



Shalom02|26

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

Your Federation Supports:

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- of North America

Together again: Join us at Community Shabbat

By Adi Shalev Smitheman
Program Director
On March 13, our community will gather for its annual community Shabbat service and dinner. Together Again, all members of the community are invited to attend.
Jewish Federation of Reading/Berks is once again joining with Chabad of Berks County, Keshet Zion Synagogue and Reform Congregation Oheb Sholom on this special, annual community event. Candle

lighting will be at 6 p.m., and dinner served at 6:45.
Chabad of Berks County (2320 Hampden Blvd., Muhlenberg Township) will serve as the host location for this year's Community Shabbat. A kosher meal will be served, and a vegetarian meal is available upon request.
By popular request, enjoy a musical performance after Shabbat dinner!
Please stay tuned for more information

about cost and registration.
We expect another great crowd at Community Shabbat on March 13, so people are encouraged to reserve early. RSVP with payment is required by Thursday, March 5, online at www.readingjewishcommunity.org, by email at info@jreading.org or by calling 610-921-0624.
All are welcome, and if you need financial assistance to attend, please contact Carole Robinson at 610-921-0624.

Practicing Jewish values at MLK Day of Service



By Adi Shalev Smitheman
Program Director
The MLK Youth Day of Service, a partnership program with Immanuel UCC and Reform Congregation Oheb Sholom, allows kids, youth and adults to practice G'milut Chasadim and Tikkun Olam, the values of loving kindness and repairing the world.
More than 80 individuals of all ages joined their hands and hearts in service to the wider community honoring the legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.
• 500+ sandwiches made for New Journey Community Outreach
• Lunch bags decorated with encouraging messages and friendly pictures
• 300+ powerpacks made for Gov. Mifflin and Antietam students
• No-sew blankets made for neighbors in need of extra warmth this winter.
• Thank you notes colored for local first responders
THANK YOU to all who participated and made this day of service possible!
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.



A Message from the CEO

My experience at GA and what it means today

By Cindy Gerber Tomlinson
Chief Executive Officer

I had the privilege of attending the Jewish Federation of North America’s General Assembly in the late fall. Even though it was two months ago, many of the themes and learnings still apply — especially when it comes to Israel and antisemitism. In fact, the stated theme of the conference was, “Inflection Point: Rebuilding Israel and combatting antisemitism, together.” The conference leaders challenged us, the participants, to imagine what Jewish life can look like, and begin dreaming again, after being in crisis mode for the last two years. To do this, they said, we need the three C’s: Courage, Compassion and Connection. One of the keynote speakers was Rahm Emanuel, former Obama administration chief of staff, mayor of Chicago and U.S. ambassador to Japan. He noted that antisemitism is not new and that this is where we can stand united. There is goodness, and it is our responsibility to touch it and bring it to life. We need to have a “major rehabilitation of the narrative of what Israel means,” especially for people under the age of 30, among whom Israel is very unpopular. We must find common ground and humanity. Scott Jennings, a CNN commentator, noted that political vigilance is required, since Israel is our indispensable ally in



the region and the world. Gary Torgow, Chair of JFNA's Board of Trustees, reminded us that the First Commandment is about hope and redemption, and this is what will get us through this time of heightened antisemitism. We will prevail “...by spreading kindness, compassion and a commitment to love everyone; we must choose life, because we have so much to do to create a future filled with light and hope. We must invest in the next generation of security professionals so that our communities not only survive — but thrive. We must continue our formal Jewish education and stand tall as Jews.” Sarah Hurwitz, former White House speechwriter for President Barack Obama and First Lady Michelle Obama, opined that “empty Jewish identity is being filled by antisemitism and anti-Zionism,” particularly among young adults, while Dr. Micah Goodman, Research Fellow at the Shalom Hartman Institute in Jerusalem, posited that a solution to this problem is to find Jewish solutions for universal problems, moving from fighting to arguing, to battle polarization. The purpose of Jewish debate is to bring clarity to the arguments and to come to a third truth — to have principled disagreement. Our tradition begs us not just to argue, but to argue well. Are we doing these things in Berks County? I challenge you to think about this question. We must reconnect as Jews with our heritage. We must love our fellow Jews unconditionally. We



