's 11 million Jews.

Bibliographic Information: Sergio DellaPergola. "Jews in the European Community: Sociodemographic Trends and Challenges." American Jewish Year Book. American Jewish Committee (AJC), Jewish Publication Society (JPS). Jan 1, 1993: 25-84. [www.bjpa.org/search-results/publication/17719\[MS1.1\]](http://www.bjpa.org/search-results/publication/17719[MS1.1])

Five cities that lost significant numbers of their Jewish population were highlighted during the Yom HaShoah program.

"During the Holocaust, the Jewish populations of these cities



Yizkor books at Yad Vashem

faced near-total annihilation, with the exception of Budapest, where a larger portion of the community survived until liberation."

(Google AI, "Jewish population by city from 1939-1945," March 23, 2026).

These numbers are approximations from numerous sources.

- **Vilna:** from 55,000 to 2,000/3,000
- **Warsaw:** from 380,000 to 5,000/11,500
- **Budapest:** from 200,000 to 119,000/130,000
- **Belz:** from 3,600 to 220
- **Crete:** from 300/400 to 6/12[MS2.1]

Yizkor books

Many Jewish communities maintained *Yizkor* (memory) books that kept records of that particular location. These books can contain a long history of that community. There were also places whose *Yizkor* books became the repository of life before and after the Holocaust — written by survivors who knew that their record of life and death would probably be the only record of the Jewish life that had existed there.

Jane Ziegelman's book, "Once There Was a Town: The Memory Books of a Lost Jewish World" published in January 2026, is about *Yizkor* books in general and specifically relates to her own family, shining a light on what life was like for Jewish

communities in Europe throughout past generations.

Yizkor books provide a concrete, though limited testimony, to our ancestors. A poignant poem was read to begin the Yom HaShoah program, "Where the House Once Stood." 🕯️

Yom HaShoah Commemoration

On April 12, at Temple Shalom in Naples, the Yom HaShoah Commemoration's theme was "Each Person Had a Home." Through music, readings, visual information, prayer and a candle lighting ceremony, homage was paid to the Jewish communities whose culture, families, history and future potential were decimated.

The Pew Research Center provides the following information about the change in Jewish population Pre- and Post-World War II:

In 1939, there were 16.6 million Jews worldwide, and a majority of them — 9.5 million, or 57% — lived in Europe, according to [Sergio]



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Voices calling from another room
Shoes by the wall.
A window catching morning light.
Proof that a family lived and belonged.
Then came the knock.
The orders
Lives emptied from rooms
As if they had never been there

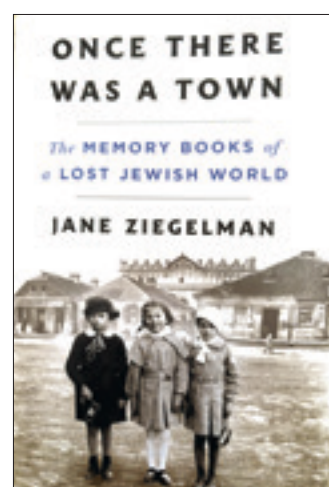
Keys were carried into exile,
Into ghettos, camps and distant lands —
Keys that no longer fit any door.

Houses were stolen or burned,
Erased from streets and maps.

But in memory, they still stand.
Survivor walked through those rooms
For the rest of their lives
In dreams, in stories, in longing.
Houses were stolen or burned,
Erased from streets and maps.

But in memory, they still stand.
Survivors walked through those rooms
For the rest of their lives
In dreams, in stories, in longing.

Author Unknown



CHAVURAT SHALOM OF SOUTHWEST FLORIDA
chavuratshalom@gmail.com

A life of generosity

Remembering Renee Michelson Minsky

By Cheryl Fulmer, Ellen Feingold and Marcia Rudin

Chavurat Shalom mourns the loss of beloved member, Renee Michelson Minsky, who died peacefully at the age of 94 on March 11.

Renee and her husband Leonard, who was Chavurat Shalom’s first president, lived in Bangor, Maine and Sanibel Island, Florida. When Leonard passed away in 2022, she moved to Fort Walton Beach, Florida to be closer to her family.

She was born on July 21, 1931, in Worcester, Massachusetts. She was the only child of Goldie and David Michelson. Her early years were filled with literature, art, music and theater. Her father built a theater in the basement and converted the laundry room into a dressing room. Her mother directed neighborhood productions. From age 13, Renee acted professionally with an actor’s equity card. After graduating from Harvard University, she entered the publishing world. When she met and married Leonard, she returned with him to Bangor, Maine where they lived for the next 65 years.

In Bangor, Renee founded a city-wide children’s theater program, taught French at the Bangor Jewish Community Center, and worked with ESL (English as a Second Language) students as a volunteer.

Renee and Leonard devoted their lives to philanthropy, believing in giving back. Their Leonard and Renee Minsky Charitable Trust is devoted to many educational pursuits. At The University of Maine, they provided naming gifts for the Minsky Recital Hall in the School of Performing Arts, and the Hudson Museum’s Minsky Culture Lab in the Collins Center for the Arts. The Minsky Endowment supports the Hudson Museum. Additional naming gifts were also established at the Northern Light Eastern Maine Medical Center, the Bangor Public Library, and the Maine Community Foundation.



Renee Michelson Minsky

The University of Maine became a second home to Leonard and Renee as philanthropists and supporters of the arts as well as hockey fans. Renee received the Wilma Award for “extraordinary commitment to the Collins Center for the Arts at The University of Maine”. She served on the Board of the Collins Center and the Hudson Museum, where she was also a docent for 15 years. Renee was made an honorary UMO alumna and was recipient of the Champion of Maine Award.

The Minskys were enthusiastic travelers. They went around the world twice and visited 97 countries, many of them several times. They spent summers at their home in Roque Bluffs, Maine and winters on Sanibel Island, Florida. They were members of Congregation Beth Israel in Bangor and Chavurat Shalom of Southwest Florida.

Renee is survived by her daughter, Marilyn Melton (Dennis), granddaughters Dani Minsky (Hatim Azly), and

Maya Melton (partner Austin Reed) and four great-grandchildren. She is also survived by her brother-in-law, Norman Minsky, who is from Bangor, is a part-time Sanibel resident and an active Chavurah Shalom member.

Renee was an avid reader, member of multiple book clubs, loved *The New York Times* crossword puzzle, and admitted to being a chocoholic. We at Chavurat Shalom will sorely miss Renee’s warmth, intelligence, and charm. **Z”L** — May her memory be a blessing.

Recurring programs

As Lag B’Omer approaches on May 4, Yom Yerushalayim on May 5, and Shavuot on May 22, Chavurat Shalom celebrates its sixth anniversary.

We hold Friday night Shabbat services every week throughout the year at 7:30 p.m. Services are led by our members, with English readings,

original readings and poetry, Hebrew and English singing, and Torah reading with commentary by a thoughtful member. The weekly services are coordinated by Drs. Ellen Feingold and Kathy Zoss and include all volunteer participants.

On the first Tuesday of the month, we enjoy our informal “schmooze” session at 7:30 p.m., hosted by Marcia Rudin.

“Torah Talk,” led by Dr. Ellen Feingold, where we study the Parsha of the week together, is the second Tuesday of the month at 7:30 p.m.

“Jewish Current Events” is the third Tuesday of the month at 7:30 p.m.

