



# Shalom05|25

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

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## Federation receives major gift for Jewish Family Service

By Laurie Waxler

Jewish Federation of Reading is pleased to announce a major gift received for our Jewish Family Service by Reading native and local artist, Jill Henry. Moving to Berks County from Philadelphia at the age of 6, Jill spent her childhood years here with her parents, Richard and Maxine, and her younger sister, Jane. Richard owned Quality Roofing Supply Co. in Reading, and Maxine was a devoted mother and community volunteer. Married for 66 years, Richard and Maxine shared a true love of life and were proud of their heritage, gratefully immersing themselves in the Jewish community both religiously and socially.

Jill was drawn to the arts at an early age, attending Moore College of Art in Philadelphia during high school and then moving on to Pratt Institute in New York City. Upon college graduation in the early 1970s, she found herself in a Volkswagen bus, with her cousin in tow, heading to California to begin an exciting life in the arts. Eventually moving up the coast and settling on the Monterey Peninsula and then Sonoma County, Jill created unique and distinctive art jewelry and found object sculptures, exhibiting at solo and group gallery shows.

Jill moved back to Berks County in 2015 to help care for her mother following her father’s passing in January 2014. Since then she has become involved with the Yocum Institute



Jill Henry

for Arts Education in West Lawn as both a volunteer and donor. She is excited about Federation’s Lakin Preschool teaming up with the Institute and thinks it will be a positive for both organizations.

Jill learned the art of fundraising and the need for philanthropy when she and some friends started a public radio station in Pacific Grove, Calif. Securing donations and

memberships was essential to the operation of the station, and every penny raised was put to good use. When asked what motivated her to want to support Jewish Family Service, she said she wants to preserve her family’s legacy of giving. She knew how important supporting Federation, and our Jewish community, was to her parents and is now continuing the tradition. She wishes all Jewish families would continue to support the Federation the way her parents, and most likely their parents, did years ago.

Growing up thinking art was her purpose in life, Jill has found a new purpose; philanthropy. Supporting causes like Jewish Family Service (JFS) brings her great joy, knowing she’s making a difference out there in our Jewish community. Her generosity will allow Federation to continue to provide needed support and let people know they are loved and not forgotten.

Our JFS provides programming for seniors, home and hospital visits for those unable to travel, special holiday treats like hamentashen deliveries during Purim, help with utilities and rent and so much more. Funds raised through our Passover Campaign go directly to Jewish Family Service.

Join Jill and many others in supporting our Passover Campaign by visiting our website at ReadingJewishCommunity.org and find the joy in giving she has found.



*On YomHashoah-Holocaust Remembrance Day, Federation had the honor to attend the 2025 Civic Commemoration of the Holocaust at the State Capitol. The deeply moving ceremony featured Pennsylvania leaders, including Berks County’s own Sen. Judy Schwank. In an especially poignant moment, Leah Leisawitz, great-granddaughter of Holocaust survivors Esther and Sidney Bratt, shared her great-grandmother’s story of survival. Gov. Josh Shapiro recognized Esther for her courage and emphasized the significance of “never again” in light of today’s climate. The event was organized by the Pennsylvania Jewish Coalition, and our own Judith Kraines served as a chair.*



# The Wise Son

By Laurie Waxler

My hope is that everyone had a nice Passover and you were able to celebrate with friends and/or family. Ours was small this year, but we did our traditional seder with my daughter Emily and her fiancé. I've tried several Haggadahs over the years but always seem to be drawn to the one I got from my husband's grandmother 30 years ago and have Xeroxed copies for everyone else. It is the Haggadah for the American Family, written by Rabbi Martin Berkowitz of Temple Adath Israel of the Main Line. I've always found it to be easy and straightforward and takes just the perfect amount of time to tell the story.

As we were reading the about the 4



sons, the paragraph about the wise son struck me as pertinent to the work I have been doing for Federation. I reread it to my family and was surprised when my daughter said she also found a lot of meaning in the words. I feel like in this day and age, this is exactly what I wish to say to our local Jewish community but it appears Rabbi Berkowitz felt it back in 1958 when he first wrote the book.

"It is incumbent upon us to emulate the wise son by remembering our duties to our people and our Faith. We must share in the obligations to advance Torah and the Jewish way of life. To remove ourselves from these endeavors, looking to others to carry the burdens, is to fail in our responsibility. The wise son, the wise Jew is he, who understands the importance of his personal participation in all efforts for the

benefit of our people and for the betterment of mankind."

Our community needs more members who emulate the wise son and don't leave the burden of advancing our Jewish way of life here in Berks County to others. Whether you are Jewish, or Jew-ish, as I've heard some people refer to themselves who are not strongly engaged, we all need to contribute in one way or another. Imagine how strong our Federation and our community could be if everyone did a little something.

I encourage you to consider contributing to one of our Campaigns (Annual or Passover) and/or joining one of our upcoming events.

Your personal participation is important! Together, we will always be stronger.

Development

## Give Today

so we can help tomorrow!

ANNUAL COMMUNITY CAMPAIGN 2025   DONATE TODAY

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Today  
Tomorrow  
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- Women's Philanthropy
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- Letter of Intent

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CAMPAIGN

Please visit  
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Make your gift  
today!

## SAVE THE DATE

# Annual Meeting

Sunday, June 1st 10am-12pm  
at the JCC, 1100 Berkshire Blvd., Wyomissing

Installation of board members, officers and  
brunch to follow

From the CEO's Desk

# Israel Independence Day: A celebration of Jewish resilience, renewal

By Brian Chartock  
CEO

Each year, Israel Independence Day (Yom Ha'atzmaut) is commemorated with fireworks, parades, cultural events and national pride. It marks the anniversary of the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, a moment that transformed our Jewish history and identity. However, beyond the flags and festivities, Yom Ha'atzmaut represents something deeply profound: the realization of a 2,000-year-old dream for a Jewish homeland and the enduring impact this reality has had on Jewish communities across the globe.

On May 14, 1948, David Ben-Gurion, the head of the Jewish Agency, proclaimed the establishment of the State of Israel. This declaration came just hours



before the British Mandate in Palestine was set to expire. Almost immediately, neighboring Arab states invaded, triggering the War of Independence. Miraculously and against the odds, Israel survived and solidified its place in the modern world as an independent state.

This event wasn't just a political milestone; it was a historic turning point for a people who had faced centuries of exile, persecution, and displacement. The birth of the modern State of Israel provided not only a physical refuge for Jews but a psychological and spiritual one as well.

The Jewish diaspora has long been a mosaic of cultures, languages and traditions spread across continents from the ancient communities of Iraq and Yemen to the shtetls of Eastern Europe and the Jewish quarters of Morocco. While these communities maintained a shared religion and history, they often lived as minorities, sometimes tolerated, frequently

marginalized, and too often targeted.

Israel's creation offered a sanctuary — particularly critical after the horrors of the Holocaust. Survivors and refugees flooded into the new nation of Israel, and in the years that followed, Jews from Arab countries, Ethiopia, the (former) Soviet Union, and beyond made their way to the new Jewish homeland. Israel became a tapestry of global Jewish life; a place where centuries of exile were brought together in the shared project of nation-building.

The existence of the modern State of Israel has sparked a rebirth in Jewish culture and identity. For the first time in ages, Hebrew became a spoken language of daily life — not just liturgy. Jewish holidays, customs, and traditions were infused with new meaning, as they could now be celebrated in the land where they originated.

Furthermore, Israel has become a focal point for Jewish pride and solidarity. Whether through Birthright trips for young Jews, solidarity missions during times of conflict or the simple act of facing Jerusalem in prayer, Israel remains central to Jewish life around the world.

At the same time, Israel's journey has not been without hardship, both within and beyond its borders. The ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict continues to challenge the region and complicate Israel's global image. This tension often spills over into Jewish communities worldwide, where

Jewish identity can become entangled with geopolitics, often making Jews targets of antisemitism, criticism or worse.

Nonetheless, the importance of the State of Israel to our Jewish identity remains stronger than ever. The very existence of a Jewish homeland, with all its imperfections and complexities, serves as a beacon of hope, resilience, and self-determination.

For Jews living in the diaspora, Israel is much more than just a distant homeland — it represents a symbol of Jewish continuity and survival. Israel's successes are celebrated as communal achievements; its struggles felt personally. The Jewish people are no longer a people without a land. And, with that land, comes both pride and responsibility to support, to question, to engage and to contribute to its ongoing story.

Israel Independence Day is not only a celebration of a nation's founding, but it's a celebration of the enduring spirit of our people who never stopped believing in their return. For Jews around the world, the State of Israel is a living, breathing testament to the power of hope, unity and historical memory. It serves as a continuous reminder that, even after centuries of dispersion and suffering, a people can truly come home. And, in doing so, change the world.

Am Yisrael Chai,  
-Brian

ERICA S. PERL

AUTHOR & ILLUSTRATOR

A NEW SUMMER-LONG PROGRAM!

ILLUSTRATION!

Recommended Ages: 6 and up!