Cindy Gerber Tomlinson, Federation CEO at the GA,

must accept our young people where they are and encourage them to also love our fellow Jews unconditionally and to have a deep backbone when dealing with antisemitism, all the while acknowledging that we are asking them to do this. We need to examine how the Jewish experience is better than the secular option, and make the Jewish experience happen. Come as you are, just come. Stop waiting and start doing. “The Surge” in the U.S. Jewish community refers to a significant, documented increase in Jewish engagement, participation, and identity affirmation, especially following Oct. 7,

2023. This phenomenon involves more Jews attending synagogues, seeking out Jewish friends and community, learning about Israel and increasing religious and cultural practices, with many previously less-engaged individuals now actively connecting with Jewish life. I challenge you to make the surge in your own life. Just as movement is what the body needs, connection is what the soul needs:

- Make day-to-day meaningful choices that reflect your Jewish values.
- Care about your own Judaism and then invest in helping other people enjoy theirs. The future is about protecting what Jewish life will look like.
- Be a role model for your family.
- Write a legacy letter to your parents, thanking them for what they have shown you. These actions will free us from the isolation of now, and the loneliness of the future.
- Let your inner purity shine out, like when you were a child. Bring Jewish joy back, by being part of a community.

This is the glue that we all need. Jewish joy!

Join us at your Federation by coming to programs, making new experiences, sharing your opinions about how to deepen our connections to each other, and creating Jewish joy. Join a committee, bring forth a new idea, volunteer at a food bank, bring a friend to an event, suggest something fun – we will make it happen! Get involved! Just show up! Help us MAKE JEWISH JOY!

SAVE THE DATE

JEWISH FEDERATION OF READING/BERKS INVITES YOU TO

COMMUNITY SHABBAT

MARCH 13, 2026

Hosted at Chabad of Berks
2320 Hampden Blvd, Reading, PA 19604

6:00 p.m. candle lighting
6:45 p.m. dinner

MORE DETAILS WILL FOLLOW IN THE JFR WEEKLY EMAIL AND ON THE WEBSITE.
STAY TUNED!

RSVP with payment is required by Thursday, March 5.

In partnership with Chabad Lubavitch of Berks, Jewish Federation of Reading/Berks, Keshet Zion Synagogue and Reform Congregation Oheb Shalom

Your Clothes Can Change Lives

Donate your gently used clothes to CommunityAid to help JFS (partner #50100) support those in need.

5370 Allentown Pike
Temple, PA 19560

or in our parking lot bin

1100 Berkshire Blvd
Wyomissing, PA 19610

Shalom

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Wyomissing, PA 19610

Phone:

610-921-0624

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FAX: 610-929-0886
www.ReadingJewishCommunity.org

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

When the war ends, the healing begins

By **Adi Shalev Smitheman**

Program Director

A few weeks ago I got a text from a friend. After catching up, she told me about a nonprofit where she volunteers in Israel and some background about its founder. She asked if I would be willing to help.

Back to Life Farm is a nonprofit supporting IDF veterans and discharged soldiers coping with posttraumatic stress disorder. The founders started the farm in memory of their close friend, Amir (Dani) Yardenai Z"l, who tragically took his life after struggling with PTSD. My friend's message came just days after we learned of yet another veteran lost to PTSD, a painful reminder of how critical this work is.

Assaf, one of the farm's co-founders, will visit Canada and the U.S. to raise funds for the farm. Until now, the farm and its programs have operated solely with volunteer support. To take the next step — offering expanded care, guidance, and resources — they need funding.

I want to share more about the farm and the remarkable work the people they're doing:

The **"Back to Life - In Memory of Amir (Dani) Yardenai"** farm was founded to provide a true home and

healing environment for IDF combat veterans coping with trauma from military service.