The fourth Tuesday is set aside for the lecture and discussion series planned by Irene Skolnick and Barry Fulmer at 7:30 p.m.

All Chavurat Shalom programs are held via Zoom. Everyone is welcome to join us. We plan in-person gatherings in the Sanibel and Fort Myers area occasionally.

For further information, email chavuratshalom@gmail.com or check out our website: chavuratshalomofswflorida.org.



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Global recognition for Hadassah's medical excellence

By Shelley Einhorn, President Collier/Lee Chapter of Hadassah

Newsweek has once again recognized the world-class excellence of Israel's Hadassah Medical Organization. In the media company's "World Best Hospitals 2026," Hadassah University Hospital - Ein Kerem — the hospital system's largest and most comprehensive location — ranks among the top 250 hospitals globally, moving up almost 100 places to No. 157 from No. 246.

In Israel, where Hadassah University Hospital - Ein Kerem already



Shelley Einhorn

ranked highly, even among the country's top 10 hospitals, the hospital moved to third place from fourth. Hadassah University Hospital - Ein Kerem is in the company of the world's foremost medical institutions. Among them, this year's top honorees: Mayo Clinic - Rochester, Cleveland Clinic, and Massachusetts General Hospital.

In Newsweek's most recent "World's Best Specialized Hospitals 2026," and "World's Best Smart Hospitals 2026," Hadassah once again earned a spot

among Israel's leading hospitals for cardiology (sixth year), oncology (fifth year), and the use of smart technology (fifth year).

In a joint statement, the Hadassah Medical Organization's Board chair, Dalia Itzik, and chief executive, Yoram Weiss, MD, said, "The continued rise of the Hadassah Medical Organization's Hadassah Hospital - Ein Kerem's global ranking reflects our physicians', nurses' and staff members' unwavering commitment to clinical excellence, innovation and compassionate care. This recognition affirms the measurable impact of our investment in advanced

technology, groundbreaking research and patient-centered medical care."

Carol Ann Schwartz, National President of Hadassah, said "Newsweek's recognition confirms that the Hadassah Medical Organization is one of the best healthcare institutions in the world. Our extraordinary doctors and scientists continue to set new standards, improving patient care and strengthening our position at the forefront of global medicine."

We should all be proud of our support of Hadassah.

Am Yisrael Chai. 

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Celebrating Jewish American Heritage Month

By Marina Berkovich, JHSSWF President

Jewish American Heritage Month (JAHM) is celebrated country-wide in the month of May for the 20th time since President George W. Bush signed it into law in 2006.



Marina Berkovich

Celebrate with JHSSWF

Jewish Historical Society of Southwest Florida celebrates this year with a special presentation of two documentaries about Southwest Florida Jewish pioneers: Mitch Spaiser and Gene Goodman.

Mitch Spaiser[MS1.1]

Mitch Spaiser has the honor and recognition of being the very first Jewish student at the Naples campus of Edison College, now Florida Southwestern College, in early 1970s.

Gene Goodman[MS2.1]

Gene Goodman was the younger brother of the very famous jazz musician, Benny Goodman, and a prolific song producer in his own right. His efforts brought many songs to the public which are appreciated and sang to this day.

This event is free to attend and will be held at the Nina Iser Jewish Cultural Center on May 1 at 11 a.m. Please register via email at office@jhsswf.org.

Kindly note that Jewish Federation of Greater Naples now requires visitors to present identification to enter the facility.

“Southwest Florida Jewish Pioneers”

Our Telly Awards-winning film series, “Southwest Florida Jewish Pioneers,” is produced by JHSSWF, with some financial assistance from the organization’s fundraising efforts. The films, contrary to

other Jewish-content films played in the area, belong to the JHSSWF. They are not rented from other markets and are made largely by the volunteer efforts of our excellent team.

By attending our presentations and showing support for our efforts you are assuring the continuity of this much-needed project and

are also sharing the knowledge of local Jewish history, along with its visible and lasting impact.

Every life, like every good story, carries a lesson in purpose and morality. Our documentary films are an excellent way to learn about local Jewish experiences and the legacy our early Jewish settlers wanted you, the students of Jewish history, to carry forward. We particularly recommend that seasonal guests, who have not yet planted roots here but enjoy the environs, attend our presentations. We are currently working on films 28, 29 and 30 of the series, and we depend on your support and generosity.

Unity and tradition

Amid ongoing escalation of vile antisemitic attacks, I am increasingly proud of our tribe in Israel and the Diaspora. People of Israel show the world that we are united in our strive and that people of Israel live!


This year, in the month of May, we also celebrate Lag B’omer with bonfires, picnics, archery and three-year-old boys’ first haircuts. Followed up with cheesecakes, blintzes and everything dairy — symbols of the “milk and honey” of the land of Israel — for Shavuot. *Am Yizrael Chai!*

Support JHSSWF

Become a member, supporter or volunteer. Sign up for our mailing list at jhsswf.org.

Our telephone number is 833-347-7935 (833-JHS-SWFL).

Kindly direct all correspondence, including contributions and renewals to The Jewish Historical Society of Southwest Florida, P.O. Box #10075, Naples, Florida 34101.

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

**America’s 250th birthday rubric
May and June Jewish highlights**

May 1907 – Albert A. Michelson became the first American Jewish Nobel Prize winner in Sciences.

May 1916 – Louis D. Brandeis was appointed as the first Jewish Supreme Court Justice.

May 3, 1791 – Following George Washington’s 1790s emancipation of American Jews, then numbering approximately 1,500 to 3,000, Polish Jews, numbering approximately 800,000, were also emancipated.

May 6, 1856 – Sigmund Freud, founder of psychoanalysis, was born.

May 8, 1945 – Victory in Europe over the Nazis; WWII ended.

May 11, 1923 – Hendry County, Florida was established.

May 14, 1948 – The Modern State of Israel was established. Yom Ha'atzmaut (Independence Day) is observed on the Hebrew date corresponding to it.

June 1898 – The Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations of America (OU) was founded.

June 5-10, 1967 – Six-Day War victory; Jerusalem reunified and control gained over the West Bank, Gaza Strip and Golan Heights.



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Honoring women, memory and freedom

By Marina Berkovich, JRCA Chair

The most recent JRCA event was to belatedly celebrate Purim and March 8, the non-coincidental celebrations of our women. International Women's Day has its beginnings in Jewish women's movements to gain rights, and the story of Queen Esther is a role model of bravery for every woman.

All female attendees got a rose (or two) in memory of days gone by, when all women in the USSR received flowers at work, school and home from men and boys. What a great tradition of appreciation that was — to respect and honor women. We preserve it to some extent; we dress up and drink up for our Jewish heroine, Queen Esther.

As the world turns to celebrating 81 years of victory in Europe over Nazi Germany on May 8, 1945, JRCA celebrates it on May 9, the historical USSR Victory Day. They did not declare victory until Hitler's charred body was found. Stalin wanted to make sure Hitler was dead indeed, and only then allowed the commanders to tell the troops.

That's why we are historically committed to celebrating May 9, and we do it in combination with May 14, 1948 — aka Israel Independence Day — which, for us, was never based on Hebrew calendar. We were barely aware that Hebrew calendar even existed. We were precluded from knowing that by the Soviets barring any religious knowledge for its youth. Most of us did not even know the date of Israel's independence.