First Meeting: Monday, June 16th at 1:00 PM

You will be able to meet and work with Erica throughout the summer to create your own graphic novel! Find your style and practice your drawing skills! Sketch pads and colored pencils are provided.

Erica S. Perl is a New York Times best-selling author and illustrator with a love for empowering young readers.

Stop by or call the library to sign up!

MORE INFORMATION COMING SOON!

4569 Prestwick Dr. • Reading, PA 19606 • [www.berkslibraries.org/exeter](http://www.berkslibraries.org/exeter) • 610-406-9431

May Iyar-Sivan	
<b>Shabbat Candle Lightings</b>	<b>Torah Portions</b>
May 2 7:41 p.m.	May 3/5 Iyar Tazria-Metzora (Leviticus 12:1-15:33)
May 9 7:48 p.m.	May 10/ 11/12 Iyar Acharei-Kedoshim (Leviticus 16:1-20:27)
May 16 7:55 p.m.	May 17/19 Iyar Emor (Leviticus 21:1-24:23)
May 23 8:01 p.m.	May 24/26 Iyar Behar-Bechukotai (Leviticus 25:1-27:34)
May 30 8:07 p.m.	May 31/4 Sivan Bamidbar (Numbers 1:1-4:20)

Shalom

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General Offices:

1100 Berkshire Blvd., Suite 125  
Wyomissing, PA 19610

Phone:

610-921-0624 FAX: 610-929-0886

Web site:

[www.ReadingJewishCommunity.org](http://www.ReadingJewishCommunity.org)

Jewish Federation of Reading

CEO: Brian Chartock

Chair: Sheila Bornstein

Communications Director: Mark Nemirow, Editor

Proofreaders: Federation staff

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

It's Simcha Supplement time

If you had or are having a bar/bat mitzvah or graduation (high school or higher) in your family this Jewish year, share the good news with the community. Please submit a few sentences about the person and their accomplishment, along with a photo.

Text and photos can be sent to [Marknem@aol.com](mailto:Marknem@aol.com) or to the Federation office.

SUBMISSIONS NEEDED ASAP



# Join us for Noontime Knowledge in May

By Vicki Haller Graff  
Program Director

**Wednesday, May 7: Tahini Talk with Amy Zitelman, co-founder and CEO of Soom Foods, the leading tahini company in the United States**

We are lucky in Reading that we have so many incredible resources so close to us! One of those is Soom Foods, based in Philadelphia, and their inspiring co-founder and CEO, Amy Zitelman. Soom Foods, the leading brand of tahini in the US, and you can purchase it locally at Kimberton Whole Foods.

Amy is coming to Reading on Wednesday, May 7, for a double-header of programs. At noon she will present at the JCC for Noontime Knowledge, sharing her entrepreneurial experience and doing some simple demonstrations on using her delicious tahini in your own recipes. That evening, a Wyomissing couple will host her in their home, where a limited number of guests can cook and eat dinner with her, with cooking beginning around 5 p.m, and dinner at 6:30. There is a \$36 fee for the dinner event.

How inspiring to have a female, Jewish entrepreneur sharing so much with our community! Amy and her sisters started Soom Foods in 2013 on a mission to make tahini a more popular ingredient outside of the Middle East. Soom is the tahini choice of top chefs across the country, including Mike Solomonov of Zahav

and all CookNSolo establishments. Soom is the #1 selling brand of tahini on Amazon, in Whole Foods, and now even Walmart!

Amy Zitelman is the author of “The Tahini Table — Go Beyond Hummus with 100 Recipes for Every Meal.” Join Amy for one or both engaging programs — a presentation and demo during the day or an intimate evening program of cooking and conversation.

RSVP is appreciated for Noontime Knowledge and required for Cooking and Conversation.

**Tuesday, May 20, FYVE Woodwind Quintet Concert’**

Music can transport us to another time and place, and the FYVE Woodwind Quintet, with its varied repertoire, will transport us from the JCC around the world and through time. Formed in 1993, the FYVE Woodwind Quartet is comprised of five classically trained professional musicians, dedicated to the finest performance of chamber music. FYVE offers a varied repertoire from the baroque, classical, romantic, and contemporary eras, presented by creative and expressive instrumentalists: Robin Lilarose, Flute; Jill Haley, Oboe; Julie Beth Drey, Clarinet; Valerie Trollinger, Bassoon; and Shari Gleason Mayrhofer, Horn. Noontime Knowledge attendees may remember Robin and Julie’s flute and

clarinet concert in February, which was equal parts educational, entertaining, and beautiful music. This concert, with five performers, promises to be even more of everything!

FYVE will perform a free concert at the JCC on Tuesday, May 20, at noon. The concert is open to the public.

### About Noontime Knowledge

Noontime Knowledge is a free, lifelong 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.

Programs will be held at the JCC unless noted (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](mailto: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](mailto:vickig@jfreading.org) or 610-921-0624.



Above, Rachel Canar, executive director of Nature Israel, shared a beautiful presentation about the bird migrations at Noontime Knowledge on March 26.  
At left, Ivan Bub meets with attendees April 9 after his presentation on this history of the Reading Public Museum

## NOONTIME KNOWLEDGE

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

**Tahini Talk with Amy Zitelman  
cofounder and CEO of Soom Foods  
the leading brand of tahini in the US**

**Wednesday, May 7, 2025 at noon**

Amy Zitelman and her sisters started Soom Foods in 2013 on a mission to make tahini a more popular ingredient outside of the Middle East.

Join Amy as she discusses her entrepreneurial experiences building Soom Foods and demonstrates simple tahini recipes. Q&A to follow!

We'll also feature Amy in an evening event at a private home.



To RSVP call the JCC at 610-921-0624  
or email [info@jfreading.org](mailto: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.



## NOONTIME KNOWLEDGE

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

**FYVE Woodwind Quintet**  
featuring flute, oboe, clarinet, basoon, horn  
**Tuesday, May 20, 2025 at noon**



Enjoy a mid-day concert by the FYVE Woodwind Quintet, comprised of five classically trained professional musicians: Robin Lilarose, Flute; Jill Haley, Oboe; Julie Beth Drey, Clarinet; Valerie Trollinger, Bassoon; Shari Gleason Mayrhofer, Horn. FYVE offers a varied repertoire from the Baroque, Classical, Romantic, and contemporary eras.

To RSVP call the JCC at 610-921-0624  
or email [info@jfreading.org](mailto: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.





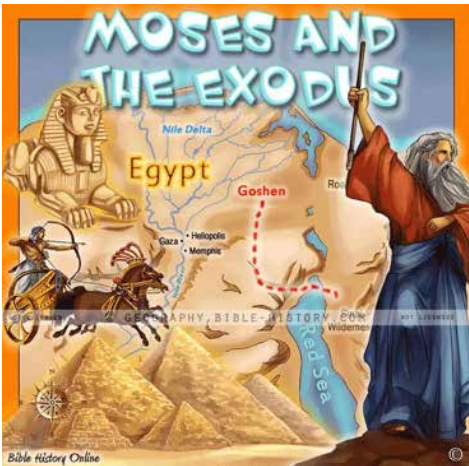
# Wonder of Wonders, Miracle of Miracles

By Cantor Ted Prosnitz  
Keshet Zion Synagogue

In April we celebrated Passover, recalling how God brought us out of Egypt, from beyn hamitzrayim/between the straits. Hashem led us to become b'nai mitzvot/children of the commandments when our ancestors experienced the theophany at Mount Sinai, which we will celebrate on Shavuot in June.

At the seder, we were enjoined to think of ourselves as having been enslaved, crushed by cruel bondage/avodah kasha (Ex. 6:9). That is a challenge: to be more than a spectator, or a reader of ancient history. But it is not too much for us. Our liturgy offers us a bedtime prayer in which we acknowledge that we put our souls in His hands — b'yadcha afkid ruchi, and a morning prayer — modeh ani — thanking God for returning our souls to us. All our senses make us realize that Hashem daily renews the wonders of creation.

Miracles did not cease with the Exodus, nor end in ages past. In May we celebrate a wonder of wonders, the establishment of the modern State of Israel. Israeli Independence Day/ Yom Ha'atzmaut will be May 1. Israel's first Prime Minister, David Ben Gurion, famously said, "In Israel, in order to be



a realist you must believe in miracles."

During the month of May we count the days and weeks leading up to the miraculous giving of the Torah/matan Torah, to be celebrated on Shavuot. On Passover, we learn to not oppress a stranger, because we know what it is like to have been strangers in a land not our own. Our Festival of Freedom has inspired other people who have suffered governmental oppression and sensitizes us to protect against loss of freedom. On Shavuot, the assignment is to turn the giving of the Torah to receiving the Torah. We can take hold of this tree of life, accept this Torah/teaching and engage in avodah sheb'lev/service of the heart. If all the inhabitants of the world would recognize that we are all children of the one God, then that would be a miracle, too.

## All Around the Town

Mazel tov to **Sue and Michael** Farrara on the birth of their granddaughter Eleora Florence Richardson, Denver, Colo. Ellie's parents are Emily Farrara and

Aaron Richardson

Send good news to [Marknem@aol.com](mailto:Marknem@aol.com) or call 610-921-0624.

