



Shalom02|25

The Journal of the Reading Jewish Community published by the Jewish Federation of Reading/Berks

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Reflections on my first month

By Vicki Haller Graff
Program Director

As a reader of the *Shalom*, you know I started working as Program Director at the Jewish Federation in December 2024. I was thrilled to take this position for many reasons, mostly for the opportunity to serve my community and live Jewish values every day. I was eager to apply a Jewish lens to my whole life and work, more than ever before. Here's a glimpse into what I've learned about the Federation and myself in this short month:

- From the inside, it's easy to get caught up in the details of running a nonprofit, but the Federation's mission is centered on Jewish values. This is not a revelation, but an affirmation. For me personally, it's reinforced my own Jewish values. I see it play out in our work with the Greater Reading Unity Coalition, comprised of other minority groups and nonprofits in Reading. Is this not B'tzelem Elohim, being made in G-d's image? We embody our responsibility to each other through this interfaith and inter-community work.
- The MLK Youth Day of Service, a partnership program with Immanuel UCC and Reform Congregation Oheb Sholom, allows youth and adults to enact G'milut Chasadim and Tikkun Olam, the values of loving kindness and repairing the world. Planting these seeds in our young people and allowing them to see their parents and other adults from the community model these values, supports our whole community.
- Noontime Knowledge, Movie Mondays, and Jewish Family Service's Friendship Circle present excellent opportunities to experience the value of



The MLK Youth Day of Service involved students and adult volunteers from the Jewish and Christian communities.

Kehillah — community. From a lifetime of Jewish experiences, this one is the most deeply instilled in me. It's a joy that this is now my work, bringing people together for shared Jewish experiences. Sometimes it's Jewish content, sometimes it's just an experience with our Jewish friends and acquaintances. But it's always better in community.

- Looking forward, I'm eager to explore Ahavat Yisrael, our love of Israel, including the people, places, and history. I have some ideas for programs to bring generations of our community together, L'Dor Vador.

I have the privilege of working here at

the Federation and living this every day, but you can connect too. Come to our programs (like Community Shabbat this month), reach out to a Jewish friend for coffee and connection, volunteer for Jewish Family Service. You don't have to be the program director to live your Jewish values.

I'd love to hear from you — what Jewish values engage you in community? What kinds of programs would you like to attend? I make no guarantees, but I would love to know more about what you, the members of our community, want to see. Stop by, send me an email, or give me a call: vickig@jfreeding.org or 610-921-0624.

Celebrating hostages' release

Jewish Federations of North America

The Jewish community is overwhelmed with emotion as we welcome Romi Gonen, Emily Damari, and Doron Steinbrecher, back home after 471 days in captivity. Romi Gonen was shot and kidnapped from the Nova music festival. Emily Damari, the last remaining British hostage in Gaza, was also shot when she was abducted. Doron Steinbrecher was taken from her home at Kibbutz Kfar Aza.

Every day for over 15 months, we have been thinking about them, praying for them, and advocating for their release. They have lived through an unimaginable nightmare, and our community will do whatever we can to help them on the long journey of healing and reintegration. We are hopeful that we will see continued hostage releases until every last one of the remaining hostages are returned home.



Doron Steinbrecher reunites with family members following her release from captivity.

The importance of having a local Federation/JCC

Development

By Laurie Waxler

As I write this month's column, I'm watching videos of the three hostages released from Gaza on Jan. 19 and reuniting with their families.

Seeing the images of Romi Gonen (24), Emily Damari (28) and Doron Steinbrecher (31) on what would have been my father's 95th birthday, I shed tears of both joy and sadness. Walking each week with the Run for Their Lives group on Sundays at the Reading Public Museum, I haven't forgotten these innocent victims, and I hope you haven't either.

My joy obviously lies in the reunification of a family, my sorrow in what they must have endured while being held against their will, and what those still being held must be going through. I just can't even begin to imagine it, so I think for many, it's easier to just move on with our lives and



not think about it, but this is serious stuff that shouldn't be put to a back burner. What's happening on our own college campuses and big cities, with the increase in antisemitism, is concerning to me as I worry about my children, and their children, and so on.

The idea of our Annual Campaign is to raise funds to keep our Federation alive and well, keeping our entire Jewish community connected and supported in both good times and bad. We were lucky to reach our fundraising goal this year because we had a generous donor who believed in the importance of our Jewish Family Service, but we need everyone to contribute to reach our goals for 2025.

Chances are good that if you're actually reading this article, you already support our Federation. I encourage you to reach out to a friend who might not and share with them, why you think Federation is important.

While we rely on financial gifts to keep the lights on,



Freed hostage Emily Damari arrives at Sheba Medical Center following her release.

the physical presence of community members at events is also important. If you haven't come to the JCC in a while, I encourage you to come back and reconnect, and bring

a friend. You'll find a lovely group of warm and welcoming people who would love to have your company... the more the merrier is always true at the JCC!



- Annual Campaign
- Women's Philanthropy
- Maimonides Society
- Your Jewish Legacy
- Chai Circle
- L'Chaim Society
- Book of Life
- Letter of Intent



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today!



Jewish Federation
of Reading/Berks

JEWISH FEDERATION OF READING/BERKS
AND REFORM CONGREGATION OHEB SHOLOM
INVITE YOU TO THE

COMMUNITY SHABBAT

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 28, 2025

6:00 pm Shabbat Service
6:45 pm Catered Kosher Dinner

Reform Congregation Oheb Sholom
555 Warwick Drive, Wyomissing

Pricing options:
\$118 Family of 5 or more
\$36 Individual Adults and Teens
\$18 12 and under; free for 3 and under

To RSVP, please visit ReadingJewishCommunity.org
or call 610-921-0624

Financial assistance is available through Jewish Family Service;
please call 610-921-0624 or email caroler@jfreading.org

Community Shabbat is an open event for our Berks County Jewish
community to come together to celebrate. This annual event is
planned in partnership with Jewish Federation of Reading/Berks,
Keshet Zion Synagogue, Reform Congregation Oheb Sholom
and Chabad Lubavitch of Reading

Please join us for Community Shabbat Service and Dinner on Feb. 28

By Brian Chartock
CEO



Shabbat, the weekly day of rest and spiritual renewal, has long been the cornerstone of Jewish life, a time for reflection, family, and community. In Jewish tradition, Shabbat is not just a personal retreat but a collective experience; a sacred opportunity for Jews to come together in faith, joy, and unity. One of the most meaningful ways to cultivate this sense of community is through a Federation Community Shabbat Service and Dinner.