As the final generation of Soviet-born and Soviet-oppressed Jewry, we are bound by our own traditions and symbols. They may seem peculiar and

outdated to some American Jews, but the majority have no idea what freedom cost to each and every one of us. Count your blessings that your fate and the fate of your children never included such hardships, and may it stay that way. May our children and grandchildren, as well as your children and grandchildren, never know any form of oppression and sufferings that our families were subjected to from 1917 to 1991.

An important fact is that the predominant majority of JRCA members are second generation Holocaust survivors or GenShoah. A couple members are first generation; some, third generation. Raised on first-hand accounts of Nazi atrocities by our relatives, neighbors, and at schools, we share our family survival stories on VE Day, talk about the blessings of Israel and the United States — the dreams our preceding generations did not dare to hope for. We sing the wartime songs our grandparents loved, many of which were composed by Jewish composers who were forced by the oppression of that regime to hide their ethnic origins and identity behind ethnically Russian-sounding surnames and pseudonyms. We sometimes dance, but as we get older our feet are not as agile as we'd like to pretend.

Every year, we remember those from our families who were not so fortunate as us to reach these shores and experience the freedoms we have here. Every survivor's or eyewitness's story is uniquely precious. After we are all gone, will the world remember or will it happen all over again? Is it already happening? 🌍

You are invited!

*Join us for our annual commemoration
if you are from SWFL, details about the
community lunch are as follows:*

When: Sunday, May 3

Where: Nina Iser Jewish Cultural Center

When: Noon to 3 p.m.

Details: Register at JRCA@jewishnaples.org and send the \$10 fee for beverages and supplies, payable to Marina Berkovich via Zelle at 646-330-7551, by noon May 1. Please also bring an appetizer or dessert for four to six people.

TEMPLE BETH EL RELIGIOUS SCHOOL
Fort Myers

Allison Fego, Religious School Coordinator

Families with our youngest students, along with those from our Tot Shabbat program, gathered for a hands-on Passover celebration that was both meaningful and engaging. Led by Alon Gomel, together with Rabbi Luna and members of the Men's Club, the children experienced the story of the Exodus through an interactive skit and lively parade that brought the narrative to life.

The celebration continued with a matzah-making activity, giving children the opportunity to connect directly with the traditions of the holiday in a hands-on way.

At the same time, our students in 2nd through 7th grade participated in their own immersive exploration of the Passover story. After studying Torah passages about the Exodus, students worked in multi-age groups to bring those scenes to life. Using materials such as Magna-Tiles, clay, pipe cleaners, Legos, and more, they created imaginative representations of key moments from the story.

This collaborative and experiential approach allowed students to engage

deeply with the text while expressing their understanding in creative and meaningful ways. It was a joyful and enriching experience that beautifully combined learning, tradition, creativity and community.

Student leadership and looking ahead

Our current B'nai Mitzvah students continue to shine as leaders within our community. They have been doing a wonderful job helping lead our morning blessings and participating in the V'ahavta during family tefilah, helping set a meaningful and inspiring tone at the start of each day.

As summer quickly approaches, we encourage families to register for our Summer of Koach Camp, taking place the week of June 22 through 26. This exciting program focuses on building strength in many forms — emotional, physical, mental — while providing a fun and engaging environment for our students. Our counselors are already hard at work planning



Cyrus Katz and family

an incredible week filled with meaningful activities and memorable experiences.

For more information or to register, please visit the Temple Beth El website or contact Allison Fego, our Religious School Coordinator, at religiousschool@templebethel.com.

As we continue through the year, moments like these remind us that our community is not only a place of learning, but one of connection, growth and shared Jewish experience that our students will carry with them for years to come. 🌍



Evie and Danny Kaufman, Emily Raab, Eta Gonsenhausner and Eve Turovsky building their part of the Exodus story



Abby Schiff, Logan Jelinek, Josh Fego and Dexter Medlock built Moses and parting the Dead Sea



Iris Luna-Bord, Gabby Snaders, Hannah Garrison, Noah Schiff and Asher Gonsenhausner build part of the 10 plagues with Legos



Aaron Raab, Cyrus Katz, Zara Luna-Bord and Abby Fego built Moses, locusts, hail, boils and the death of the firstborn with modeling clay



Rabbi Luna with parents Nolan and Sheba Katz on bimah while Cyrus reads his Torah portion



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

As we continue to create joyful and engaging Jewish experiences for our families, both our Religious School and Shabbat B'kef programs have been filled with energy, creativity and connection.

In preparation for Passover, our Religious School students explored the story of the Exodus, learning about the customs and traditions that bring the holiday to life. They practiced chanting the Four Questions and deepened their understanding of the Seder experience.

Our learning philosophy is rooted in the belief that Jewish education is most powerful when it is experiential — moving beyond books and storytelling into hands-on engagement.

When students are invited to create, participate and actively explore, their connection to Jewish learning becomes deeper and more enduring. Engaging as many senses as possible — seeing,



hearing, touching, creating, tasting, and doing — strengthens understanding and supports lasting retention.

Our learning culminated in a lively Passover Fair, where students rotated



through interactive stations and enjoyed a spirited game of Passover trivia, bringing together all they had explored through hands-on, engaging experiences.

Shabbat B'kef

Our recent Shabbat B'kef gathering was centered around the theme of Passover. Families came together for a meaningful and creative experience, during which the children made their own “Ten Plagues” bags. Each bag included items such as animal figures, masks and puppets representing the different plagues. These hands-on creations allowed students to engage with the Passover story in a tangible, multi-sensory way, deepening their understanding and enriching the Seder experience at home.

We are also looking forward to our final Shabbat B'kef gathering of the year,

which will be combined with our Religious School Friday night dinner on Friday, May 15. If you would like to attend the Shabbat dinner, **RSVP is required** by May 8. This special evening will be an opportunity for our community to come together in celebration of Shabbat, learning and connection.

Registration

Registration is now open for the upcoming Religious School year. We warmly welcome both returning and new families to join our vibrant and nurturing program. If you or someone you know is interested, I would be happy to share more information. Please feel free to reach out to me.

For both RSVP and registration information, please email me at Tehila@tjswfl.org.



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The Festival of Shavuot

Weeks of harvest and revelation

By Cantor Barry Butensky

Shavuot, known as the Festival of Weeks, stands as one of Judaism's three major pilgrimage festivals, blending ancient agricultural roots with profound spiritual meaning. Falling exactly seven weeks after Passover, it marks both the summer wheat harvest in the Land of Israel and the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai. The name "Shavuot" literally means "weeks," reflecting the 49-day count of the Omer that links the physical freedom of Passover to the spiritual liberation of receiving God's law.

In biblical times, Shavuot was a joyous harvest celebration. Farmers brought the first fruits or *bikkurim* — wheat, barley, grapes, figs, pomegranates, olives and dates — to the Temple in Jerusalem as offerings of gratitude. Two loaves of bread baked from the new wheat, uniquely including leaven, were presented alongside sacrifices. This agricultural aspect, called *Chag HaKatzir* or the Festival of Reaping, expressed thanks for the land's bounty and the covenant with God.

Over time, rabbinic tradition connected Shavuot to the revelation at Sinai. According to Jewish sources, this event occurred around the 6th of Sivan, about 3,300 years ago. The Israelites, having left Egypt, gathered at the mountain amid thunder, lightning and shofar blasts as God delivered the Ten Commandments. This moment sealed the eternal bond between the Jewish people and the Torah, often described as a spiritual wedding —

God as the groom, Israel as the bride. The holiday thus celebrates not just physical harvest but the "harvest" of Divine wisdom.