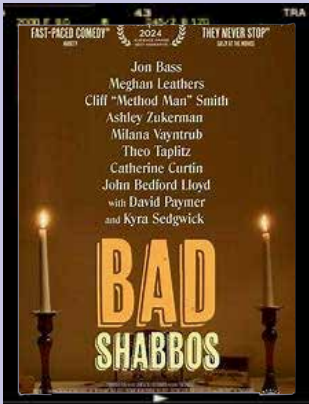
*Until next time: Shalom!*

# An inspiring Yashek Lecture



Boaz Dvir, center, delivered an inspiring presentation on Holocaust education at this year's Yashek Lecture. With him, from left, are Vicki Haller Graff, Kimberly Yashek Lockhart, Linda Yashek Hughes, Dena Hammel, Vic Hammel, and Brian Chartock.

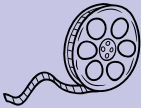
## Movie Monday at the JCC May 19, 2025, 1pm



### Bad Shabbos

all star ensemble cast led by  
Kyra Sedgwick

a hilarious ensemble  
dark comedy



An engaged interfaith couple are about to have their parents meet for the first time over a Shabbat dinner when an accidental death gets in the way.



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!



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MYERSTOWN  
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Myerstown, PA 17067  
717-866-1400

# Tahini Talk

with Amy Zitelman  
cofounder and CEO of Soom Foods  
the leading brand of tahini in the US

Wednesday, May 7

5:00pm - intimate evening  
of cooking and conversation  
in a Wyomissing home - \$36



**By Vicki Haller Graff**

Here are the May activities while our quests are in town:

- Thursday, May 1, we will host community leaders from government, education, and our partner organizations to build understanding and connections between the Jewish and non-Jewish community.
- We will bring the guests to the Highlands to meet with Jewish elders.
- That same day in the afternoon, we will celebrate Yom Ha Atzma'ut at Keshar Zion with a party for all ages —

games, food and wine tastings, music and dancing, and more — to celebrate Israel's 77th birthday with our honored guests!

- Thursday evening, we'll have a pizza party for teens and teens to meet our guests and talk with them in a smaller group.
- On Friday, they will visit Lakin Preschool for Shabbat and story time and visit a local church to build more understanding and goodwill. That evening, Chabad of Reading/Berks invited our guests to join in their Taco

Bout Shabbat dinner.

Please check your email or contact the Federation for full details.

By bringing these guests to Reading, our intention is that we all have an opportunity to meet them, hear about their lives and build connections from our small community out into the wider Jewish world.

We invite you, as a part of our community, to meet our guests and share this experience with your friends, neighbors, and fellow Jews.

**By Amanda Wertz**

Sadly, this year's Great Decisions program here at JCC has come to an end. I've had the pleasure over the last eight weeks of getting to know all the participants, and we even had some new faces join us this year. The group has been continually growing since I've been here, and that makes me extremely happy to know that people with differing opinions can come and have discussions in a safe space.

This year's group had 27 people registered. I just want to say thank you to everyone who participated this year.



and thank all of those who graciously offered to moderate our sessions!



I hope you will attend our sessions next spring here at the ICC and until

then stay involved and make “Great Decisions.”

**By Nancy Russo**

Vav is the sixth letter of the Hebrew alphabet. Six represents connection and through our Federation's Literatour program, we connect the community to Jewish authors and Jewish stories. Jewish stories are our stories and the value of these stories arises not only from their content but also from the spirit in which they are told to us.

The Exeter Community Library is proud to partner with the Federation for such an important series. I remember Bill Franklin approaching me about my participation on this committee and have enjoyed working with Federation staff (especially, Amanda Hornberger!) throughout these years. It pleases me that so many of my library's patrons have attended the programs over the years and they are always enthusiastic about which authors we will be bringing each year.

This series is truly a community-wide effort as both Jews and non-Jews support and attend.

In this, our sixth season of Literatour, we traveled from the Warsaw Ghetto to the United States Court of Appeals for the D.C. Circuit; met some of the fabulous leading ladies of Broadway, as well as the Jewish art student who was a cyclist, forger and saboteur; cheered the love story of a couple

who reconnected after being apart for 60 years; celebrated the life of Evitchka Ritter, Holocaust survivor and fellow Pennsylvanian; heard the courageous stories of those battling mental illnesses; and learned the tale of the second Exodus that brought over 2.5 million Russian and Central European Jews to the United States.

As I write this article (in April), we are meeting once again as a committee in preparation for our upcoming seventh season. Each May, the Jewish Book Council ships out all of the books being considered for that season. Committee members get the opportunity to read or glance through these books before the committee attends the Virtual Jewish Book Council Conference later in the month. During the conference, more than 200 authors “on the tour” present a two-minute introduction of their book. It’s both exciting and exhausting for the committee as we listen to hours of presentations over the three-day conference.

Once the conference concludes, we will meet and begin to discuss our choices, keeping in mind the interests and needs of our community.

Choosing the authors who will visit our community is just the beginning of the process. We work with the Jewish Book Council, to organize travel and accommodations for each author and to



work with our independent booksellers, Reads & Co. to ensure the books are

available for purchase. Each season, we develop marketing materials and coordinate advertising, trying to reach as many in the community as possible. Thus, it's a group effort as our committee finishes one season of Literatour and immediately begins work on the next one.

I'd like to take this opportunity to thank each of our committee members, the Federation and ECL staff, and to welcome Vicki Haller Graff to the Literatour family. I can't wait to see what season seven will bring us!



# RCOS students serve clients at Opportunity House



Two groups of Reform Congregation Oheb Sholom Religious School students prepared food for clients at Opportunity House in late March.

"ART, CULTURE & IDEAS"

THE HIGHLANDS AT WYOMISSING

MONDAY, JUNE 9  
1:30 PM

92NY

CULTURAL CENTER AT THE HIGHLANDS AT WYOMISSING  
2000 CAMBRIDGE AVE.

HONEST AGING: WHAT TO EXPECT AND HOW TO THRIVE IN THE SECOND HALF OF LIFE  
PRE-RECORDED PROGRAM

Jewish Federation of Reading/Berks

Art, Culture & Ideas is a monthly series. Upcoming dates:  
July 11  
Aug 114

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*

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

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SHOES

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When you donate to CommunityAid, Jewish Family Service receives financial credit and is eligible for additional support through grants and funding. Please use our partner number Reading JFS #50100 when donating in store.

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Jewish Federation of Reading/Berks  
1100 Berkshire Blvd  
Wyomissing PA 19610



# Freedom from hunger

By Carole Robinson

It's finally spring — the weather is getting warmer, the flowers are starting to bloom, and with the arrival of spring comes Passover. I had the pleasure of retelling the story of Passover not just once, not just twice, but FOUR times this year!



I began with a Passover program at the Highlands, followed by the Lakin Preschool Seder and a JFS Friendship Circle Seder, culminating in the Robinson family Seder. Each observance was special in its own right, though I'm not sure how much anyone but a loving grandmother would enjoy being around my chaotic, messy and adorable grandchildren. Each version included holding up the three matzos and reciting from the Haggadah: "This is the bread of affliction our ancestors ate in the land of Egypt. Let all who are hungry come and eat; all who are needy come share our Passover."

Although it would be impossible to literally invite all the people facing food insecurity into our homes at the Seder, these words remind us that not only must we continue to tell the story of our liberation from slavery in Egypt. It is also the responsibility of every generation to fight social injustice and, in the spirit of the Haggadah, advocating for freedom includes fighting to end hunger.

What does fighting hunger look like today? Jay Worrall, president of Helping Harvest Food Bank, spoke at the JFS Volunteer Appreciation Lunch on March 26 to talk about the organization's efforts to combat food insecurity on a local level.

For those who don't know, Helping Harvest is the hub for charitable food giving in Berks and Schuylkill counties. It distributes over 9 million pounds of food annually to more



Clockwise from top left, JFS food pantry volunteers Sarah and Sam Flamholz at the Volunteer Appreciation Lunch on March 26; Jay Worrall, President of Helping Harvest, addresses the luncheon participants; and volunteers enjoy the event.

than 350 agency partners, including 160 food pantries, soup kitchens, weekender sites and maternal health programs. Jewish Family Service operates two of these pantries, serving about 600 households each month.

Worrall discussed how federal cuts will affect local food programs:

- Some of the programs that have already had funding cuts or are facing significant cuts include SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program), LFPA (Local Food Purchase Assistance), and TEFAP (The Emergency Food Assistance Program).
- Reductions in SNAP benefits are

forcing families to rely more heavily on food pantries for groceries while Helping Harvest itself is facing a \$3 million loss of federal funding, equivalent to about 15% less food to distribute. This is a particularly big blow when the need for food assistance is so great.

- Gov. Josh Shapiro is challenging the USDA's authority to eliminate LFPA in Pennsylvania. This program provides funding to farmers who supply food banks with fresh produce. He is prepared to pursue legal action to ensure food access for Pennsylvanians.

Continued on Page 9

## Volunteers share food with community



Annette Peppard and Paul Schwartz, left, loading a car at the JFS food pantry on April 2. Cindy Balchunas assists walk-ups with their food.