In the Torah, Shabbat is introduced as both a commandment and a gift. The word *Shabbat* comes from the Hebrew root Shin-Bet-Tav (ש-ב-ת), meaning “to cease” or “to rest.” This cessation from work is not merely a physical rest but a spiritual one as well that reconnects Jews with God, creation and one another. For instance, in the Genesis creation narrative, God sanctified the seventh day and rested, establishing Shabbat as a central pillar of Jewish identity.

Shabbat is also deeply embedded in Jewish communal life. The weekly observance is traditionally marked by candle-lighting, prayer, blessings, a festive meal and time spent with family and friends. The concept of Kedushat HaYom (holiness of the day) emphasizes that Shabbat is not simply a day off; Shabbat is a moment when the mundane is transformed into the holy — a time for Jewish people to come together as one.

The collective aspects of Shabbat are embodied in the Hebrew word for community — *kehilla*, which symbolizes a gathering of people bound by a common purpose and shared values. When celebrated as a community, Shabbat serves as a bridge, uniting individuals from all walks of life, generations, and backgrounds.

A Federation Community Shabbat Service provides an opportunity for Jews from various neighborhoods, movements, and backgrounds to

unite in prayer. Whether they belong to Orthodox, Conservative, Reform or secular traditions, Community Shabbat services offer a shared space where differences are set aside, and the focus is on common values, faith and heritage. The communal prayers, including the recitation of Kabbalat Shabbat (the welcoming of Shabbat) and Ma’ariv (evening prayer), are meant to elevate the collective spirit and to bring people together in reverence and joy.

By holding Shabbat services within the framework of a Federation, Jewish organizations help create an inclusive atmosphere that reflects the diversity of the Jewish people. Federation Shabbat services are often designed to welcome families, individuals, and young children, inviting all to participate in the prayer experience, whether or not they are new to Jewish practice. The unity fostered in these services is both spiritual and communal, helping participants feel that they belong to something larger than themselves.

The Shabbat dinner table is another fundamental element of Jewish tradition. It is at this table that families and communities come together to break bread, share stories, and celebrate the sanctity of the day. A Federation Community Shabbat Dinner takes this practice beyond the family unit, inviting a broad spectrum of Jewish people to gather, connect, and build relationships.

The communal Shabbat dinner provides a space for people to engage in meaningful dialogue, learn from one another and deepen their connections. The singing of Shalom Aleichem, the sharing of the Kiddush (blessing over the wine), and the Hamotzi (blessing over the bread) all serve as moments to unite everyone in joy and gratitude.

The Shabbat meal is a moment of reflection on the values that bind the Jewish people — respect for tradition, love for family, and the importance of community. As the Talmud teaches, “One who eats and drinks on Shabbat and

recites the appropriate blessings, the Holy One, blessed be He, considers it as if he has offered a sacrifice” (Shabbat 118b). In this sense, the community Shabbat dinner is more than a meal; it is a sacred gathering that connects the participants to their faith, their heritage, and each other.

A Federation Community Shabbat Service and Dinner are more than just opportunities for prayer and festivity; they also play a critical role in reinforcing the Jewish value of Achdut (unity). In Jewish law, Achdut is not simply about harmony but about a shared commitment to the community and its collective welfare. The Torah teaches that the Jewish people are “one nation” (am echad), and it is through acts of communal engagement like these Shabbat services and dinners that the bonds of the Jewish people are strengthened.



The Federation, by organizing these events, ensures that Jews of all backgrounds have a platform for connection, support, and unity. Such gatherings serve to break down barriers between individuals and groups, fostering a greater sense of belonging and shared responsibility. The Hebrew term k’lal Yisrael, meaning the collective body of

the Jewish people, emphasizes that the well-being of one Jew is the well-being of all.

The Federation Community Shabbat Service and Dinner are vital in cultivating a vibrant and united Jewish community. By coming together to observe Shabbat, Jews are reminded of the importance of Kedushat HaYom, the sanctity of the day, and the power of communal connection. Through prayer, song, food, and fellowship, these events offer an opportunity to strengthen the bonds of unity, ensuring that the Jewish community remains a thriving, supportive and spiritually connected force. In keeping with the teachings of the Torah, the Talmud, and the centuries-old traditions of the Jewish people, a communal Shabbat gathering nurtures not only the body but the soul of the community.

If you haven’t already registered, please join in the Federation’s Community on Friday, Feb. 28, at 6 p.m. Reform Congregation Oheb Shalom will be hosting.

The link to register is on our webpage: <https://www.readingjewishcommunity.org>
L’Shalom,
-Brian

February ☆ Shevat	
	
February 7 5:10 p.m.	February 1/3 Shevat Bo (Exodus 10:1-13:16)
February 14 5:19 p.m.	February 8/ 11/10 Shevat Beshalach (Exodus 13:17-17:16)
February 21 5:27 p.m.	February 15/18 Tevet Yitro (Exodus 18:1-20:23)
February 28 4:53 p.m.	February 21/24 Tevet Mishpatim (Exodus 21:1-24:18)

Give back to Jewish Family Service by donating your gently used items to CommunityAid!



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Wyomissing PA 19610

or in our parking lot bin

Shalom

A newspaper serving the Jewish community of Berks County, Pennsylvania, and published monthly, September through June, under the Jewish Federation of Reading/Berks. Funded by the Annual Jewish Community Campaign.

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The opinions expressed in Shalom are of the writers and not the Jewish Federation of Reading/Berks



Jewish Federation
of Reading/Berks

Join us for Noontime Knowledge in February

By Vicki Haller Graff

Noontime Knowledge is a free, life-long learning program that fulfills our mission to build our Jewish community through social, cultural, and educational programs. These presentations are offered twice a month on weekdays at noon by the Jewish Federation of Reading to educate and engage our community on a variety of topics, some of Jewish content, and some not. All are welcome to join. February's programs will be held at the JCC (Jewish Federation office, 1100 Berkshire Blvd., Ste. 125, Wyomissing). There is ample parking, and the building is accessible.