Today, with no Temple, observances focus on synagogue, study and home rituals. In Israel, it's one day; in the Diaspora, two. Work is prohibited, and festive meals are shared. A standout custom is eating dairy foods like cheesecake, cheese blintzes, krepalach or sambusak. Explanations abound: before the Torah's kosher laws, meat wasn't prepared properly, so dairy sufficed; the Torah is likened to "milk and honey" for its sweetness; and the gematria of "chalav" equals



■ Cantor Barry Butensky

40, matching Moses' days on Sinai.

Another beloved tradition is *Tikkun Leil Shavuot* — staying up all night studying Torah. This 16th century mystical practice "repairs" the ancient Israelites' oversleeping on revelation morning. Communities gather to learn Talmud, Midrash or Zohar, often ending with dawn prayers. It's a night of intellectual and spiritual

renewal, open to all ages.

Synagogue services feature dramatic readings of the Ten Commandments, evoking Sinai's awe. The Book of Ruth is recited too; its harvest setting aligns perfectly, while Ruth's conversion mirrors accepting the Torah. As King David's ancestor, her story ties to his *yahrzeit* on Shavuot. Ashkenazi Jews add the poetic *Akdmut* before the Torah reading, praising God, Torah and Israel. Homes and synagogues are adorned with flowers and greenery, symbolizing Sinai's blossoming or the Jewish people's flourishing.

In modern Israel, secular celebrations highlight agriculture with parades of produce, farm machinery and even babies born that year. Reform communities hold confirmation ceremonies for teens,

reaffirming their commitment to Jewish learning. Sephardic traditions include reading a symbolic *ketubah*, a marriage contract between God and Israel.

Shavuot lacks the elaborate rituals of Passover's Seder or Sukkot's sukkah, yet its simplicity invites personal engagement. It reminds us that freedom from slavery

finds purpose in ethical living and study. The Omer count builds anticipation, turning 49 days of self-improvement into readiness for revelation.

Ultimately, Shavuot bridges past and present. From temple offerings to late-night study sessions, it celebrates gratitude — for the land's gifts and for the timeless guide of Torah. In a world of distractions, it calls us to renew our covenant, taste life's sweetness, and embrace wisdom that endures.

Whether through cheesecake or deep discussion, Shavuot nourishes body and soul alike. 🌿

Shavuot lacks the elaborate rituals of Passover's Seder or Sukkot's sukkah, yet its simplicity invites personal engagement.

It's Pesach again

By Rabbi David Arias

"Really, Rabbi?" Yes! It's our second chance, a new opportunity. Just a month after Passover, we celebrate Pesach Sheni, literally "The Second Passover."

"Yeah, right! Like if cleaning our houses and having large Seder tables wasn't enough."

I'm not saying it wasn't enough. Pesach Sheni is about a second opportunity.

During the times of the *Beit Hamikdash* (the Temple), Pesach was celebrated with various rituals, including the offering of the *Korban Pesach*, the Paschal Lamb, which had to be offered on the evening of Nisan 14. In the Torah (*Bemidbar/Numbers 9:1-14*), we learn that the people approached Moshe and asked a very simple and important question: What happens if someone wasn't ready or couldn't offer that sacrifice on time? Maybe someone was a few hours late or on his way to Jerusalem and, for some reason, couldn't make it — what should that person do?

The people also genuinely asked what happens if someone wasn't pure enough to bring the offering, arguing, "Why must we be excluded from presenting God's offering at its set time with the rest of the Israelites?" (*ibid.*, v. 7).

The entire answer to this problem also applies to our times.

Moshe recognizes that he just does not know the answer. How humble must a leader be to admit in front of his people that he simply does not know? Moshe says, "Stand by and let me hear what instructions Hashem gives about you" (*ibid.*, v. 8).

Here we find the first important lesson about Pesach Sheni. It is okay not to have all the answers! The problem arises when we believe we do; no one owns the absolute truth, not even the greatest prophet of the Jewish people.

Second, regarding answers as well, not even the Torah provides all the answers — or else people wouldn't have asked Moses what to do in this situation. It's a lesson for all generations to keep studying, interpreting and applying the



■ Rabbi David Arias

Torah in its wholeness to our lives. Don't think that everything was sealed and written at Mount Sinai. Revelation can happen at any moment and any place as long as we remain committed to studying and making the Torah our own.

Third, God's answer introduces a new celebration, Pesach Sheni. A month after Passover, on the 15th of Iyar, those who couldn't offer the *Korban Pesach* have a second chance. Judaism believes in second chances, forgiveness and allowing people to grow and correct their mistakes.

If you haven't been to shul in a long time, don't feel ashamed. No one will judge you; just come. If you hav-

Judaism believes in second chances, forgiveness and allowing people to grow and correct their mistakes.

en't prayed in years, pick up a prayer book, open it and open your heart — there is always a second chance. Missed lighting the candles before Shabbat on Friday? Then light the Havdalah candle at the end of Shabbat or do it next week. There's always another opportunity.

Today, we don't offer a Paschal Lamb, but we still observe Pesach Sheni as a special day. Maybe you still have some matzah or matzah meal and can prepare a nice matzah ball soup or another round of gefilte fish.

Look back at your last Seder. If something was missing, try to make it up this coming Pesach Sheni. And remember:

- It's okay not to have all the answers.
- The Torah was given at Mount Sinai, and it's still given today — in your heart and in your home.
- There's always a second chance.

Chag Sameach!

Rabbi David Arias serves at Temple Judea in Fort Myers. 🌿

IS YOUR BUSINESS WORTH MORE THAN YOU THINK?

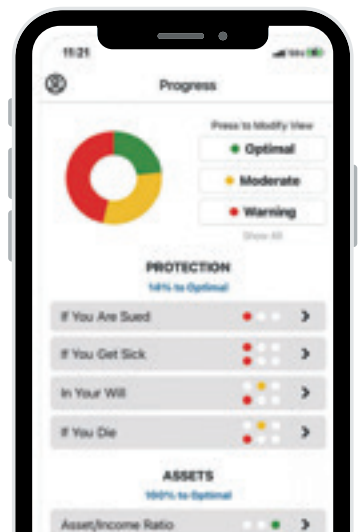
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Water as a metaphor

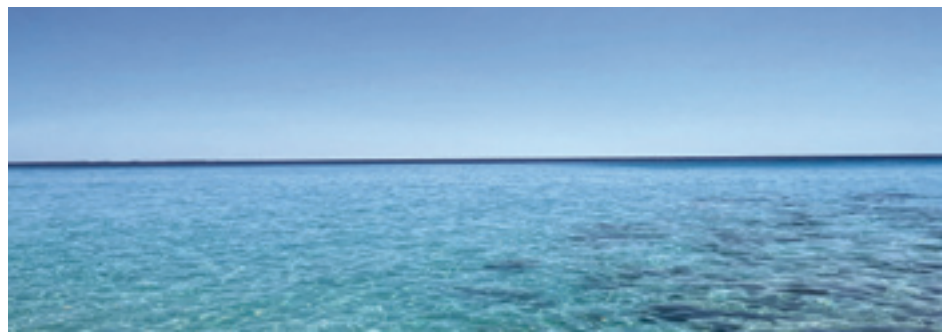
By Rabbi Nicole Luna

In March, 24 of us arrived home from a six-day Temple Beth El cruise to the Bahamas and Turks and Caicos Islands. We spent the days surrounded by water — calm, beautiful, reassuring. On the cruise, the ocean was an endless blue, and it was easy to think about the water as peaceful and predictable, there to gently guide us from one port to another.