Located on 2.5 beautiful acres at Kibbutz Sdot Yam in northern Israel, the farm rescues animals from the West Bank, Gaza and the Bedouin diaspora: dogs, donkeys and horses that have suffered abuse or are at risk of euthanasia.

The unique approach pairs these rescued animals with veterans, creating a mutual rehabilitation environment. Those caring for the animals are the very men and women carrying the weight of combat trauma themselves, and this connection has proved profoundly healing from day one.

The farm has completed its first full treatment cycle — a 12-week program of full-day sessions — and is launching two more cycles, including one for women coping with military-related PTSD. To date, more than 50 participants and 20 rescued animals have benefited — a remarkable achievement in just a few months of operation.

In addition to animal-assisted therapy, Back to Life Farm offers a wide range of facilities, including:

- A psychotherapy clinic

- A studio for yoga and Tai-Chi
- An art and ceramics therapy greenhouse
- A large vegetable garden
- A woodworking workshop
- A writing workshop, and more

All treatment is provided free of charge, with no approval required from the Ministry of Defense or the Rehabilitation Department — no paperwork, no bureaucracy. Anyone seeking healing after returning from the battlefield is welcome. The 12-week program is for veterans and reservists only, but the farm and facilities are open to Nova survivors and abductees, including workshops open to the entire patient community.

As the farm's team says: "Please help us prevent the next Dani. We save lives every day."

You now have the opportunity to hear Assaf share his personal story and the story of the farm, with the option to contribute as you are able.

Assaf will join us on Thursday, Feb. 19, at 7 p.m. at the JCC.

****Registration is required via the link on the JFR bulletin or by emailing info@jfreeding.org.**

Carrying the story forward

By **Margo Levin**

JCRC Coordinator

Members of our Jewish community began 2026 by sharing the extraordinary story of their families' survival during the Holocaust.

Jeff Gernsheimer spoke to students and faculty at Oley Valley High School about the experiences of his mother, Hilde Gernsheimer.

Leah Leisawitz, a seventh-grader at Wyomissing Junior High School, spoke at Atonement Lutheran Church in Wyomissing and shared with the audience her great-grandmother Esther Bratt's story about living in the Vilna Ghetto.

These stories offer enduring lessons of perseverance, strength and resilience.

As time carries us further from the horrors of the Holocaust and survivors continue to pass away, the responsibility to carry the torch on behalf of the survivors increasingly falls to the next generation. The children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren of survivors

now take on the vital task of preserving these stories and ensuring they are never forgotten.

There are organizations, like 3G (Third Generation), that work hard to not only make sure that the stories of their families will never be forgotten, just as our local descendants of survivors provide a living link to preserve the legacies and lessons of the Holocaust.

The goal of the children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren is to educate diverse communities about the danger of intolerance as well as motivate all people to get involved and confront such issues.


We want to extend a heartfelt thanks to the members of our community for doing this important work here locally.

At right, top, Jeff Gernsheimer with an Oley Valley High School group who listened to his presentation about the Holocaust experience of his mother, Hilde Gernsheimer.

Bottom, Leah Leisawitz appears at Atonement Lutheran Church, Wyomissing, tells the story of her great-grandmother Esther Bratt.




NOONTIME KNOWLEDGE
At the JCC, 1100 Berkshire Blvd., Ste. 125, Wyomissing



FREEDOM OF THE PRESS AND DEMOCRACY


Dr. Jodi Radosh and Dr. Victoria Williams

In this joint talk, a communications professor and a political science professor explore how journalism **shapes** public opinion, **holds** those in power accountable, and **enables** informed civic participation.



Wednesday, February 11, at noon

WHEN THE WAR ENDS, THE HEALING BEGINS



A Story of Loss and Hope


Assaf, co-founder of Back to Life Farm, will share the personal story that inspired a healing home for veterans with PTSD, founded after the suicide of his close friend Amir, who carried the invisible wounds of military service. From this loss, a mission was born: **no veteran should heal alone.**

At the farm in Kibbutz Sdot Yam, veterans heal by caring for rescued animals: horses, donkeys, and dogs, who have known trauma.