Planning to attend the programs below? Please let us know by emailing info@jfreading.org or calling 610-921-0624.

Would you like to present or recommend a presenter? Please contact Vicki Graff, Program Director, at vickig@jfreading.org or 610-921-0624.

Wednesday, Feb. 12: "The Last Ships from Hamburg" with Author Steven Ujifusa

Whether you are a history aficionado or intrigued by human drama, you'll want to attend February's Literatour Berks author talk with Steven Ujifusa, on Wednesday, Feb. 12 at noon, to discuss his book "The Last Ships From Hamburg." A book sale and signing will follow the presentation.

Literatour Berks is a program of the Jewish Federation of Reading/Berks, the Exeter Community Library, and the Jewish Book Council.

This incredible true story retells the mass exodus of Jews from Eastern Europe between 1881 and 1914 that brought two and a half million Russian and Central European Jews to the United States. Their descendants include many famous Jews such as Ruth Bader Ginsburg, Irving Berlin, Al Jolson, Hank Greenberg as well as the author's great-grandparents.

This mass migration was precipitated by outbursts of antisemitic violence following the 1881 assassination of Russia's Czar Alexander II. The Jews became the scapegoats, as they had been so many times before. Risking

all they'd ever known, they illegally escaped from Russia by train, heading to Hamburg, Germany, where they boarded steamships to the shores of the United States.

Author Steven Ujifusa is a historian who chronicles the confluence of American business, social, and maritime history. His third book, "The Last Ships from Hamburg," was released by HarperCollins on Nov. 21, 2023, and named by *Publishers Weekly* as one of the best books of the year.

Moving from the shtetls of Russia and the ports of Hamburg to the mansions of New York's Upper East Side and the picket lines outside of the notorious Triangle Shirtwaist Factory, "The Last Ships From Hamburg" is a history that unfolds on both an intimate and epic scale. Don't miss this opportunity to hear the author speak in our community.

Tuesday, Feb. 25: Just Friends Duo Woodwind Concert

Picture your best friend from middle school. Did you play a sport together? Ride bikes in the neighborhood? Perform in the school play? Best friends since seventh-grade band camp, Robin Lilarose and Julie Beth Drey make up the Just Friends Duo, and they will bring their love of music and decades of experience to Noontime Knowledge on Tuesday, Feb. 25 at noon. This music program is presented thanks to the American Federation of Musicians, Local 135-211.

They will perform a variety of genres of music on a variety of woodwind instruments. As skilled musicians and knowledgeable teachers, they will play and share information and context about each piece.

You may recognize Robin and Julie from their performances around the community, and we are looking forward to bringing their beautiful music to the JCC.

Robin Lilarose, flute, is a graduate of Elizabethtown College with a B.S. in music therapy. Currently she has a private flute studio in her home and is retired after 20 years as adjunct flute instructor at Lebanon Valley College. Robin is a freelance musician and

performs with Reading POPS Orchestra, the Berks Chamber Orchestra, Fyve Woodwind Quintet, and the Reading Musical Foundation Music in the Schools Woodwind Quintet. In 2007 Robin created the TRIO JOLIE (flute, oboe, cello) that performs regionally. Robin also gives flute masterclasses.

Julie Beth Drey, clarinet, is a graduate of Temple University. She performs in the Reading/Berks area as a member of the Reading Symphony Orchestra, Berks Sinfonietta, Berks Chamber Orchestra,

Reading Musical Foundation Music in the Schools Woodwind Quintet, and the Reading Pops Orchestra where she also serves as Managing Director. She is the founder of Fyve Woodwind Quintet. Julie also plays in the pit orchestra for Dutch Apple Dinner Theater in Lancaster. She serves as Secretary/Treasurer for the American Federation of Musicians, Local 135-211.

Join us for an intimate concert with two accomplished musicians from our community.

Noontime Knowledge book talk



Authors Lawrence Levitt and Stephanie Smartschan appear at the Jewish Federation of Reading on Jan. 15 to discuss their book "Evitchka: A True Story of Survival, Hope and Love."



LITERATOUR BERKS

CELEBRATING AUTHORS AND BOOKS

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 12TH, 2025
12:00 PM AT THE JEWISH FEDERATION OF READING/BERKS


STEVEN UJIFUSA



THE LAST SHIPS FROM HAMBURG
BUSINESS, RIVALRY, AND THE RACE TO SAVE RUSSIA'S JEWS ON THE EVE OF WORLD WAR I
STEVEN UJIFUSA




**AUTHOR OF:
THE LAST SHIPS FROM HAMBURG**
A NOONTIME KNOWLEDGE PROGRAM




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Jewish Book Council



Exeter Community Library



Jewish Federation of Reading/Berks

JEWISH FEDERATION OF READING/BERKS
1100 BERKSHIRE BLV., // SUITE 125
WYOMISSING, PA 19610
Call 610-921-0624 to RSVP
or visit www.readingjewishcommunity.org for information!

Join us for a Noontime Knowledge with Steven Ujifusa, author of the illuminating book "The Last Ships From Hamburg". He'll be discussing this incredible true story, as well as signing & selling copies at the event. This program is brought to us by Literatour Berks, Jewish Book Council, The Jewish Federation of Reading & Berks, and the Exeter Community Library.

NOONTIME KNOWLEDGE

at the JCC, 1100 Berkshire Blvd., Ste. 125, Wyomissing

Just Friends Duo Woodwind Concert

featuring Robin Lilarose and Julie Beth Drey

Tuesday, February 25, 2025 at noon



Just Friends Duo, best friends since meeting at band camp in 7th grade, Robin Lilarose and Julie Beth Drey perform a variety of genres of music on a variety of instruments.

To RSVP call the JCC at 610-921-0624 or email info@jfreading.org

Noontime Knowledge is a free program, held twice monthly, provided by the Jewish Federation of Reading/Berks to educate our community on a variety of topics.