■ Rabbi Nicole Luna

Then, in Grand Turk, several in our group went out on a smaller excursion boat and came back buzzing about what they saw: a mama whale and its calf, rising up out of the water, surfacing and then disappearing again into the deep. It reminded me that even when we think we know what we are looking at — peaceful waters — there is always more beneath the surface. The ocean is teeming with life we do not see, depths we do not control. The rabbis of our tradition look at water as a metaphor and say, “Torah is like water. Torah helps us face the unpredictable chaos of the world, and it encourages us to go beyond the surface and see what lies beneath.”



In a midrash on the Song of Songs, the rabbis say, “As water descends, drop by drop, but becomes streams upon streams, so too, Torah. A person studies two laws today and two tomorrow, until they become a flowing stream.” In a world of rapid transformation and endless change, this metaphor offers a different way to go through life — with slow and steady progress, a journey of ongoing learning. Drop by drop, day by day, one piece of learning at a time, we grow and make sense of the world.

The midrash continues, “Just as water forsakes an elevated place and goes to a low place, so too, Torah forsakes one who is arrogant and cleaves to one who is humble. Just as water is not preserved in vessels of silver and gold, so too, Torah is preserved only in one who renders themselves like an earthenware vessel.” How do we sort through the confusion and turmoil of our world? By remaining humble and open to listening to and learning from all people.

And finally the midrash reads, “Just

as water restores the soul, as it is stated, ‘He drank and his spirit was returned,’ so too Torah, as the Psalms state ‘The Torah of God is complete, restoring the soul.’”

For those of us on the TBE cruise, we experienced how water restores the soul.

The ocean is teeming with life we do not see, depths we do not control.

We took deep breaths sitting by the pool, relaxing on the beach, walking out on the deck, or just looking out over our balcony. The midrash reminds us to not give up on the beauty of the world, to approach it with a sense of awe and wonder. We turn to God and Torah to restore our soul.

We have returned home from still waters to lives that are often anything but still — to a world that can feel overwhelming and rocky. But we carry with us both the memory of those waters and the wisdom of Torah: to move through life not at a frantic pace but drop by drop; to remain open and humble enough to



keep learning; and to trust that even in depths, even in the uncertainty, we are not alone.

Just as in the very beginning of creation, God still hovers over the *p'nai tehom*, the surface of the waters. God is present with us in the calm, in the chaos, and in all the depths in between.

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

Shavuos completes a cycle

By Rabbi Yitzchok Minkowicz

Every holiday in the Jewish calendar is associated with a specific date, with one exception: Shavuos. In the present era, when the Jewish calendar is set, Shavuos is always celebrated on the 6th of Sivan, but according to Scriptural Law, the holiday is not necessarily associated with that date. The Torah tells us to count 49 days, beginning on the second night of the Pesach holiday and then, on the 50th day, to celebrate the holiday of Shavuos.

Originally, the Jewish calendar was dependent on the sighting of the moon. Ordinarily, the month of Nissan would have 30 days, and Iyar would have 29 days, and Shavuos would be celebrated on the 6th of Sivan. Nevertheless, at times, both the months of Nissan and Iyar would have 30 days, and Shavuos would be celebrated on the 7th of Sivan; at other times, both months would have 29 days, and Shavuos was celebrated on the 5th of Sivan.



■ Rabbi Yitzchok Minkowicz

Now, this is not a historical curiosity. It is a lesson in spiritual dynamics. Shavuos completes a cycle that begins on Pesach and continues through the Counting of the Omer. Pesach is the time when we leave Egypt, i.e., transcend the boundaries and limitations that confine our spiritual experience.

For this reason, when given permission to leave, the Jewish people fled Egypt. Directly after the Ten Plagues, the Egyptians would have done anything the Jews said. Why then did the Jews flee? Because they were scared that if they did not leave Egypt immediately, they would become so mired in Egypt that they would never want to leave.

During their journey in the desert, they anticipated receiving the Torah. As they proceeded towards Mount Sinai, they worked on refining their characters

to make themselves fit for this experience. We relive this process each year during the Counting of the Omer. Each of the days is associated with a particular element of our personalities. As we refine ourselves, we make ourselves a fitting vessel for G-d to give the Torah.

Nevertheless, no matter how much work we do to refine ourselves, all we can do is make ourselves ready to receive the Torah. It cannot be otherwise. For man is a created being and thus, immeasurably distant from G-d, his Creator. Every created being is by definition limited, brought into being in a specific manner, with a given set of criteria defining who and what it is. G-d, the Creator, is above that framework of reference entirely.

That's why the Giving of the Torah marks a fundamental turning point in the world's spiritual history. It's not only that

this is when G-d singled the Jews out as His chosen people and gave them a spiritual mission that they have carried forth ever since. It is that by doing so,

He gave man a chance to step beyond the mortal realm and do things that are G-dly.

When a person understands a Torah idea, it is not merely that he has comprehended a profound idea or found a guide for his conduct. His mortal mind has the opportunity to grasp an

eternal Divine truth. Similarly, when a person performs a mitzvah, he is relating to G-d on His frequency. The act he performs may not necessarily appear important in human terms, but it speaks to G-d on His terms. It is what He asked and desires man to do.

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

As we refine ourselves, we make ourselves a fitting vessel for G-d to give the Torah.



Standing firm amid misplaced blame

By Rabbi Bruce Diamond

Below is an excerpt of the guest opinion I wrote Oct. 7, 2023, the day of the Hamas pogrom in the Jewish communities and gatherings close to Gaza. I was published in *The News-Press* on Oct. 9, 2023:

“... regardless of how we American Jews feel about today’s events in Israel and how strongly we tend to identify with her, we are not Israelis, and our synagogues are not an extension of the State of Israel. While there are synagogues that support Israel’s human services through fundraising events and many, like my own, that organize regular tours of the Jewish State, we have absolutely nothing to do with what is happening now and what might happen next in and around Gaza. [MS1.1]”

Sadly, it may be inevitable that some misguided individuals in America might take it upon themselves to try and desecrate our synagogues — or worse — as their way of siding with Palestinian fighters facing a relentless I.D.F. onslaught, but there can be no moral bases for such “surrogate” actions, no matter how outraged they might feel about what is happening 6,600 miles away.

Being right about this offers me not one bit of satisfaction.



■ Rabbi Bruce Diamond

Israel’s democratically elected government’s mode of military operations is ultimately up to its citizens in general and to the roughly 600,000 individuals who perform active or reserve military duty and their families. “Rank and file” American Jews do not have a voice in when and how Israel exerts its military power.

It is not at all unusual in an American synagogue to see the Israeli flag alongside the American one on the bimah front stage and often flying side-by-side with the red, white and blue outdoors by the entrance. Groups to Israel, Israeli guest speakers, fundraisers, religious school programs, among others, publicly testify to the powerful sway that Zionism holds over what is considered our Jewish life in America.