No diagnosis. No forms. No cost.
Just a safe place to breathe, connect, and come back to life.

This evening is about listening, understanding, and supporting a mission born from loss and hope.

We are looking forward to seeing you.
Registration is required via the registration link on JFR bulletin or email info@jfreeding.org



Amir ("Dani") Yardenai Z"l

To RSVP check out JFR bulletin or email info@jfreeding.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



THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 19, 7:00 PM
JEWISH COMMUNITY CENTER
1100 BERKSHIRE BLVD., SUITE 125, WYOMISSING, PA 19610



Youth programs in Berks County

By Adi Shalev Smitheman
Program Director

In the Reading Jewish community, we are fortunate to offer a variety of youth programs, each providing unique experiences for Jewish teens.

Below is an overview of the different programs available in our community.

BBYO

The BBYO chapter is led by a teen board that includes Bella Karchevsky, Eva Karchevsky, Alexandra Levin, Leah Erlikh and Sofia Schneider, with Luba Karchevsky and Michele Leisawitz serving as chapter advisers. The BBYO board plans fun and engaging events that appeal to teens, such as going to the movies, bowling, volunteering, and go-karting. BBYO also ensures the inclusion of meaningful Jewish programming, including Havdalah, Shabbat gatherings and an October 7th commemoration event.

The purpose of BBYO is to be an organization for Jewish teens, led by Jewish teens, which sets it apart from other youth organizations. Members attend regional (Liberty Region) conventions with chapters from Pennsylvania, New York, Delaware and beyond. Many BBYO participants will be attending the International Convention in February, which will take place in Philadelphia.

For more information or to join the chapter, contact Luba at luba.karchevsky@gmail.com or Michele at mb1617@aol.com.

Chabad's CTeen:

CTeen, for teens in grades 9-11, is a meaningful way to stay connected to Judaism post Bar/Bat Mitzvah while socializing with other Jewish teens, giving back to the community, and taking part in experiences that instill Jewish pride and help build a strong Jewish identity.

This year's sessions are geared toward exploring the connection between the Holocaust, the Land of Israel and Jewish traditions. This chapter is part of the international CTeen community, which includes over 30,000 teens worldwide. In addition to local events, CTeens will participate in the International CTeen Shabbaton in New York, an experience that fosters pride and a sense of belonging within the global Jewish youth community.

The group meets Feb. 19, March 15, April 12 and April 19 from 12:45 to 2:30 p.m. (except for day trips).

For more information or to join the chapter, contact Chana Lipsker at office@chabadofberks.org.

RCOS/KZ Post B'nei Mitzvah:

Berks Jewish Education is led by Rabbi Michelson and Rabbi Prosnitz and is designed for students in

8th grade and older. The program provides post-Bar/Bat Mitzvah Jewish learning in a discussion-based, seminar-style format rather than a traditional classroom setting.


The group meets on the second Sunday of each month at 11:30 a.m., for approximately one hour (with refreshments). The next session will take place on Feb. 8. No prior Jewish education or synagogue membership is required. The program is open to all of Berks County and is free of charge.

For more information or to join the program, contact Rabbi Michelson at rabbi@ohebscholom.org or Rabbi Prosnitz at ravhazprosnitz@gmail.com.


Jewish Federation of Reading:

The Federation creates and plans programs based on the needs of our community's teens. On Jan. 25, we were scheduled to host an antisemitism workshop led by the ADL, which provided teens and parents with a safe space to discuss the topic and gain tools for navigating challenging situations. JFR will continue to offer programs that respond to community needs and support our teens in meaningful and practical ways. Our goal is to foster pride in who teens are and confidence in their Jewish identity.

If you have ideas for topics or programs that could benefit our teens and their parents, please contact Adi Shalev Smitheman at AdiS@JFreading.org.