Jewish Federation of Reading/Berks



American Federation of Musicians
Local 135-211

Maimonides Society learns about sleep apnea

By Laurie Waxler

Members of the Berks County Maimonides Society met at the Federation office on Jan. 12. The discussion topic, led by Drs. Alec Platt and Jeff Driben, was obstructive sleep apnea (OSA). OSA is the most common sleep-related breathing disorder and is described as repeatedly stopping and starting breathing while sleeping. One of the most common signs of OSA is snoring, but we learned that not all people who snore have sleep apnea and not all people who have sleep apnea snore. OSA occurs when the throat muscles relax and either partially or fully block the airway, causing disruptions in normal sleep patterns.

Dr. Platt showed examples of positive sleep studies, explaining how patients with OSA are missing both the deep sleep and REM sleep needed for restorative nature sleep. He said this doesn't just happen during the test but every night for afflicted patients. Because of a lack of this important restorative sleep, untreated sleep apnea

may result in daytime drowsiness, difficulty concentrating and/or cardiovascular issues such as high blood pressure, arrhythmias or stroke.

Dr. Driben talked about the anatomy of the disease process and described a variety of surgical treatment options. These options range from dental appliances and/or procedures to the newer "Inspire", an FDA-approved implantable therapy that stimulates the movement of the tongue to a more forward position upon inhalation, opening the airway and helping patients achieve deeper and more restorative sleep.

The group enjoyed bagels and coffee before the talk and used the time to do some important networking, not always possible during the work day for medical professionals.

We look forward to our next meeting on Sunday, May 18. Our Maimonides Society is open to all Jewish health care professionals here in Berks County. For more information, please contact me at LaurieW@jfreeding.org.



Dr. Alec Platt and Dr. Jeff Driben lead a program on obstructive sleep apnea.

Team Philadelphia gets ready for Maccabi Games

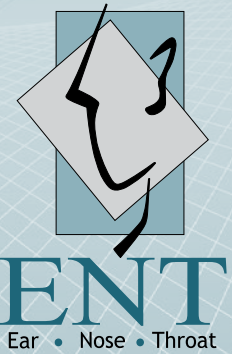
Maccabi Team Philadelphia

Team Philadelphia is excited to travel to Pittsburgh and Tucson for the 2025 JCC Maccabi Games, and we want you to be on our team! Play your favorite sport, meet teens from all over the world, and have the experience of a lifetime.

Learn more about Team Philadelphia and the JCC Maccabi Games at <https://www.phillyjcc.com/jccmaccabi/>.

if you have questions or want to learn more about joining Team Philadelphia, email the team's Delegation Head, Barrie Mittica, at barrie@phillyjcc.com.

Pediatric and Adult Patients Treating Ear, Nose, Throat Problems Thyroid Nodules, Neck Masses & Sinusitis



Physicians:

James P. Restrepo, M.D., FACS, ECNU
Jeffrey S. Driben, M.D., FACS, ECNU
Scott J. Cronin, M.D., FACS
Adam P. Vasconcellos, M.D., FACS
Chetan Y. Safi, M.D.

Nurse Practitioner:

Rosemarie Montgomery
MS, CRNP, FNP-C

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For more information, contact:
Barrie Mittica at barrie@phillyjcc.com or
(610) 896-7770 x 125
www.phillyjcc.com/jccmaccabi

Kaiserman JCC Philly

SAVE THE DATE

Mediterranean Nights

Join your friends at RCOS for an evening of music, fun, and great mediterranean cuisine!

SATURDAY, APRIL 5 @ 6:30 pm

Cocktails, Dinner, Music
& Balis Volunteer Appreciation Award
Presentation to Carol Cohn

REFORM CONGREGATION OHEB SHOLOM

Scam Jam

By Carole Robinson

My granddaughter Freya got an iPad for Hanukkah. She is having fun sending messages to her contact list, her aunts, uncles, and grandparents. So much fun in fact that she doesn't bother actually reading the message she sends and will let the computer autogenerate a message. For instance, she sent me a message saying, "I am not going to be in today," a rather unusual sentiment for an unemployed 7-year-old!

My husband and I were not too concerned until he got the message asking for his new bank account number. Then red flags went off and we contacted our son, fearing her iPad account was hacked. Fortunately, it was just Freya being goofy, but her days of sending random messages are over.

If only all scams or potential scams were so easily detected and stopped! State Sen. Judy Schwank sponsored the first Scam Jam of 2025, held at the Jewish Federation on Jan. 10. The program featured the following speakers: Detective Pamela Mathias from the Berks County District Attorney's Office, Dave Shallcross from the Senior Protection Unit of the PA Office of Attorney General, Detective Ryan Solecki from the Wyomissing Police Department, and Katrina Boyer from the PA Department of Banking and Securities.

The message from every speaker was clear. Anyone can be fooled. Scams don't have anything to do with your intelligence. They rely on timing (right before the end of a work day), psychology (make you feel obligated) and emotional triggers (e.g. you won a prize or fear, your power will be shut off).

One common fraud is the "romance scam." Scammers play on the emotions of lonely people, often widows or widowers. Using fake profiles, they contact their victims on social media and appear interested in getting to know them and claiming it's "love." Then they start asking for money for something urgent. They build relationships before they disappear with the money.

Have you heard about these other



Sen. Judy Schwank leads the Scam Jam program at the Jewish Federation.

common frauds?

- You won a prize! But you can't get it unless you pay. Only scammers tell you to pay for a "free" prize.
- You have Medicare and a card to prove it. But scammers say you need a new card and need to verify personal information. Call Medicare.
- You get a message from a business you know saying there is a problem with your account and to call a number for help. Don't call. It's not a business you know. It's a scam.
- A call or message says your computer is infected. Don't call a phone number or click a link. Don't give control of your computer and don't send money.