Some harsher critics might even contend that Israel has replaced God as the focal point for many non-Orthodox American Jewish congregations without regarding it as precisely the kind of idolatry condemned by the prophet Jeremiah and others. I would not necessarily agree with that. Would you?

Be that as it may, in a manner of speaking, the typical American synagogue has

made itself into an unofficial Israeli consulate. What is true for our synagogues is doubly the case for the Jewish Federation organizations in communities throughout the United States.

Of course, there is not one ounce of justification for attacks on American synagogues in retaliation for Israel’s actions more than 6,000 miles away. Persons motivated by rage and revenge mindlessly lashing out at American synagogues don’t help those in the Middle East with whom they sympathize. The exact contrary is true — attacks on synagogues here and around the world erode support for the attacker’s cause.

Our constitution protects law-abiding Jewish organization expressing and acting upon their values as long as they don’t incite violence or other criminal activities. It absolutely wrong to claim that in so doing these organizations make themselves into targets. That is done solely by the persons attacking them and their inciters.

However, the unavoidable fact is that American synagogues that openly support Israel can be targeted by misguided

inflamed anti-Israel persons whose reach may not extend to Israel itself, but for whom a synagogue is just a short trip across town.

That is why, according to a recent estimate of The Jewish Federations of North America, our U.S. Jewish organizations spend more than \$750,000,000 annually on security to protect themselves from those who think they are lashing out at Israel by conflating them with the Jewish State and then violently cross the line.

Think about how that three quarters of a billion dollars could be spent positively bolstering Jewish life in our local communities and the support it could lend to those in need!

So what are we to do? For me, it must be whatever we think is right. Defensively submerging our values thinking that will add to our security is a catastrophic mistake, since in the end, there will be nothing to secure! Jews have been through much worse. Let’s tough it out!

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

It is not at all unusual in an American synagogue to see the Israeli flag alongside the American one ...

This night is different from all other nights

By Rabbi Sunny Schnitzer

Who has not attended a Pesach Seder?

Among Jews, there are very few who have not. Our memories are thick with the recollection of gatherings around the Pesach table with family and friends. Favorite dishes. Stories of the young cousin who drank wine for the first time, falling asleep at the table during Zeide’s six-hour Seder. Friendly arguments over who makes the best brisket or matza ball soup.

An estimated 70% of Jews attend a Seder each year.

A lesser known fact is that more non-Jews attend a Seder than any other Jewish holiday observance. There are references to the Seder meal in the Christian Bible (Mark 14:12), and the Koran tells the story of Moses at the Burning Bush and the Exodus from Egypt multiple times (Surah Taha 20:9-14, Surah Al-Qasas 28:29-30, and Surah An-Naml 27:7-10). Passover is the ultimate interfaith holiday across all of the Abrahamic religions.

It is an opportunity to be embraced.

That is why it was so thrilling when last month on Sanibel Island, 164 people came together at the Sanibel Community House for Bat Yam Temple of the Island’s Passover Seder. Of those attendees, a substantial number were not Jewish, and I



■ Rabbi Sunny Schnitzer

dare say every one of them had a great time. Not only did they experience a great traditional meal of gefilte fish, matza ball soup, brisket, chopped liver and all the trimmings, but an evening filled with meaning with a modern Haggadah connecting the ancient rabbinic text with modern challenges.

More-Jews share in Pesach through the Seder than share in any other Jewish observance or holiday. In is an opportunity that all Jews should embrace both as institutions and as individuals. Just as the Seder night features questions about the meaning of the rituals, so too might we take the time to answer questions others ask about Judaism. And the door swings

both ways. Jews know far too little about Christianity and Islam. Knowledge reduces fear and suspicion of the “other.”

The message of Passover is the most universal message. It is a message of hope. The hope that no matter how bleak and oppres-

sive a given moment in history may be, the possibility of change is always present. The key ingredient is belief that action, both Divine and human, leads to change.

This is evidenced by the succession of spring holidays on the modern Hebrew calendar.

Passover is the ultimate interfaith holiday across all of the Abrahamic religions.

From the depths of slavery to the challenges of the wilderness and the exhilaration of freedom.

From the depths of the horror of the death camps of Europe, to be restored to our ancestral homeland as a people once again in control of our own destiny.

Pesach to Yom HaShoah to Yom Ha’atzmaut is not a linear journey but

a circular journey of up and down and up again. This year, despite the challenges Jews face around the world, we are still a free people in our own land. May we be wise enough and worthy enough to keep it so.

Rabbi Sunny Schnitzer serves Bat Yam Temple of the Islands. ☺

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Where every trip begins with a conversation —
and ends with a great story

TEMPLE BETH EL
Fort Myers

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April kudos to Sisterhood who outdid themselves with a delicious and fun Second Night Seder. Thanks to all who helped make this happen! Temple members also enjoyed a delightful Temple Beth El cruise in April – both a fundraiser and a great vacation break.

the court system. Temple Beth El members had an overwhelming response of donations — all for the children!

Bar Mitzvah

On May 2, Sy Whittington will be called to the bimah for his Bar Mitzvah. Sy is in 8th grade at North Fort Myers



Donations for Lee County Youth Shelter

Temple Beth El Sisterhood recently held a donation drive to collect supplies for the Lee County Youth Shelter. The shelter serves at-risk children, which includes but is not limited to, children living on the streets, children from families in need of crisis management, and/or children in

Academy for the Arts. He is passionate about his e-bike, football cards, clothes, shoes, cologne and spending time with his family and friends. He adores his four dogs, cat and crested gecko. Mazel Tov to the family!



Sy Whittington

Looking ahead

May begins with Tot Shabbat at 6 p.m. on Friday, May 1, including a PJ Library Book Swap. Our Cantorial Soloist Rebecca Gladstone will join the rabbi on the bima at 7:30 p.m.

Spring is here, and the TBE Women's Simcha Circle is holding a Flower Arranging Class at 1:30 p.m. on Sunday, May 3.

In honor of Mother's Day, May 10, there is no religious school. May all mothers be honored and remembered.

Sisterhood's next "Ladies who Lunch" is May 14, 12:30 p.m. Remember, Sisterhood or Temple membership is not required to join in the fun. Please register on the TBE calendar.

The Religious School will celebrate with an End-of-Year Party on May 17. Later that evening, the Board of Trustees will hold their periodic Town Hall Meeting via Zoom at 7 p.m.

Rabbi Luna will officiate at the Jewish War Veteran Memorial Day Service, May 24, 9:30 a.m., at the Garden of Memories Cemetery within the City of Fort Myers Cemetery (3200 Michigan Avenue). All are welcome.

On May 29, new members will be blessed by Rabbi Luna during the Friday night service, beginning 7:30 p.m. Let's welcome them and share a delicious Oneg following the service.

Temple updates

Visit our new Prayer and Meditation room next to the office. Write a wish or prayer of your own and stuff it in the prayer wall — all while relaxing to the flow of waters in the fountain and calming music. Also, stop by the library, which has been updated with a window to the sanctuary.

Tired of having to leave a service because of a noisy child? Now, parents have a room where the toddlers can be themselves and parents can still watch the service.

Recurring programs

Don't forget our recurring programs:

- Our Choir has openings. Please email your interest and contact details to info@templebethel.com.

- The rabbi teaches in the Temple every Wednesday at 4 p.m. This month's adult education topic is "Exploring the Prayerbook."