Many thanks to our  
April Food Pantry Volunteers  
who distributed food to 575 households!



- |                    |                 |                 |
|--------------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Mary Anne Avins    | Pete Jacobson   | Ellen Schwartz  |
| Cindy Balchunas    | Lisa Levine     | Paul Schwartz   |
| Sam Flamholz       | Annette Peppard | Russ Shanahan   |
| Sarah Flamholz     | Jenn Reilly     | Oleg Umanov     |
| Sharon Gernsheimer | Mike Robinson   | Phyllis Warshaw |
| Patty Hartman      | Mike Schein     | Michael Warshaw |





# FEEDING THE HUNGRY

*Continued from Page 8*

• Feeding America, a nationwide network of food banks, is advocating for a Farm Bill that strengthens TEFAP, ensuring food banks have a reliable source of food to meet the growing demand.

Despite the cuts, Helping Harvest continues to help families facing food

insecurity. Worrall is indebted to the food pantry volunteers for their work that allows Helping Harvest to fulfill its mission of feeding the hungry in Berks and Schuylkill counties, distributing over \$20.5 million of food in 2024.

You can help support your neighbors in need through a financial donation to Helping Harvest or the JFS Food Pantry,

donating food, volunteering at the JFS Food pantries or Helping Harvest or by contacting your elected officials to emphasize the need to restore this funding.

As I sweep away the last matzah crumbs and remember our journey from slavery to freedom, I realize matzah, the “bread of affliction,” is also the “bread of hope.” We eat matzah not to forget

suffering, but to transform it into a call for action. Working together as a community, we can help ensure that people don’t have to choose between paying rent and feeling their families.

If you would like to join JFS and Helping Harvest in “feeding the hungry,” please contact me at [Caroler@jfreading.org](mailto:Caroler@jfreading.org) or 610-921-0624.

## Festival fellowship at Friendship Circle



*Dorie Karp and Lila Shapiro, left, and Pete Jacobson at the Jewish Family Service Seder that included participants of Friendship Circle and other guests from the community.*

*Friendship Circle meets twice monthly at the JCC on Thursdays at 1 p.m. Each program includes an optional luncheon followed*

## FRIENDSHIP CIRCLE

### May 8- “Armchair Zumba”

Linda Donofrio from Griswold Home Care will lead a lively session of Armchair Zumba.

### May 22 - “Schmooze with Rabbi Michelson”

Come to Friendship Circle and schmooze with Rabbi Brian Michelson from RCOS. It’s an opportunity to have your questions about Judaism answered!



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.



# CENTERPIECE

## Jewish Community Calendar – May 2025

Upcoming events offered by the Jewish Federation of Reading (listed as JCC, JFS, JFR), Keshet Zion Synagogue (KZ), Reform Congregation Oheb Shalom (RCOS), and Chabad-Lubavitch of Berks (Chabad). To learn more about any event below, read articles throughout the Shalom or see our online calendar at [readingjewishcommunity.org/calendar](http://readingjewishcommunity.org/calendar).

Questions? Contact Amanda at 610-921-0624 or [info@jfreading.org](mailto:info@jfreading.org).

### Yom Ha'Atzmaut Celebration

Thursday, May 1, 4:30pm – 6pm

Celebrate **Yom Ha Atz'maut, Israeli Independence Day!** Meet our honored guests, sample Israeli food, dance to Israeli music, play Israeli games, and more! KZ/JFR sponsored. RSVP required.  
Location: Keshet Zion Social Hall

### JFR Teens' Discussion and Pizza

Thursday, May 1, 7pm – 8:30pm

Youth in our community in **grades 8 – 12** are invited to **meet our guests and learn about October 7 and life in Israel** over pizza. RSVP required.  
Location: JCC

### Chabad Taco 'Bout Shabbat

Friday, May 2, 6:30pm – 9pm

Join Chabad for an **evening shabbat** featuring delicious Mexican cuisine. No charge kindly sponsored by Dr. Jerry Marcus. RSVP required.  
Location: Chabad

### KZ Book of Psalms Class

Monday, May 5, 2pm – 3pm

Join Cantor Prosnitz for his new class **How Many Ways Can You Read The Book of Psalms** at Wyomissing Public Library. Mondays at 2pm. Last session May 12.  
Location: Wyomissing Public Library

### JCC ROMEO Club

Tuesday, May 6, 12pm – 2pm

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

### JCC Noontime Knowledge

Wednesday, May 7, 12pm – 1pm

Come to hear **Amy Zitelman, CEO and co-founder of Soom Foods**, share her entrepreneurial experiences building Soom Foods and a demonstration (and tasting) of simple tahini recipes.  
Location: JCC

### JCC Cooking and Conversation

Wednesday, May 7, 5pm – 8pm

Join Amy Zitelman from Soom for an **intimate evening of cooking and conversation over dinner** in a private Wyomissing home. Space is limited and cost is \$36.  
Location: shared after registration.

### JFS Friendship Circle

Thursday, May 8, 1pm – 3pm

Linda Donofrio from Griswold Home Care will lead a **lively session of Armchair Zumba**. Optional lunch is \$7 at 1pm, free program at 2pm.  
Location: JCC



For more event information visit  
[www.ReadingJewishCommunity.org/calendar](http://www.ReadingJewishCommunity.org/calendar)



# CENTERPIECE

## Jewish Community Calendar – May 2025

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Questions? Contact Amanda at 610-921-0624 or [info@jfreading.org](mailto:info@jfreading.org).

**Chabad Challah Bake**  
*Sunday, May 11, 5pm – 7pm*  
*Unite, socialize and be inspired at Chabad’s **Recovery Challah Bake** featuring a delicious selection of refreshments.*  
*Location: Chabad*

**JCC Arts, Culture, Ideas**  
*Monday, May 12, 1:30pm – 3pm*  
*Take control of your health and well-being in the second half of life, featuring **Dr. Rosanne Leipzig**. A prerecorded program. A monthly series hosted by the JCC.*  
*Location: The Highlands in Wyomissing*

**Chabad Lag B’Omer BBQ**  
*Thursday, May 15, 5:30 pm – 7pm*  
*Join Chabad for a fun Jewish family **Lag B’Omer festival**. Free and open to the community.*  
*Location: Chabad*

**Chabad Colorful Profiles Course**  
*Sunday, May 18, 10am – 11am*  
*Join Chabad for this four-week journey starting May 18 to encounter the incredible lives of **Jewish history’s most fascinating men and women**. \$60 per person. Register online at [chabadofberks.org](http://chabadofberks.org).*

**JCC Movie Monday**  
*Monday, May 19, 1pm – 3pm*  
*Watch “**Bad Shabbos**”: An engaged interfaith couple are about to have their parents meet for the first time over a Shabbat dinner when an accidental death gets in the way.*  
*Location: JCC*

**JCC Noontime Knowledge**  
*Tuesday, May 20, 12pm – 1pm*  
*Enjoy a mid-day concert by the **FYVE Woodwind Quintet**, comprised of five classically trained professional musicians. They play a varied repertoire from classical to contemporary.*  
*Location: JCC*

**JFS Friendship Circle**  
*Thursday, May 24, 1pm – 3pm*  
*Come to Friendship Circle and schmooze with **Rabbi Brian Michelson from RCOS**. It’s an opportunity to have your questions about Judaism answered! Optional lunch is \$7 at 1pm, free program at 2pm.*  
*Location: JCC*

**Chabad Pre-Shavuot Event**  
*Tuesday, May 27, 7pm – 8:30pm*  
*Come discover the **secrets of Shavuot** while baking delicious cheesecake at Chabad’s Pre-Shavuot celebration.*  
*Location: Chabad*





# Saluting volunteer Carol Cohn at RCOS



The community gathered at Reform Congregation Oheb Sholom to salute Carol Cohn, winner of the Irvin and Ruth Balis Volunteer Appreciation Award.