Advice from the experts to avoid these common fraud scenarios — don't send cash or pay online with gift cards, wire transfers, or cryptocurrency. (Even if they are asking for a dollar to ensure that the money you "won" can be transferred into your account!) That money will be hard to recover. Here are some other valuable tips for avoiding investment fraud. Avoid anything that is:

- Too good to be true
- Guaranteed return
- No risk

- Must act now!
- Pay by non-traditional means

Please take this list of common frauds and tips to educate your loved ones. While scams can happen to anyone, older adults are the #1 target of frauds and scams. When someone takes money or property from a senior without their knowledge or consent, it is senior financial abuse/exploitation. This includes when someone uses the senior's identity to open accounts for their own personal use. Senior abuse can be committed by anyone: friends, family, care staff, or strangers. If you suspect senior fraud, report it immediately to the police or Berks County Area Agency on Aging at 610-478-6500.

And while I am giving out numbers, if you or someone you know becomes a victim of fraud, please contact:

- The PA Department of Banking and Securities at www.dobs.pa.gov or 800-PA-BANKS
- The Securities and Exchange Commission at www.sec.gov/tcr or 800-SEC-0030

Hopefully, these tips can help you and your loved ones protect your money for the future. And no, Freya, we will not be sending you our bank information!

Sharing Hanukkah joy

By Carole Robinson

If your family is like my family, holidays are always super busy. There is planning and shopping, cooking and baking, prior to enjoying time with family and friends. Yet despite the time constraints, many of you found time this Hanukkah to help other members of the Jewish community have a joyous holiday.

Many thanks to Esther Shanahan and the RCOS Sisterhood. Esther organized the third annual RCOS Mitzvah Menorah for JFS clients.

RCOS congregants and other community members fulfilled the "wish list" for 25 seniors and families.

Gift recipients were thrilled with their presents and overwhelmed with the generosity and kindness of our community. They expressed their heartfelt gratitude to be passed on to all the kind-hearted donors!

I would also like to thank the JFS latke deliverers. They made sure that 75 seniors in our community were able to enjoy a Hanukkah nosh of latkes and applesauce. Thank you, Cindy Balchunas, Sue Farrara, Carol and Gordon Perlmutter, and Sharon Syret.

And a special thank you to our favorite baker, Sheila Bornstein, who brought homemade Hanukkah desserts to our Friendship Circle Hanukkah Party.



Rabbi Michelson with RCOS children in front of the Mitzvah Menorah table of gifts.

Giving at food pantries brings warmth to winter



Many thanks to our Food Pantry volunteers who braved the cold to distribute food to over 450 households in January

Mary Anne Avins	Paul Mintz
Cindy Balchunas	Annette Peppard
Raymond Gehring	Jenn Reilly
Patty Hartman	Mike Robinson
John Incledon	Mike Schein
Pete Jacobson	Ellen Schwartz
Sid Lempiner	Russ Shanahan
Lisa Levine	Oleg Umanov



January food distributions, clockwise from top left: Two children who received teddy bears at our food pantry; Jenny Reilly and Pete Jacobson deliver food to cars; Annette Peppard and Lisa Levine packing food



Holiday fun and more at Friendship Circle

At left, Friendship Circle Hanukkah celebration on Dec. 19 with Ellen Schwickrath, Helene Berne, Carole Robinson, Dorie Karp and Ingrid Soltysik. Right, a musical program, sponsored by the Jacob Krumholz Fund with singer and guitarist Steve Barth on Jan.9

FRIENDSHIP CIRCLE

Feb 6- "Tu B'Shevat Seder"

Celebrate Tu B' Shevat, the birthday of the trees, with fruit and nuts from Israel and around the world.

Feb 20 - "Yiddish Lotto"

Join Friendship Circle to "Schmooze" and play a Jewish word game. You don't have to know Yiddish to play, but you will laugh while you learn.

Friendship Circle is held twice a month on Thursday afternoons at 1:00 p.m at the JCC. An optional lunch is served, followed by an entertaining or educational program or holiday celebration.

Programs are free; optional lunch is \$7. Contact Carole at 610-921-0624 to make lunch reservations.



Why now is the time to visit Israel

By Rabbi Yosef Lipsker
Chabad Center of Berks County

Israel has always been a central part of our history, our faith, and our collective story. In times of challenge and triumph, we've expressed our care for Israel in many ways—but sometimes the most profound way to show support is simply by being there.

This past November, Chana and I had the privilege of visiting Israel, to visit with our daughter Hudi, who is studying there, and it was truly special.

Walking through its streets, we felt an overwhelming sense of safety, belonging, and purpose. The gratitude on the faces of the people we met was humbling. Knowing that our visit brought them hope and solidarity made every step of the journey feel deeply significant.

Part of our trip was to bear witness to a country deeply broken and traumatized by October 7. It started as soon as we entered the country and saw pictures of the hostages displayed in the airport. We traveled south and were overwhelmed by the unimaginable sight of the Nova festival, and saw the display of thousands



of burned cars and homes, each with a story to tell.

One particularly powerful moment was meeting Iris Haim, the mother of a young hostage tragically killed by friendly fire who came to Reading to share her story last year.

Meeting up with her in Israel we saw her strength and grace as she willingly took us to her son's destroyed home to share his life with us. This left an indelible mark on our hearts. Despite her personal loss, she exuded a resilience that encapsulates the spirit of Israel.

In March, we have an incredible opportunity to experience this connection together.

From March 17 to March 25, join Chana and myself as we lead a community trip to Israel, where we'll visit historic sites, engage with the land and its people, and show our unwavering support. It will be a journey filled with meaning, discovery, and inspiration—a chance to see firsthand why Israel remains such a beacon of hope.

If you've ever considered visiting Israel, now is the time. Let's come together, strengthen our bond with the land and its people, and create memories that will last a lifetime.



It's not too late to sign up. Use this link to check out what's going to be a 5-star experience: [Go to Landandspirit.org](https://Landandspirit.org) and enter the registration code **Chabadberks25**

Israel is amazing!! Its people are wonderful, strong and resilient. Am Yisrael Chai!

Obituary

Shelly Seltzer, 68, died on Jan. 12. She graduated from Wilson High School and Central Penn College. Shelly became an Operations Manager for Jonathan Logan and later created Chocolate Delights by Shelly, serving both corporate and individual clients.