- Non-perishable collections in the lobby shopping cart whenever the Temple is open.

- Torah study, led by Rabbi Luna, Saturday mornings at 9 a.m. via Zoom. No prior study experience is required.

- Book Club meets May 6 (and the first Wednesday of every month) at 1:30 p.m. via Zoom. This month's meeting will decide which books to choose for next year.

- Tot Shabbat, a kid-friendly service, is May 1 at 6 p.m., and then resumes Sept. 4. Bring your kids, bring your grandkids. Please RSVP at 239-433-0018.


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

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

- 12-Step Recovery Group: Saturdays at 11 a.m. via Zoom. We are seeking a path to recovery via Judaic spiritual principles and the 12-Steps using "Twelve Jewish Steps to Recovery" by Rabbi Olitzky and Stuart Copans, M.D., second edition.

There's always something happening here at TBE, and our members make it happen: Current Events, Coffee & Chat, Theology & Life, our Monthly Book Club, Francophone & Hispanophone groups, Solo Travelers, Caring Visitors, and more.

Follow us on Facebook and/or Instagram: [@TempleBethElFortMyers](https://www.facebook.com/TempleBethElFortMyers). You can always contact the office at 239-433-0018. Let's pray for the release of all remaining hostages and for peace around the world.

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

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED!



LUNCH BUNCH: MONTHLY LUNCHES



Looking for a meaningful way to give back every month? Join our volunteer team for Lunch Bunch around various locations in Lee and Charlotte Counties! Lunch is included.

Positions we are looking to fill:



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Contact Elizabeth Elba to sign up or for more information: Elizabeth@jfedlcc.org



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**TEMPLE JUDEA
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There are holidays, classes, and lots of events in May at Temple Judea.

Religious School families

And families with young children

- Join us for Shabbat B'Kef Family Shabbat Service on Friday, May 15, at 5:30 p.m.
- Sunday, May 17 is the final day of Religious School classes.

**Temple Judea
Preschool families**

- The last Preschool Shabbat of the school year is the morning of Friday, May 15.
- Teacher Appreciation Week is May 11-15.

- Preschool Graduation is the morning of Friday, May 29.

May programs and events

The Annual Congregational Meeting is Sunday, May 17, 10 a.m. **Attendance is important!**

Rabbi Arias continues his adult education class, "Jud-AI-ism: Ancient Ethics for a Digital Soul," at Temple Judea on Tuesdays, May 5, 12 and 19, at 6 p.m.

Shavuot Services begin Thursday, May 21 at 6:30 p.m.

Friday, May 22 morning services begin at 9:30 a.m. and evening services begin at 6:30 p.m. Saturday, May 23 services begin at 9:30 a.m. and include Yizkor.

Nashim Circle's May event, Ladies' Mah Jong: Open Play and Beginner Class, is Sunday, May 3, from 2 to 5 p.m. Call our office for additional details: 239-433-0201. Additional information is also available online, as well as registration. Visit tjswfl.org.

Ongoing programs

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.

Co-President Jan Klein will be available at Temple Judea on Monday mornings from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m.

Regularly scheduled events

- Friday evening Shabbat services, 6:30 p.m.
 - Saturday morning Shabbat services, 9:30 a.m. Kiddush luncheons are served every Shabbat. If interested in sponsoring a Kiddush, please contact JoAnn Lewin at jalewin2@aol.com.
 - Morning minyan Monday, 9 a.m. After services, join us for breakfast at Sunflower Cafe.
- You can always find out about our activities by checking our website. We would love to see you in person or via Zoom. 🌐

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Donate today at MagenDavidAdom.org or call 866.632.2763.



CHABAD LUBAVITCH OF SOUTHWEST FLORIDA
Fort Myers

(239) 433-7708 • www.Chabadswf.org

Chabad Lubavitch of Southwest Florida recently participated in Heritage Day, providing engaging opportunities for attendees to experience Jewish traditions and cultural heritage firsthand.

Additionally, ahead of Passover, Shmura Matzah was distributed throughout the community, enabling broader access to traditional observance of the holiday.

Please join us for prayers, Torah Study, ladies events and classes with Shani, men's events, and family events. Chabad Lubavitch of Southwest Florida is located at 5620 Winkler Rd., Fort Myers, FL 33919.

Daily prayers and Kaddish

- Sunday, 8 a.m.
- Monday-Friday, 7 a.m.
- Saturday, 10 a.m.
- Evenings, 7 p.m.

Torah Study

- Kabbalah Class – Saturday, 9 a.m.

Ladies Torah Study with Shani

- Torah & Tea – Monday, 7 p.m.

Lag B'Omer Celebration

- Tuesday, May 5

Shavuot Celebration

Thursday, May 21

- Prayers, 7:30 p.m.
- Light candles, 7:52 p.m.
- All night Torah Study program

Friday, May 22

- Prayers, 10 a.m.
- Evening prayers, 7:30 p.m.
- Light candles, 7:53 p.m.

Saturday, May 23

- Prayers, 10 a.m.
- Yizkor, 11 a.m.
- Evening prayers, 7:30 p.m.
- Shabbat ends, 8:50 p.m.

For more information and to join, please call 239-433-7708, email Chabad@Chabadswf.org, or visit our website: Chabadswf.org. We look forward to seeing you. 🌍



Daily prayers in full swing



Chabad at Heritage Day



Distributing Shmura Matzah to the Jewish community



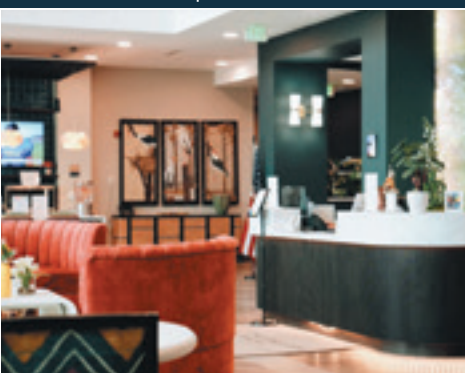
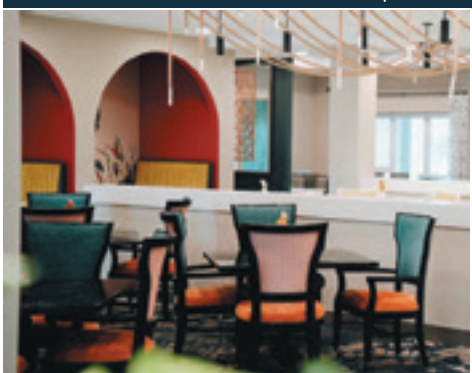

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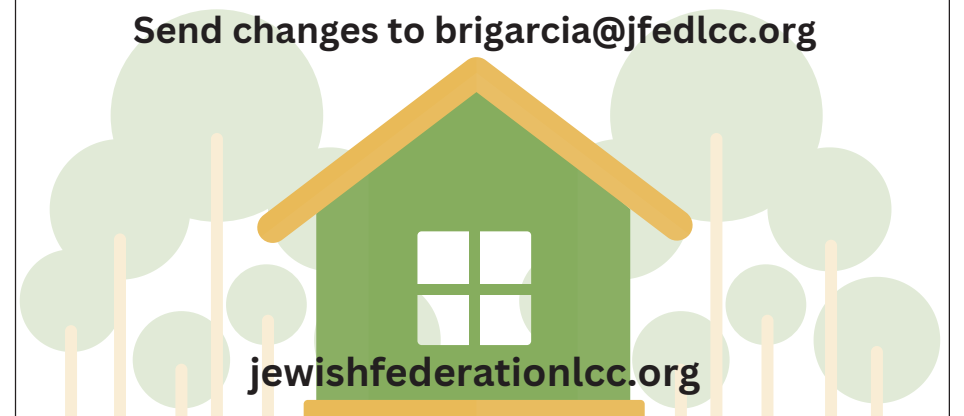


MOVING?