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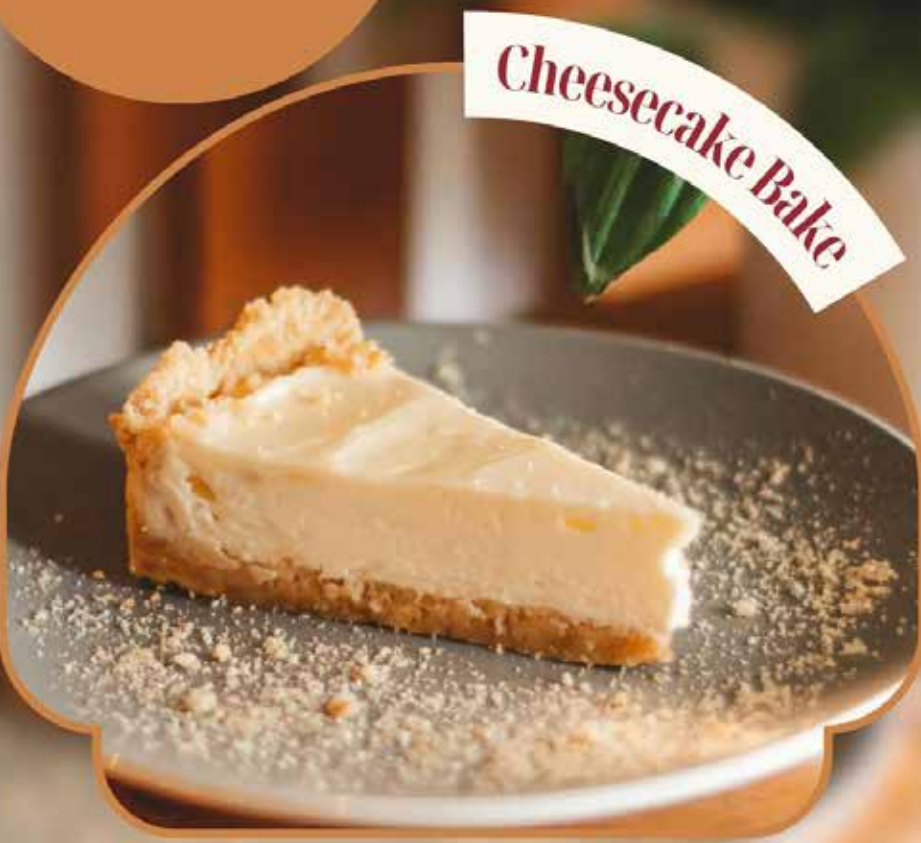
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# New method determines if tomatoes are ready to pick

Israel21c.org

Researchers in Israel recently developed a machine learning model that helps assess the quality of tomatoes before harvest. The pioneering method could make tomato harvest easier, more cost efficient and sustainable.

In a study recently published in the Computers and Electronics in Agriculture scientific journal, scientists from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem (HUJI) said their model recognizes the key parameters of tomato quality with exceptional accuracy.

Why tomatoes? The coauthors explain that the tomato is “one of the most substantial crops grown worldwide, with significant economic and nutritional values.”

In 2020, the global gross production of tomatoes was 189 million tons. Tomatoes are nutritionally rich, offering sugars, organic acids, lycopene, and ascorbic acid (vitamin C) and may even reduce the risk of several cancers, cardiovascular conditions, and age-related macular degeneration.

However, traditional methods of determining the quality of tomato crops happen only after harvest and have many drawbacks.

The HUJI researchers, in collaboration with researchers from Bar-Ilan University and the government’s Volcani Center Agricultural Research Organization, employed hyperspectral imaging to develop

a machine learning model for pre-harvest assessment.

Hyperspectral images of specific ranges of light wavelengths, known as spectral bands, are used to study the properties of objects based on how they reflect light.

The scientists used a handheld hyperspectral camera to collect data from 567 tomato fruits across five cultivars.

They then employed machine learning algorithms to predict seven critical tomato quality parameters: weight, firmness, total soluble solids, citric acid, ascorbic acid, lycopene, and pH.

The model demonstrated high prediction accuracy.

The researchers said the study highlights potential for integration of the method into agricultural practices to evaluate produce quality during ripening stages, optimizing harvest timing, as well in supermarkets at later stages.

“Our research aims to bridge the gap between advanced imaging technology, AI, and practical agricultural applications,” said David Helman from HUJI’s Faculty of Agriculture, Food and Environment, who led the study.

“This work has the potential to revolutionize quality monitoring not only in tomatoes but also in other crops. Our next step is to build a low-cost device — ToMAI-SENS — based on our model that will be used across the fruit value chain, from farms to consumers,” he added.





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# Kesher Zion completes mitzvah project

**Kesher Zion Social Action Committee**  
The Kesher Zion Social Action Committee has completed another mitzvah project. We have spent the last two months collecting clothing to be donated to CommunityAid, a faith-based nonprofit that is partnering with

Jewish Family Service.  
A percentage of sales from CommunityAid's thrift store is given back to JFS.  
We want to thank all those in the community who dropped off two carloads full of donations and contributed to our success.

## Kesher Zion's May Events

1		Minyan Thursday May 13th 7:00PM
4		Annual Meeting Sun. May 4th 10:00AM
10		Birthday/Anniversary Shabbat Shabbat May 10th 9:30AM
15		Minyan Thursday April 15th 7:00PM
16		Friday Services May 16th 6:30PM
17		Jr. Congregation Sat. May 17th 10:30AM

# Lag B'Omer Jewish Family Festival

**Thursday, May 15**  
**5:30 PM**  
2320 Hampden Blvd.  
Reading, PA 19604

**EVENT IS FREE & OPEN TO ALL**  
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REGISTER ONLINE: [www.ChabadofBerks.org/RSVP](http://www.ChabadofBerks.org/RSVP)

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# Federations express horror at Governor’s Mansion arson

**Jewish Federations of North America**

The Jewish Federations of North America are horrified by the antisemitic violence perpetrated against Pennsylvania Gov. Josh Shapiro and his family on the eve of Passover. This shocking attack reminds us once again that those

who threaten violence really do mean to do harm. The Jewish community will continue to insist on rigorous law enforcement and full accountability to deter and prevent acts of violence. As the Jewish Federations in Pennsylvania have stated, “These acts must not be tolerated in any civilized society. Everyone has the right to

worship freely, and our differences should not only be tolerated—but embraced and celebrated.” The governor’s unflinching assertion of his Jewish identity and support for the right of Israel to defend its people and its borders is inspiring. The work of Federations and our community partners to

provide greater security, strengthen our community relationships, support our brothers and sisters in Israel, and build resilient, flourishing Jewish communities is more important than ever. The attack on Gov. Shapiro and his family will cause us all to redouble our efforts.v

# Online program offers valuable lessons on Zionism

**Jewish Federations of North America**

When it comes to Israel and Zionism, there’s a lot of noise, and not a lot of nuance. That’s why Jewish Federations have launched Getting Grounded in Israel & Zionism, a self-paced learning program that provides historical context, key facts, and analysis on Israel and Zionism.

The course is designed to help participants better understand these topics and engage with confidence. Guided by Rabbi Mike Uram, Chief Jewish Learning Officer for Jewish Federations of North America, the program explores key moments in Israel’s history, the foundations of Zionism, and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

From the origins of the modern state to the wars, peace efforts, and the impact of October 7th, this course provides a comprehensive roadmap for learners of all backgrounds. The curriculum features 17 short videos — also available as a podcast — as well as upcoming discussion guides to support deeper engagement.

This initiative reflects Jewish Federations’ commitment to educating and empowering our communities. Whether you’re just getting started or looking to learn more, this program provides a clear and engaging way to understand Israel and Zionism. Learn more and download the free course at [understandingisrael.org](https://understandingisrael.org)

# Partnership to send 10,000 volunteers to Israel

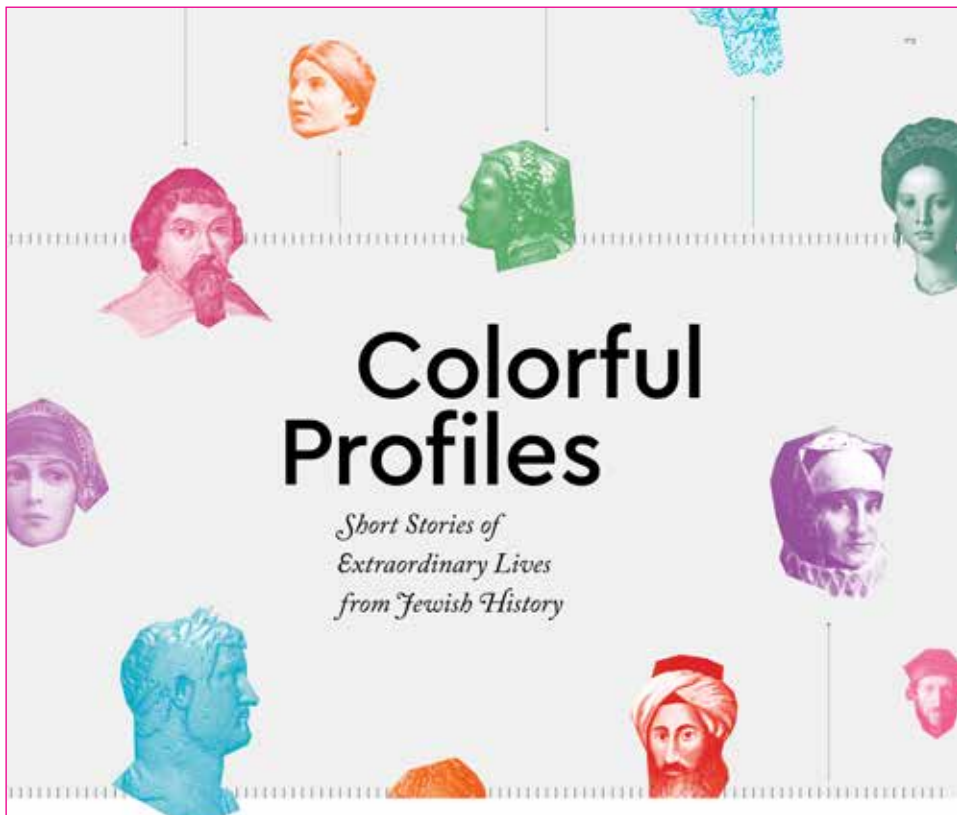
**Jewish Federations of North America**

Jewish Federations of North America and Taglit-Birthright Israel are pleased to announce a strategic partnership to grow the number of global Jewish community members that travel to Israel to volunteer at this critical time. The two organizations will leverage their scale and expertise to ensure that at least 10,000 participants volunteer in Israel in 2025 to support Israel’s recovery and rebuilding, while also responding to the surge of interest in Jewish life since the October 7th attacks. The two organizations will also explore pathways to sustain and grow these efforts for years to come.