She spent many years in the Flying Hills community enjoying golf, and loved the sun and sea in Boynton Beach before returning to Wyomissing. Shelly was the daughter of the late Irvin and Sara Seltzer, and is survived by her brother Barry and his wife, Aviva, and a large extended family and many friends.

All Around the Town

Ian Gavigan received a PhD in American History from Rutgers University. He is National Director of Higher Education Labor United.

Daniel and Meghan Gavigan recently added Violet Miriam to their family. She joins big sister, Abigail and big brother, Phillip. They live on Bainbridge Island in Washington state.

Mazel tov to **Sylvia Wenger** on the birth of her great granddaughter, Shiri Singer. Shiri's grandparents are Janet (Wenger) and Arthur Werner and her parents are Tara and Tal Singer.

Send good news to Marknem@aol.com or call 610-921-0624.

Until next time: Shalom!

WEAR RED AND JOIN US ON OUR NEXT WALK!

RUN FOR THEIR LIVES



#BringThemHomeNow

Join local organizer Amana Woolf-Gibbs for a weekly 0.5 mile/18 min. walk in honor of the 100 hostages still being held in Hamas captivity. The purpose of this peaceful walk is to raise awareness and send a message of solidarity to families who are awaiting their return.

When: every Sunday at noon (new time)

Where: Reading Public Museum by the walking trail.

Why: Global run/walk events calling for the immediate release of the hostages held by Hamas

More Info: R4TL.Reading.PA@gmail.com

JFS hospital, outpatient visits

By Carole Robinson and Sari Incledon

Jewish Family Service social workers visit Jewish patients at local hospitals, senior communities, nursing homes and rehab centers.

Our goal in these visits is both to be friendly and supportive at a difficult time, and to provide access to social services that supplement and complement the case managers at these locations.

If you or a loved one is at a local hospital or nursing home and would like a visit, please call us.

If you or a loved one are treated at a hospital out of our area we are also available for follow-up visits upon discharge.

At times of ill health, stress or crisis, families are often looking for information about home care, transportation services, senior communities, nursing homes and rehabs. This is what we're here for.

Please call Jewish Family Service social workers for help at 610-921-0624.



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CENTERPIECE

Jewish Community Calendar – February 2025

Upcoming events at the JCC (Jewish Cultural Center), JFS (Jewish Family Serice), and JFR (Jewish Federation of Reading). To learn more about any event below, read articles throughout the Shalom or see our online calendar at readingjewishcommunity.org/calendar for details, RSVPs, and events from the whole Jewish community.

Questions? Contact Amanda at 610-921-0624 or info@jfreading.org.

JCC Anne Frank Bus Trip

Monday, Feb. 3, 7:15am–5pm

Anne Frank House presents a pioneering experience outside of Amsterdam to immerse visitors in a full-scale recreation of the rooms where Anne Frank and her family spent two years hiding to evade Nazi capture. Bus trip includes tickets to the exhibit and time in NYC.

JCC Romeo Club

Tuesday, Feb. 4, 12pm–2pm

Retired Old Men Eating Out will meet at **Paolo's** (2480 Lancaster Pike, Reading) for conversation and camaraderie. New members always welcome. Meets the first Tuesday of every month.

JFS Friendship Circle

Thursday, Feb. 6, 1pm–3pm

Celebrate the birthday of the trees with a **Tu B'Shevat Seder** together with friends. Friendship Circle is held twice a month on Thursday afternoons at the JCC. Optional lunch is \$7 at 1pm, free program at 2pm.

JCC Arts, Culture, Ideas

Monday, Feb. 10, 1:30pm–3pm

Cultural Center at The Highlands
Watch **Dr. Clarence B. Jones and Robert Kraft in conversation with Gayle King** on the bonds between Black and Jewish communities. A monthly series hosted by the JCC at The Highlands in Wyomissing.

JCC Noontime Knowledge

Wednesday, Feb. 12, 12pm–1pm

Literatour Berks author talk with **Steven Ujifusa**, who will discuss his book, ***The Last Ships From Hamburg***. Book sale and signing will follow. Literatour Berks is a program of this Jewish Federation, Exeter Community Library, and the Jewish Book Council.

JCC Great Decisions

Monday, Feb. 17, 10:30am–12pm

Kick off date for **Great Decisions**, a national, grassroots foreign policy discussion program. Meets Monday mornings from February 17 to April 7 at the JCC. Different facilitators each week.

JFS Friendship Circle

Thursday, Feb. 20, 1 pm–3pm

Oy vey! Play **Yiddish Lotto** and enjoy a bissel of Yiddishekeit with friends. Friendship Circle is held twice a month on Thursday afternoons at the JCC. Optional lunch is \$7 at 1pm, free program at 2pm.

JCC Movie Monday

Monday, Feb. 24, 1pm – 3pm

Come watch "**Marshall**" at the JCC. Young Thurgood Marshall, a lawyer for the NAACP, teams up with Jewish lawyer Sam Friedman to build their defense while contending with racism and anti-Semitism.

JCC Noontime Knowledge

Tuesday, Feb. 25, 12 pm–1pm

A midday concert by the Just Friends Duo. Best friends since meeting at band camp in 7th grade, Robin Lilarose and Julie Beth Drey perform a variety of genres of music on a variety of woodwind instruments.

JFR Community Shabbat

Friday, Feb. 28, 6pm– 9pm at

Reform Congregation Oheb Sholom
Welcome Shabbat together with the whole Jewish community at this annual service, followed by a catered, kosher dinner. Hosted this year at Reform Congregation Oheb Sholom.

For more event information visit
www.ReadingJewishCommunity.org/calendar

Hanukkah celebrations around the community and beyond



Hanukkah festivities at Reform Congregation Oheb Sholom. At left, the annual Latkes and Vodka sampling. Right, a pre-holiday party at the synagogue.



Clockwise from top left, Chanukah celebration for Keshar Zion congregants; CHS Chanukah project - Menorah & Dreidel shaped LED lamps; Rabbi Lipsker at the Caron alumni Hanukkah celebration in New York; a Gelt Dro and more at Chabad's Community Chanukah celebration; Chanukah Chinese Movie Night at Chabad; Rabbi Yosef Lipsker meeting with Gov. Josh Shapiro at the menorah lighting at the Capitol. The Chabad Men's Club also held a Latke Reuben event to celebrate the holiday.