TAKE L'CHAYIM WITH YOU!

Don't forget to contact us with your change of address to continue receiving L'CHAYIM

Send changes to brigarcia@jfedlcc.org



Candle lighting times:

- May 1: 7:41 p.m.
- May 8: 7:45 p.m.
- May 15: 7:48 p.m.
- May 22: 7:52 p.m.
- May 29: 7:56 p.m.



TEMPLE BETH SHALOM
Cape Coral

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

My family and I moved to Cape Coral in the summer of 2021. We were looking for a shul because my son needed Hebrew and Bar Mitzvah lessons. My mother-in-law brought us to Temple Beth Shalom for a Friday night service. We came from a Conservative Temple, and I had no idea how different a Reform service was from a Conservative one, but I was open to finding out.

My first reaction was how welcoming everyone was, but there was one person,



Robin, who — with her boisterous hello and warning she was a hugger — made me feel like I had known her for years. In fact, she reminded me of someone very dear to me who had passed years ago. I knew Robin and I would become fast friends, and my two children now love her.

When I went into the sanctuary for services, I couldn't get over how much it made me feel like home. There was a

sense of peace, and I swear I could feel my father-in-law tell me this was the place for us.

My son, who is very shy, started Hebrew lessons, and with the help of Cantor Barry and all his patience, my son Kenneth read from the Torah beautifully. My daughter Lauren made her Bat Mitzvah the following year.

Passover and April happenings

As I write this, it is just after Passover, and the Seder once again reminded me how much the congregation has become like an extended family. The food was all homemade; reading the Haggadah was shared by many people; children recited The Four Questions. There was lots of singing, dancing and laughter. Even though more than 60 people were there, the atmosphere felt like home.

Although Passover is always a highlight of the year, we had other great things in April. Our "Brunch & Learn's" topic on Yom Hashoah was informative and provoked an interesting discussion. Our "Solidarity Musical Shabbat" on April 17 was beautiful and inspiring.

Looking ahead

We are looking forward to our Religious School Shabbat on May 8, and our annual Veteran's service on Saturday, May 23. Guests are **always** welcome. Please check our website for more details: templebethshalomcc.org.



In conclusion

We found a home here at Temple Beth Shalom. The children and I attend almost every week. They are a part of services and are active members of the Temple, which is what every parent wants to see. I enjoy going and finding my peace there. The friends that we have made are amazing. I help with the weekly communications and am involved with the Temple Book Club.

I am so glad we found Temple Beth Shalom! 🌍



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Ronny S Taschner DDS

Active Member of the American Academy of Periodontology

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Visit Our Website www.taschnerperio.com

**COMMUNITY FREE SYNAGOGUE
Fort Myers**

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

Natalie Fulton, our congregation's founding moderator, died the morning of March 31. Key to starting CFS nearly 22 years ago, Natalie, a natural leader, organized and managed our mailing lists and other

congregational culture that we continue to enjoy. Natalie has moved on, but her soul endures among us and will for years to come.

We also lost long-time CFS-er, Joe Turkel. A remarkable man, Joe felt a great passion for Israel, bringing five of his family members with him on our last CFS pilgrimage to Israel. Heartfelt condolences to Gina and her wonderful family!

May their souls be included in the circle of eternal life.

Community Free First Night Seder

Thanks to so many helping hands, we were able to welcome 82 well-fed participants to our Community Free First Night Seder. Kim Cohen donated the brisket, chicken, vegetables and her signature Passover apple cake; Publix's generous gift

card covered the gefilte fish; Donnie Stokes made 5 alarm chrain; the Rabbi prepared the broth and baked the mat-sot; and Donna Girasa rolled and boiled over 120 matzo balls. And that's how we keep it free for one and all, even the schnorrers!



The Rabbi and Mrs. Diamond with Natalie Fulton at last year's CFS tribute dinner to her.

contact information, kept our supplies well-stocked, and was famous for her weekly Sabbath Eve soups. But much more than that, Natalie's unwavering loyalty, practical wisdom, upbeat sense of humor and unwavering dedication to us all helped create the harmonious

Jewish Heritage Festival

Melinda Diamond organized CFS's table at this year's Jewish Federation Jewish Heritage Festival. Hundreds of packets containing home-baked matsah and recipe were prepared and distributed. A live

Zoom connection enabled Jewish Heritage visitors to interact with Mugoya Oren, the rabbi's student and spiritual leader of Abuyudaya Congregation Ahavat Yisrael in Itonko, Uganda. CFS underwrote its sister congregation's community Seder and distribution of Passover supplies to its 60 households.



Preparing and distributing Passover "Shalom Wine" in Itonko, Uganda.

Summer schedule

CFS begins its summer schedule starting with a pot-luck Sabbath Eve dinner at the rabbi's home on May 1, 6 p.m., followed by worship. Dinners at the rabbi's home will also take place the first Fridays in June, July and August.

On the remaining Sabbath Eve's each month, worship will be held via Zoom only, starting at 7 p.m., each Friday.

For more information about these dinners, email synfree@comcast.net. No dairy dishes, please!

Torah Study with the rabbi continues via Zoom every Sabbath morning from 9:30-11 a.m. Login information is available on CFS's website: fortmyerssynagogue.com.

**TEMPLE SHALOM
Charlotte Harbor & the Gulf Islands**

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

There's always something going on at Temple Shalom.

Pesach Seder

Temple Shalom, the center of Jewish life in Charlotte County, celebrated Pesach with a lively congregational Seder. Rabbi Marc Kline led more than 100 adults and children who gathered on April 2, the second night of the holiday. Rabbi Kline added historical context, expanding our knowledge of Passover.

create menorahs in the fall! Stay tuned for more information.

Regular services

Social, educational and worship 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.

Glass fusion workshop

Temple members were invited to come and bring friends to create art using glass and the glass fusion technique. Instructor Jane Duke guided us to make plates and bowls of our own design and then finished them in a kiln. The response to this "glass class" was so enthusiastic that another session is planned to





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863.673.4154

contact@eesfl.us

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



Jewish Federation news items, updates from Israel and lots more.

Send an email to debbiesanford@jfedlcc.org

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



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):
Lynda Adler & Ian Noy - 617-676-7567
- 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

Federation Annual Meeting:

Thank you. Reflections. Year In Review.

On The Agenda

- Celebrating Michele Laboda's years of dedicated leadership and service to the board
- A review of our community security initiative with John Murtagh, SCN Regional Security Advisor.



Jewish Federation
9701 Commerce Center Court



Wednesday – May 13, 2026

7 P.M. ~ Dessert Reception

RSVP by **May 4th**

[JewishFederationlcc.org/calendar](https://www.JewishFederationlcc.org/calendar)

More information.

Amy Hallock, 239.481.4449 ext. 2 or events@jfedlcc.org