This joint initiative builds on the successes that both Federations and Birthright Israel have had facilitating and running volunteer trips since the attacks. Birthright Israel sent 8,000 volunteers — including many alumni of classic Birthright Israel trips — to Israel in 2024 on one- and two-week trips facilitated by a range of organizations including synagogues, Federations, and other community-based institutions. Jewish Federations have sent an additional 1,000 volunteers since August alone through their Serve Israel platform. More broadly, Federations have been deeply engaged in supporting Israel through efforts that have raised over

\$850M since October 7th. “Jewish Federations are at the forefront of efforts to help Israel rebuild and recover from the terrible events of October 7th and the war that followed. Pairing Birthright Israel’s deep expertise in running meaningful educational trips with Jewish Federation communities’ deep relationships and partnerships, including over 500 Israeli NGOs that have received emergency support since October 7th, will allow us to help Israel rebuild in significant ways through new volunteer experiences,” said Julie Platt, Chair of the Board, Jewish Federations of North America. “We are thrilled to partner with Jewish Federations of North America to dramatically expand volunteerism in Israel. This initiative, which began as a response to our community’s urgent desire to support Israel’s recovery after October 7th, has grown into a major pillar of Birthright Israel’s work. We hope to partner with new and existing supporters of the Birthright Israel program to ensure that we can meet the increasing demand for volunteerism in Israel,” said Josh Nash, Chair of the Board, Birthright Israel. The initiative is open to Jewish


adults aged 18-50 who are interested in strengthening Israel through hands-on volunteer work and offers significant assistance to cover costs. The cost to North American volunteers for the one-week program, including flights, is \$600. The initiative is set to expand its offerings, including raising the age cap, in the months ahead. Volunteerism is critically important to supporting Israel at this time, as tens of thousands of Israelis serve on reserve duty and fewer foreign workers are available. Over the past eighteen months, volunteers have made meaningful contributions to Israel, contributed both to the economy and Israel’s national food security, and have found their experiences transformative, significantly strengthening their connections to Israel while fostering a profound sense of belonging with the Jewish community back home. This initiative is also supported by Mosaic United and the Ministry of Diaspora Affairs. For more information and to apply for a 2025 Birthright Israel Volunteer trip experience, please visit <https://www.birtherightisrael.com/volunteer-in-israel>.




## Colorful Profiles

*Short Stories of Extraordinary Lives from Jewish History*


*Lesson outline*




LESSON 1  
Courageous Converts




LESSON 2  
Influential Jews



LESSON 3  
Unsung Heroines




LESSON 4  
Heroes and Hostages




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# Late pope good for Catholic-Jewish relations

By Rabbi Noam Marans  
*American Jewish Committee*

I vividly remember each of the many times I was fortunate enough to meet with Pope Francis. The initial meeting was in June 2013, when the pontiff welcomed a group of Jewish organizations to the Vatican — the first of many such meetings of his tenure.

We were expecting a large, ornate hall, complete with the new pope seated on a royal chair atop a riser. But Francis had not yet (reluctantly) given in to the reality of his position, the one where he led more than a billion Catholics and became, perhaps, the most recognized and influential person on Earth.

Instead, we met in an intimate room, and he greeted us with his inimitable pastoral warmth. It was then when he said, referencing *Nostra Aetate*, the Second Vatican Council document that transformed Catholic-Jewish relations for the better:

“...The Council recalls the teaching of Saint Paul, who wrote “the gifts and the call of God are irrevocable” and who also firmly condemned hatred, persecution, and all forms of antisemitism. Due to our common roots, a Christian cannot be antisemitic!”

Francis continued to share words to that effect dozens of times during his 12-year tenure, even as recently as Easter during his final public appearance on April 20.

He did not mean that there was no antisemitism in the Christian world. Rather, he argued, it makes no sense to be a Christian antisemite, if you have internalized the teaching of *Nostra Aetate*.

At that 2013 meeting, the American Jewish Committee presented the pope a framed copy of one of its most historic and cherished photographs — when

Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel met in March 1963 with Cardinal Augustin Bea at AJC headquarters in New York.

Heschel had been drafted by AJC to advise and guide the Church on its path to *Nostra Aetate*. Bea led the Vatican shift to a new, positive era in Catholic-Jewish relations. In 2013, a younger, healthier Pope Francis exclaimed with joy, “I know this picture!”

Indeed, he did. The pope had been among the first to implement the mandates of *Nostra Aetate* in his exemplary relationship with the Jewish community in his native Argentina.

And that’s the way it mostly was with Francis: a Catholic-Jewish lovefest in which he not only did what modern popes since Pope John Paul II did and had never done before — visit synagogues, make pilgrimages to Auschwitz and go on official state visits to Israel — but also had innumerable Jewish friendships, especially with native-Spanish speaking rabbis. He simply was comfortable among Jews.

But there was, sometimes, a fly in the ointment. Francis, a folksy shepherd of his people, was not always as careful as a pope needs to be in adhering to the new post-*Nostra Aetate* language.

Never was there concern about what was in Francis’s heart, but sometimes his language revealed that he did not always understand that his words could be misused by others who had not accepted the advances of *Nostra Aetate*. When you are pope, everything you say matters.

So, for example, all the positive, empathetic things Francis did since Oct. 7, 2023 — his Oct. 11 statement that Israel had a right to defend itself; his meetings with families of hostages and injured Israelis; his repeated calls for the release of the hostages; and his reassuring positive February 2024 letter “to my Jewish brothers and sisters



in Israel” — were not enough to allay the concerns regarding his seemingly harsh judgmental-of-Israel, post-Oct. 7 approach, which he manifest on many occasions in different ways.

I believe history will be kind to Francis in its evaluation of his Catholic-Jewish relations track record. There is no taking away from his affirmation in words and deeds that positive Catholic-Jewish relations are integral, perhaps even defining, for Catholicism. He guaranteed that the achievements of the last 60 years since *Nostra Aetate* were sustained and expanded, and that his voice was among the loudest and most influential in its condemnation of antisemitism.

We do not know for sure what will follow in Catholic-Jewish relations. There are possible popes who are like recent popes in their commitment to Catholic-Jewish comity. But there are

also potential successors to Francis for whom that will not come naturally, not because they are ideologically opposed to the cause, but rather because the Church has expanded to regions where there are few Jews and few Catholic-Jewish relationships.

The latter does not preclude a continuation of the golden age in Catholic-Jewish relations, but vigilance will be required from both Catholics and Jews to make that happen.

I am optimistic, but optimism is only the beginning of a plan. There is a lot at stake for the Jewish people. There can be no going back to a darker era.

*Rabbi Noam Marans is American Jewish Committee’s Director of Interreligious Affairs, heading the agency’s global interfaith outreach and advocacy. This was originally published by the Jewish Telegraphic Agency.*

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# Plenty of interesting facts about Israel

## Israel21c.org

Israel has the highest number of altruistic kidney donations per capita in the world: 1,775 in the past 15 years, and counting.

The oldest tree in Israel is a jujube tree in Ein Hatzeva, thought to be between 1,500 and 2,000 years old.

Israeli scientists managed to grow fresh dates from sixth century seeds found at Masada and Qumran.

Eating the Israeli peanut snack, Bamba, at an early age has been proven to reduce peanut allergies in children by 75% according to the New England Journal of Medicine.

The Israel Postal Service has a special Letters to God department for letters arriving in Jerusalem from around the world addressed to God. They are placed into the cracks of the Western Wall in Jerusalem. The Western Wall Heritage foundation offers a digital alternative to this service.

About 1 million notes are left in the Western Wall every year by people of many religions. The earliest known account of this practice came in 1743. Twice a year, ahead of Rosh Hashana and Passover, the notes are cleared from the wall and buried in the Jewish cemetery on the Mount of Olives.

The Mount of Olives is the oldest continuously used cemetery in the world. It's been in use for over 3,000 years.

The glue on Israel's postage stamps is kosher.

At the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, an old wooden ladder has been propped up against a window since the 18th century. The building is managed by six different churches and none of them agree on who owns the ladder.

Israel is the only country to have revived a dead language and made it the national language. Hebrew was revived in the 19th century as a spoken language.

The hottest temperature ever recorded in Israel was 129.9 degrees in June 1942 at Kibbutz Tirat Zvi in the northern Jordan Valley.

While Jerusalem and even the Negev Desert get occasional snow, Tel Aviv has only had one snowstorm in its history, in 1950.

More than half the landmass of Israel is desert, yet it has an Olympic bobsled and skeleton team.