Shabbat Candle Lightings



Torah Portions


February 6 5:11 p.m.	February 7/20 Shevat Yitro (Exodus 18:1-20:23)
February 13 5:19 p.m.	February 14/27 Shevat Mishpatim (Exodus 21:1-24:18)
February 20 5:27 p.m.	February 21/4 Adar Terumah (Exodus 25:1-27:19)
February 27 5:35 p.m.	February 28/11 Adar Tetzaveh (Exodus 27:20-30:10)

Helping Harvest donation



Cindy Gerber Tomlinson, Jay Worrall (Helping Harvest President), Carole Robinson and Jess Umbenhauer (Helping Harvest Director of Programs and Community Engagement) celebrate the Jewish community's support for the food bank.


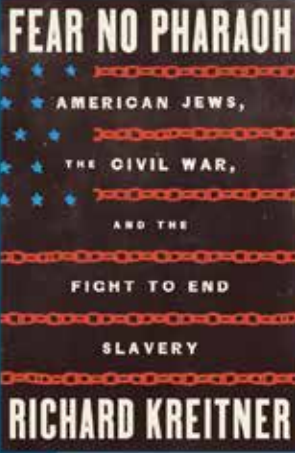
We are so proud of our Jewish community! Due to your generosity, Jewish Federation donated \$15,000 and eight boxes of canned food to Helping Harvest Fresh Food Bank. JFS operates two monthly food pantries in partnership with Helping Harvest and we are seeing a significant increase in food insecurity. Your tzedakah will help feed our neighbors.



LITERATOUR BERKS
CELEBRATING AUTHORS AND BOOKS

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 24TH
12:00 PM AT THE JEWISH FEDERATION

RICHARD KREITNER




AUTHOR OF:
FEAR NO PHARAOH: AMERICAN JEWS, CIVIL WAR, AND THE FIGHT TO END SLAVERY




Using original sources, journalist and historian Richard Kreitner tells the intertwined stories of six American Jews who helped to shape a tumultuous time and illuminates the shifting dynamics of Jewish life in America that endure to this day.

Join us for an afternoon with Richard Kreitner, author of *Fear No Pharaoh: American Jews, Civil War, and the Fight to End Slavery*! Richard will be leading a discussion of his book as well as signing & selling copies during the event.

NOONTIME KNOWLEDGE PROGRAM




VISIT THE FEDERATION WEBSITE



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

"ART, CULTURE & IDEAS"


THE HIGHLANDS AT WYOMISSING




PROTOCOLS FOR LIVING BETTER, NOT JUST LONGER: THE SCIENCE BEHIND LONGEVITY AND HEALTHSPAN PRE-RECORDED PROGRAM

MONDAY, FEB 9
1:30 PM

CULTURAL CENTER AT THE HIGHLANDS AT WYOMISSING
2000 CAMBRIDGE AVE.





Art, Culture & Ideas is a monthly series. Upcoming dates:

Mar 9

2025 JEWISH COMMUNITY CAMPAIGN

HONOR ROLL OF DONORS

2025 Jewish community Honor Roll of donors including Annual Campaign, Passover Campaign Jewish Family Service, JCC Membership and Honorarium/Memorial gifts.

TOTAL GIVING: \$553,809 as of Dec. 31, 2025

G’MILUT HASADIM GIFTS

\$25,000 +
B’nai B’rith Apartments
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SIMCHAH GIFTS

\$10,000 +
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\$5,000 +
CommunityAid Inc.
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Rose Sack Fund for Adult Programming
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ACHARAYUT GIFTS

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\$500 +
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\$118 +
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Evangelical Lutheran Church of the
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Donald Fox and Julie Gabriel
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William and Andrea Franklin
Ellis and Irene Friedman
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Alvin and Betsy Katz
Shirley Kauffman
Nancy Knoblauch
Jennifer Koosed and Rob Seesengood
Eileen Kope
Lakin Preschool
Roberta Lawit
Jack and Teri Lefkowitz
Jeffrey and Robin Lupowitz
Bernard and Toby Mendelssohn
Jake Mendelssohn and Joan Walden
Paul and Sheina Missan
Jay Moyer
Phyllis Murr