JEWISH FAMILY SERVICE NEEDS:

PLASTIC GROCERY BAGS FOR OUR FOOD PANTRIES!



DROP YOUR BAGS AT OUR OFFICE 1100 BERKSHIRE BLVD SUITE 125 MONDAY TO FRIDAY 9:00 AM TO 3:00PM.



Movie Monday at the JCC

February 24, 2025, 1pm



Marshall
starring Chadwick Boseman and Josh Gad
honoring Black History Month

Young Thurgood Marshall faces one of his greatest challenges while working as a lawyer for the NAACP. He teams up with Jewish lawyer Sam Friedman. The two men build their defense while contending with racist and anti-Semitic views.



 Jewish Federation of Reading/Berks

Grab a seat for a Jewish themed movie each month at the JCC (1100 Berkshire Blvd., Ste. 125, Wyomissing). It is usually held on the 4th Monday of the month, and the popcorn and the movie are both free!

Kesher Zion volunteers deliver



The Kesher Zion Social Action Committee made and delivered BBQ for the New Journey Food Bank, a project done every other month with Wyomissing Church of the Brethren. Thank you to Susan Wilson, Janine Ure, Carol Perlmutter, Carole Robinson, Mike Robinson, Lisa Levine, Cindy Balchunas, Laurie Waxler and Debbie Goldberg for helping this month.



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Celebrate Purim with ‘Spiel on the Roof’

By Vicki Haller Graff
Reform Congregation Oheb Sholom

A decade ago, Michael Pardo began a beloved Oheb Sholom tradition: the musical Purim spiel. I know I am not alone as someone who looked forward to learning the musical theme of each spiel, from the Beatles, to Disney, to Rogers and Hammerstein. Mike’s clever lyrics and silly characterizations transported us to Shushan each year with comedy and a lot of heart.

Though Mike Pardo moved to a new community, I’m honored to carry this tradition forward. It just wouldn’t be Purim without it!

To that end, I’m pleased to announce the 2025 Oheb Sholom Purim Spiel: “A Spiel on the Roof!”

A spiel on the roof. Sounds crazy, no? But here, in our little village of Wyomissing, you might say every one of us is a fiddler on the roof trying to scratch out a pleasant, simple spiel without breaking his neck.

From Anatevka of “Fiddler on the Roof” to Shushan of the Book of

Esther, our people struggled and also found joy. We faced those in power who wanted to kill us all and, as Tevye would say, “on the other hand,” stood together in celebration and sadness to stand up for our community. There were also a few headstrong women, men looking for beautiful wives, and very important secrets. We are pairing two very Jewish stories. What’s not to like!?

As always, keeping with tradition, our spiel will have a musical theme, will be performed by congregants and friends, and will be very silly. All ages are welcome in the audience.

And because traditions change and evolve, this year we are including younger members of our congregation. We have to plant seeds for spiels to come!

Please mark your calendar for Thursday, March 13, at 7 p.m. for Erev Purim.

Join us in the sanctuary to celebrate the endurance of the Jewish people through song and merriment! Right? Of course right!

Thursday, March 13, 2025, 7:00 p.m.

Reform Congregation Oheb Sholom

555 Warwick Drive, Wyomissing

A spiel on the roof. Sounds crazy, no? But here, in our little village of Wyomissing, you might say every one of us is a fiddler on the roof trying to scratch out a pleasant, simple spiel without breaking his neck.

Join us for this annual TRADITION!
(But don’t worry, we’ll be in the sanctuary.)

What to know about the Israel-Hamas hostage deal

American Jewish Committee

On Jan. 19, the first three hostages freed under the deal — Romi Gonen, 24, abducted from the Nova music festival, and Emily Damari, 28, and Doron Steinbrecher, 31, taken from their homes in Kibbutz Kfar Aza — were reported to be in relatively good physical condition.

On Jan. 15, 467 days since grandparents, mothers, children, and wives were torn from their families and held captive in Gaza, the Israeli government and Palestinian terror group Hamas announced a hostage release deal. The deal, brokered by international partners including the U.S., Egypt and Qatar, follows over 15 months of conflict that began on Oct. 7, 2023, when Hamas terrorists stormed southern Israel, massacring over 1,200 Israelis and taking 251 hostages.

Here's what you need to know about the deal: Hamas is releasing hostages, including Israeli and American citizens, while Israel is releasing Palestinian security prisoners, including those convicted of terrorism and serving life sentences.

What are the phases of the deal?

The deal involves a significant exchange of hostages for convicted Palestinian terrorist prisoners, alongside changes to Israeli troop positions in Gaza and humanitarian measures.

As of Jan. 17, Hamas and other terror groups inside Gaza were still holding 94 of the 251 hostages taken from Israel on Oct. 7, at least 34 of whom are dead, according to the Israeli government. An additional four hostages were already being held by Hamas, including the

bodies of Hadar Goldin and Oron Shaul, who died during Israel's Operation Cast Lead in Gaza in 2014. Hamas is also holding captive Israelis Avera Mengistu and Hisham al-Sayed, who crossed into Gaza on their own accord in 2014 and 2015, respectively.

The three-phase agreement covers a span of six weeks and includes the release of 33 hostages, including 12 women and children, men ages 50 and above, and injured civilians, including two Americans.

Three hostages were released on the first day, and four more were to be released on the seventh day. After that, three hostages are to be released every seven days, and the final 14 will be released in the final week of the first phase. Among these, five female Israeli soldiers would be exchanged for 50 Palestinian security prisoners each, including 30 serving life sentences for terror.

Kfir, 1, and Ariel Bibas, 5, the only children still in captivity, along with their parents, Yarden and Shiri, are expected to be included in the release of hostages in phase one. Dual Israeli-American citizens Sagui Dekel-Chen, 36, and Keith Siegel, 65, also would be in this group. The oldest hostage, Shlomo Mantzur, 86, would be included.