An Israeli startup, Tevel Aerobotics Technologies, developed drones that can pick ripe fruit from a tree and gently lower it for collection, helping solve a labor shortage.

Israeli agritech company BlueWhite developed a technology that can turn a conventional tractor into a self-driving robot. It is helping U.S. farmers deal with a dwindling workforce.

Israel recycles nearly 90% of its wastewater. This makes it the leading nation in the world for water recycling. In the United States, only 1% of wastewater is recycled.

Sheba Medical Center has been listed as the world's eighth best hospital by *Newsweek* this year.

Israel is a global leader in medical clowning, regularly sending medical clowns on aid missions around the world.

In 2007, Israeli businesswoman Shari Arison initiated an annual Good Deeds Day on April 6 to encourage people to help each other. In 2024, 4.5 million people participated in 115 countries.

Volunteers in the group Trail Angels open their homes to hikers on the 637-mile Israel Trail, offering beds, showers and other amenities.

Israel is smaller than Hawaii and roughly half the size of Lake Michigan.

Israel is bordered by snowy peaks at one end and a desert beach on the other.

Israel has 137 beaches – all of them beautiful.

Israel has its very own Stonehenge, an ancient stone circle called Galgal Refa'im (wheel of ghosts) with massive rock walls that jut 8 feet into the sky. The stone structure is around 5,000 years old.

Israeli company SolCold developed a paint coating that uses sunlight to activate a cooling mechanism, providing air conditioning without electricity.

Israel's volunteer emergency response organization, United Hatzalah, collaborated with Israel Defense Forces to create an AI system that can predict where and when medical emergencies are about to take place, enabling responders to mobilize and respond faster.

One of Israel's most popular snacks is only sold between October and February because otherwise, supposedly, it will melt. According to Hebrew-language Wikipedia, there are seven different ways to eat the chocolate cream snack, Krembo.

When Israel was founded in 1948, there were only 806,000 residents. At the end of 2024, the population passed the 10 million mark. The population is 74% Jewish, 21% Muslim and 5% Christian.

In 2024, 28% of Israel's population was under the age of 14, and only 12% was older than 65.

Israelis love kids. According to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development is about 2.9 children per woman. The world average is 1.5.

Israel has advanced breakthroughs in fertility. The country performs more in-vitro fertilization per capita than any other country, and it's free for the first two babies in women under the age of 45.

In 2024, the most popular baby names in Israel were Mohammad for boys and Avigail for girls.

Life expectancy in Israel is among the highest in the world. According to Statistica, in 2022 life expectancy for men in Israel stood at 80.7 years, and 84.8 years for women.

Israel is home to the largest known dog cemetery of the ancient world. More than 1,400 dog skeletons, most of them puppies, were found at the Ashkelon site. They were buried sometime in the fourth and fifth centuries BCE.

One of the world's greatest archeological finds since the Dead Sea Scrolls was discovered in 2005. The 1,800 year old inscription "Jesus is God" was found in a floor mosaic as Megiddo Prison expanded. The Christian biblical name for Megiddo is Armageddon.

According to Startup Nation Central, AI firms in Israel account for 30% of the country's 7,000+ startups but are bringing in 47% of all investment. There are some 2,170 AI startups in Israel today.

Israel ranks fourth globally in AI advancements, behind the U.S., China and the UK.

AI software from Canotera can predict with 85% accuracy if a lawyer can win or lose a legal case, helping lawyers assess liability.

In 2024, Tel Aviv ranked first in Israel, and ninth globally, as a top city for startups according to StartupBlink's Global Startup Ecosystem Index.

In March, Google parent company Alphabet purchased Israeli cybersecurity company Wiz for \$32 billion, making it the biggest acquisition in Israeli history, the biggest acquisition by Google, and the biggest acquisition ever in cybertech.

A new startup that emerged from stealth in 2024 has developed an AI system that can detect and fight wildfires. FireDome has a mechanical launcher that deploys capsules containing fire retardant. It goes into operation this year in the U.S..

Israel has the largest fortified underground hospital in the world: the



three-floor, 2,000-bed Sammy Ofer Fortified Underground Emergency Hospital at Rambam Health Care Campus in Haifa.

Two of Israel's largest hospitals, and a hospital in Philadelphia, are working with a robot called Gary that does all sorts of tasks including chatting with patients, taking medical notes and even cleaning.

Caesarea-based company IceCure Medical has developed a minimally invasive treatment to destroy benign and cancerous tumors of the breast, kidney, lung, liver and other organs by freezing them with liquid nitrogen.

In Israel, people are taught from an early age to turn off the tap while they brush their teeth, to save precious water.

In Israel, a meal without a salad is not considered a meal. Even breakfast.

Tel Aviv has over 4,000 Bauhaus buildings, the largest concentration anywhere in the world.

During Passover in Israel, supermarkets are not allowed to sell chametz, and if you bring the products to the checkout, they cannot be scanned. Large sections of the shops are covered in plastic sheets.

In Hebrew, Merry Christmas is Chag Molad Sameach, which means Happy Festival of the Birth.

In Israel, the most common way to mop the floor is by doing what's called a sponja: flooding the floor with water and using a long-handled squeegee to push the dirty water outside or down the nearest drain.

Israeli toilets have two handles: A smaller one that releases less water to flush down #1, and a larger one that elicits more water to get rid of #2.

The Knesset has 120 seats because it's modeled after the Second Temple-era Knesset HaGedolah (the Great Assembly), a leadership body of 120 sages, prophets and scribes.

When Israel was founded, the Knesset met regularly in a movie theater in Tel Aviv. The legislative assembly met there throughout 1949 until moving to Jerusalem.

Israel may have been called Zion, Ever or Judea. The new country finally decided on Israel, the name suggested by Prime Minister, David Ben-Gurion.

85% of Israeli households get hot water from rooftop solar heaters, compared to less than 1% in the United States.

In Israel it is legal to write the Jewish calendar date on all official documents, including checks.

The main compounds of the cannabis plant were first isolated, analyzed,

synthesized and named in Israel.

Israel was the first country to ban underweight models from participating in fashion shows.

Since 2020, Israel has ranked as one of the top 10 happiest countries in the World Happiness Report. Even after the last year and a half of war, Israel came in eighth place for happiness in 2025, and first place for social connections.

From October 2023 to Dec. 19, 2024, 1,667 demonstrations and protest events have taken place in Israel. At least 10 of these protests had more than 100,000 participants. In the months since then, the protests have continued.

Israel is home to the only theater company in the world composed entirely of deaf and blind actors. The company, Nalaga'at (please touch), based in Jaffa, includes a restaurant where visitors eat in the dark and are served by blind staff.

In 1952, Albert Einstein was offered the post of president of Israel. He declined.

HemaShock, a medical company, developed an exsanguination tourniquet that squeezes the blood from the patient's limbs and sends it to the core organs where it's needed most in cases of hemorrhagic shock or heart attack.

Israeli company Beyond Oil developed a powder that can remove carcinogenic toxins from fried food.

In 2025, Gal Gadot became the first Israeli actress to receive a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame.

The world's heaviest strawberry was grown in Israel in 2022. It weighed in at 289 grams (about 10 ounces). Regular strawberries weigh just 15 or 16 grams.

Israeli company Watergen developed an atmospheric water generator that can create clean drinking water from the air. It has been deployed in disaster situations all over the world.

Israeli company Beewise developed the world's first autonomous beehive. It can house up to 40 bee colonies (around 2 million bees) and take care of their health and upkeep with a simple app.

Israeli students won an international award for producing real honey without bees, using a bacterium programmed to "learn" how to make honey.

The record for the greatest number of passengers ever flown by a commercial airliner happened in May 1991 as part of Operation Solomon, when Israel evacuated 1,086 Jewish Ethiopians from their home country on an El Al Boeing 747. Two babies were born on the flight, bringing the number to 1,088.

The first Israeli flag, flown May 14, 1948, was hand-sewn and colored with crayons.



# Antisemitic incident data break records again

**Anti-Defamation League**

The massive spike in antisemitic incidents following the Oct. 7, 2023, massacre in Israel continued in 2024, with totals again exceeding any other annual tally in the past 46 years. This is the fourth year in a row that antisemitic incidents increased and broke the previous all-time high. It is also the first time that incidents containing elements related to Israel or Zionism made up a majority of all incidents (58% of the total).

There were 9,354 incidents of antisemitic assault, harassment and vandalism across the country in 2024, according to ADL's (the Anti-Defamation League) annual Audit of Antisemitic Incidents, released today. This total represents a 5% increase from 2023 (already a record-setting year), a 344% increase over the past five years, an 893% increase over the past 10 years and is the highest level recorded since ADL started tracking this data in 1979. The 12-month total for 2024 averaged more than 25 targeted anti-Jewish incidents in the U.S. per day, more than one an hour.

"This horrifying level of antisemitism should never be accepted and yet, as our data shows, it has become a persistent and grim reality for American Jewish communities," said Jonathan Greenblatt, ADL CEO. "Jewish Americans continue to be harassed, assaulted and targeted for who they are on a daily basis and everywhere they go. But let's be clear: we will remain proud of our Jewish culture, religion and identities, and we will not be intimidated by bigots."