Additionally, during this phase, Israel agreed to withdraw from specific population centers in Gaza, facilitate the return of displaced Palestinians to northern Gaza and allow the entry of 600 humanitarian aid trucks daily, up from roughly 250 per day, while maintaining control of the strategic Gaza-Egypt border region known as the Philadelphi

Corridor. This border has been used by Hamas to smuggle into the Gaza Strip vast amounts of weapons used to carry out attacks on Israel.

During Phase One, there are no restrictions on Israel's ability to continue its efforts to defend Israelis from threats emanating from Gaza.

The 65 remaining hostages will only be freed if the sides can agree on a second phase for the truce. The deal stipulates that negotiations for the second phase are to begin 16 days after implementation of phase one and with the goal being the release of all remaining hostages, a permanent ceasefire, and the full withdrawal of Israeli troops from Gaza.

The second phase is to involve the release of all remaining hostages, primarily male Israeli soldiers, in exchange for additional Palestinian prisoners and a complete Israeli withdrawal from Gaza.

The third phase would see the return of remaining hostages' bodies in exchange for a Gaza reconstruction plan spanning three to five years, supervised by international entities.

Four Americans are presumed dead, with their bodies still being held: Itay Chen, 19; Omer Neutra, 23; Gadi Haggai, 73; and Judi Weinstein Haggai, 70. The bodies of 37 hostages have already been recovered and brought back to Israel by Israeli troops.

The full scope of the plan for a post-war Gaza has yet to be determined, including who would govern the territory. Israel has insisted that Hamas, which

is sworn to Israel's destruction and has controlled the territory since 2007, should not be involved in a post-war Gaza. The Israeli government has also opposed the involvement of the Palestinian Authority, which administers portions of the West Bank and administered Gaza before its ouster by Hamas in 2007.

Palestinians being released

The prisoners to be released include prominent figures linked to Palestinian terror groups, such as Khalida Jarrar, 62, of the U.S.-designated terror group the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP); Dalal Khaseeb, 53, sister of former Hamas leader Saleh Arouri; and Abla Abdelrasoul, 68, wife of detained PFLP leader Ahmad Saadat, who ordered the 2001 assassination of Israeli tourism minister Rehavam Ze'evi.

PFLP is a decades-old internationally designated terrorist organization that partnered with a West German terror group in 1976 to hijack an Air France flight, diverting it to Entebbe, Uganda. They murdered the Fogel family in 2011, carried out the 2014 Jerusalem synagogue massacre, and killed 17-year-old Rina Shnerb in 2019. PFLP was also involved in Hamas' October 7 massacre of Israelis.

What is AJC saying?

American Jewish Committee welcomed the first stage of the agreement. AJC CEO Ted Deutch expressed gratitude to "the Biden Administration, the incoming Trump Administration, and other global partners" while emphasizing the need to "ensure that every hostage is reunited with their loved ones."

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Sunday, February 9
7:00pm

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Please mail your payment with complete information to the Jewish Federation, PO Box 14925, Reading, PA, 19612-4925 or bring to the Jewish Cultural Center, 1100 Berkshire Blvd., Suite 125, Wyomissing. You may set up a “savings account” for the purpose of sending cards. Please contact the Federation at 610-921-0624 for further information.

Contributions as of Jan. 17

Jewish Family Service

In honor of:

Phyllis Dessel and her volunteering for JFS - Doris and Elliott Leisawitz
Bat Mitzvah of Vic and Dena’s granddaughter - Anzie Golden

In memory of:

Harriet Baskin - Roger Schein
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Federation Jewish Community Campaign

In honor of:

Margo Levin’s birthday - Rick and Mindy Small
The birth of the Abramsons’ new grandson - Debbie Goodman

Doris Levin Fund

In honor of:

Carole Robinson and the work she does - Stephanie Arbige

Harry & Rose Sack Adult Education Fund

In honor of:

Luba and Misha Alperovich’s new home- Albert and Nancy Sack

Honorariums and Memorials

Contributions may be made to the following Funds:

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In memory of:

Sidney Bratt - Jill and Barry Miller

PJ Library

In memory of:

Harriet Baskin- George Viener
Eric Gerst - George Viener

JFS TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM

This program provides transportation to members of the Jewish community, age 60 and over or those with disabilities, who have no other way of getting around. It allows participants to retain their independence and keeps them from becoming homebound and isolated. It can be used for medical appointments, synagogue attendance, shopping and other errands.

It is easy to participate. Purchase a book of 25 taxi tickets from the Federation at a cost of \$25. Each coupon is worth \$3. The phone number for Reading Metro Taxi is printed on the ticket book. Call the company and arrange your ride. At the end of the ride, sign your coupon(s) before giving them to the driver. Tipping is left to the passenger’s discretion. Coupon does not include cost of tipping.

This program is subsidized by the Jewish Federation of Reading/Berks

HOW CAN YOU HELP?

Jewish Family Service is grateful to our committed volunteers!

Here are some ways that you can help:

Help Fight Hunger

Join us at a JFS Food Pantry to distribute food to our hungry neighbors.

Share your Professional Expertise

Present a program on travel, photography, or your unique interests or hobbies to our seniors.

Share your time

A small investment of your personal time can make a profound difference in someone’s life. Visit a shut-in, shop for a homebound senior, or take someone to a doctor’s appointment.

Donate your vehicle to JFS or donate clothing to CommunityAid

Enjoy tax benefits of donating a car or help our clients through our partnership with CommunityAid.



Contact Us
Carole Robinson at
610-921-0624

 Jewish Federation
of Reading/Berks

2025 GREAT DECISIONS


Meeting at the Jewish Community Center
1100 Berkshire Blvd. Suite 125, Wyomissing
Monday mornings 10:30 a.m.
February 17 through April 7

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3/3/25	U.S. Changing Leadership of the World Economy	Dr. Randall Newham, PSU Berks
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3/17/25	U.S. China Relations	Jim Shankweiler
3/24/25	The Future of NATO and European Security	Dr. Victoria Williams, Alvernia University
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\$35 one person, one book or \$40 two persons, one book

To register for Great Decisions and to order a copy of the 2025 Great Decisions Briefing Book please visit readingjewishcommunity.org or call the office 610-921-0624



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