**Incidents related to Israel, Zionism**

In 2024, for the first time, a majority of all incidents (58%, or 5,452 incidents) were related to Israel. Of all Israel-related incidents, 2,596 took place at anti-Israel rallies in the form of antisemitic speeches, chants, signs, and slogans. (About half of the more than 5,000 anti-

Israel rallies tracked by ADL in 2024 contained antisemitic expressions; those that did not contain antisemitic elements were not included in the Audit. When antisemitic expressions of this sort appeared at a rally, ADL tabulated them as a single incident regardless of how many times they were repeated or how many different forms they took.)

Activity and rhetoric documented at these rallies included: justification or glorification of antisemitic violence, promotion of classic antisemitic tropes including blood libel, conspiracy theories and signage equating Judaism or Zionism with Nazism, celebration of the anniversary of Hamas's Oct. 7 terror attack in Israel, and unapologetic support for terrorism, designated terrorist organizations and their leaders.

Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP) and Party for Socialism and Liberation (PSL) were the two most active organizers or co-sponsors of protests where antisemitic incidents occurred, and combined were involved in over 50% of the protests in this category.

"In 2024, hatred toward Israel was a driving force behind antisemitism across the U.S., with more than half of all antisemitic incidents referencing Israel or Zionism," said Oren Segal, ADL Senior Vice President for Counter-Extremism and Intelligence. "These incidents, along with all those documented in the Audit, serve as a clear reminder that silence is not an option. Good people must stand up, push back, and confront antisemitism wherever it appears. And that starts with understanding what fuels it and learning to recognize it in all its forms. All the data is available in the H.E.A.T. Map, highlighting our commitment to transparency."

**Major Findings**

Assaults: 196 incidents (a 21% increase from 2023) were categorized as assault, defined as cases where Jewish people (or people perceived to

be Jewish) were targeted with physical violence accompanied by evidence of antisemitic animus. Orthodox Jews were targeted in 30% of assaults. The 196 incidents of assault targeted at least 250 victims, none of these assaults were fatal.

Vandalism: 2,606 incidents (a 20% increase from 2023) were categorized as vandalism, defined as cases where property was damaged along with evidence of antisemitic intent or where there was an antisemitic impact on Jews. Swastikas, which are generally interpreted as symbols of antisemitic hatred, were present in 37% of these cases.

Harassment: 6,552 incidents (up from 6,535 incidents recorded in 2023) were categorized as harassment, defined as cases where one or more Jewish people (or people perceived to be Jewish) were harassed with language that includes antisemitic slurs, stereotypes or tropes. There were 647 bomb threats. The harassment category also includes many of the expressions of antisemitism occurring at anti-Israel rallies described above.

Incidents on (or around) college and university campuses rose more steeply than any other location type. In 2024, ADL recorded 1,694 antisemitic incidents on college campuses, which is 84% higher than in 2023. Campus incidents comprised 18% of all incidents, a larger proportion than in any previous Audit.

Antisemitic activity also increased by 19% in public areas (3,452 incidents) and by 11% at business establishments, including Jewish-owned businesses. 860 incidents were reported at non-Jewish K-12 schools in 2024, a decrease of 26%. Given the insidious nature of bullying, compounded by the fact that many children may not feel empowered to report their experiences, it is likely that the actual number of school-based antisemitic incidents was significantly higher than the data reported in the Audit.

Antisemitic incidents occurred in all 50 states and the District of Columbia.

The states with the highest levels of incidents were New York (1,437) and California (1,344). Their largest cities, New York City (976) and Los Angeles (297), also reported the most incidents.

**White Supremacist Propaganda**

There were 962 antisemitic propaganda incidents (dissemination of antisemitic print materials and public events) connected to white supremacist groups last year, down 17% from 2023. Incidents were recorded in 47 states and the District of Columbia. Three groups (Patriot Front, Goyim Defense League and the White Lives Matter network) were responsible for 94% of this activity.

**Targeting of Jewish Institutions**

While incidents decreased by 14% at Jewish institutions, they remained elevated compared to pre-Oct. 7 levels, with 1,702 incidents recorded in 2024. Moreover, assaults at Jewish institutions more than doubled (from 9 to 20 incidents) and vandalism increased by 39% (from 148 to 205 incidents).

Jewish organizations were targeted with a total of 627 bomb threats, 89% of which targeted synagogues. Congregants were harassed and even assaulted; some anti-Israel groups also escalated their tactics, protesting Jewish religious and cultural institutions on dozens of occasions.

The complete dataset for antisemitic incidents for 2016-2024 is available on ADL's H.E.A.T. Map, an interactive online tool that allows users to geographically chart antisemitic incidents and extremist activity. The full dataset can also be downloaded by anyone who would like to take a closer look at individual incidents.

ADL is careful to not conflate general criticism of Israel or anti-Israel activism with antisemitism. Legitimate political protest, support for Palestinian rights or expressions of opposition to Israeli policies are not included in the Audit. ADL's approach to Israel-related expressions comports with the IHRA definition of antisemitism.

JOIN RCOS

Tuesday, May 13th  
6:00-8:00 pm

Happy Hour

GNA RISTORANTE

421 PENN AVE

WEST READING

FREE PARKING | FREE APPS | CASH BAR

JEWISH FAMILY SERVICE NEEDS:

PLASTIC GROCERY BAGS FOR OUR FOOD PANTRIES!

THANK YOU  
THANK YOU  
THANK YOU  
THANK YOU

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

Jewish Federation of Reading/Berks



## Federation Honorarium-Memorial Card Information

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 April 21

### Jewish Family Service

In honor of:  
Mike and Sue Farrara’s new granddaughter Eleora- Debbie and David Goldberg

### Federation Jewish Community Campaign

In memory of:  
Steven Zazove - Deborah Goodman  
Helen K. Fox - Mr. and Mrs. Michael Gottdenker, Sylvia Wenger, David and Mary Jane Kates, Rick and Mindy Small

In honor of:  
Dr. Larry Rotenberg’s special birthday- Deborah Goodman, Steve and Roseann Finkel

### Holocaust Library & Resource Center

In honor of:  
Helen K Fox- Maralyn Goldstein and Alma Lakin

## Honorariums and Memorials

Contributions may be made to the following Funds:  
Federation Jewish Community Campaign  
Jewish Family Service  
Leo Camp Lecture Fund  
JFS Food Bank  
JFS Taxi Transportation Program  
Holocaust Library & Resource Center  
Doris Levin Fund  
Sue B. Viener Memorial Fund for PJ Library  
Harry & Rose Sack Adult Education Fund  
Evelyn Thompson Fund

### Jewish Family Service Taxi

In memory of:  
Josephine Charnoff - Michael and Barbara Charnoff

### Evelyn Thompson Nursery School Fund

In honor of:  
Donald and Ellen Abramson’s new grandson- Bob and Beth Caster

### PJ Library

n memory of:  
Helen K. Fox- George Viener  
Robert Erkes- George Viener

save  
the  
date



Friday  
May 9th  
at 7PM

Teacher Appreciation & New Member Shabbat  
Friday, May 9th at 7PM  
Celebrate our Religious School teachers and Welcome our New Members  
Join us for an ice cream oneg immediately following the service.

THANK YOU



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



Kauffman’s  
BBQ Chicken  
& Our Jewish  
Apple Cake

Sunday, May 4th, 2025  
12:00 noon - 3:00 pm  
Reform Congregation Oheb Sholom  
555 Warwick Drive

\$13 Kauffman’s Chicken BBQ Platter

\$22 Quarter Apple Cake & Chicken BBQ Combo Platter

\$10 Quarter Apple Cake

Credit Card Preferred or  
Cash Accepted on Event Day

Pre-Order Starts April 14th  
Credit Card Only

www.ohebsholom.org

Prices same as last year!





# Passover celebrations plentiful around community



*Lakin Preschool students enjoy a Seder provided by Jewish Family Services.*



*A chocolate Seder at Reform Congregation Oheb Shalom.*



*Ellis and Vicky Sokoloff and Scott and Claire Bram participating in the Jewish Family Service Seder.*



*Friendship Circle and guests waiting for the JFS Seder to begin.*



*Sue Wachs, Pat Frankel, and Esther Bratt enjoying the early Passover program at the Highlands*



*Norm Wilikofsky and Marty Jacobson reflecting on Passover traditions*

A BIG thank you to our Passover volunteers:

- Rabbi Michelson and Cantor Prosnitz for leading the Passover program at the Highlands
- Jeff Bornstein, Sheila Bornstein, Nancy Haller, Claudia Strauss and Gail Tomrell who helped prepare for our JFS Seder and served the holiday meal
- Sheila Bornstein for baking fabulous Passover desserts for our JFS Seder
- Robert Schneier and Oleg Umanov for delivering meals to our seniors who were unable to attend the JFS Seder

A special thank you to Jill Skaist, advisor to the Isadore and Anna Oritsky – Gladys and Eli Skaist Philanthropic Fund for sponsoring our JFS Passover seder.