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Joan Friedman
Michael Gage
Debra Greenblatt
Lawrence Gross
Ronald Hinsey
Hillcrest Racquet Club
Robin Costenbader-Jacobson
Dorie Karp
Alan Kates
Mary Jane Kates
Pat Kelley

Barbara Karin
Burton and Francine Krieger
Nan Kurlancheek
Bette Lankin
Sidney Lempiner
William Lidman
Evelyn Lipschutz
Dennis and Karen Lutz
Rochelle Mann*
John McGonagle*
Mindy McIntosh
Lee Meyers
Jeffrey and Karen Miller
Bret Miller
Wendy Neuhs
Mary Ann Oppenheimer
John Pagerly
Pedro Pino
Lee and Jodi Radosh
Michael and Linda Roeberg
Kathleen Roeberg
Robert Schneier
Marj Shearer
Charon Snyder
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Janice Starsnic
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Esther J. Strauss
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Judy Synnamon
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Sylvia Wenger
Nikki Wilson
Joseph Wolfson and Ellen Holtzman
Carol Zirkel

** Deceased, may their memory
be for a blessing*

'12 Hours in October'

By Adi Shalev Smitheman
Program Director

At 6:30 a.m., my sister woke my husband (back then, fiancé) up, to tell him there are rockets being shot at Israel, north and center and that we should wake up and be prepared.

We got up, still confused, and I turned on the news to try and get some sense of clarity. I remember I saw one of the news reporters, standing at a very improvised station, looking very confused and unsure.

He tried to explain the situation, but at that point, no one had any information, except for families and individuals calling the police and news reporters to ask (or I should say, beg) for help.

Slowly we were getting more and more information, while our different chat groups were full with "is everyone ok?" "have you heard anything from X?" "is your family ok?"

"is X safe?" and not always getting any answer, or the answer you wished to hear.

We saw on TV a video recording of terrorists driving the streets of Israel, shooting everywhere and breaking into people houses with one goal — to murder.

I, and a lot of other people, won't forget the feeling we had that day, the combination of confusion, fear, apprehension, shock, worry, anger, loneliness and the inability to truly digest what was happening.

During the two weeks after October 7th, I attended three funerals, and I'm considered a lucky one. Now, over two years later, it seems like people forgot, the world forgot, and people don't want to understand how huge of a tragedy and a massacre it was. We can't let it happen.

The movie "12 Hours in October" was created for this, to tell the true stories.

Executive producer Perry Hiiman

created the film for moral and historical reason. In his words: "I felt a deep responsibility to help ensure that what happened is documented truthfully, respectfully, and with humanity. This film is part of history. It serves as a record for future generations, a way to remember the victims, honor their lives, and preserve their stories so they are never reduced to headlines or statistics. As someone who believes strongly in remembrance, accountability, and the power of storytelling, I felt compelled to be part of bringing this project to life.

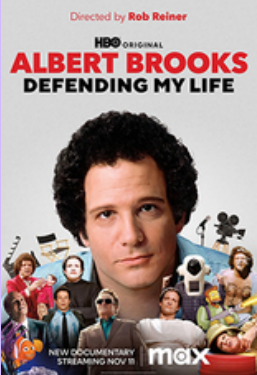
"My role as an executive producer

was to help support a film that gives voice to the innocent, bears witness to reality, and ensures that the memory of those lost is preserved with dignity and integrity. This was a moral decision about standing on the right side of history and using my resources to support truth, remembrance, and human compassion"

On March 11 at 7 p.m. we will have a screening of the movie and a Q&A with Perry at the GoggleWorks Center for the Arts, 201 Washington St., Reading. See goggleworks.org, readingjewishcommunity.org or email info@jfreading.org for more information.

February 19 at 1:30


Thursday Film Festival at the JCC

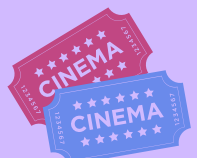


"Albert Brooks Defending My Life"

A documentary film directed by Rob Reiner. It is a tribute to the American actor, comedian, film director, and screenwriter Albert Brooks and follows the life of Brooks from his early childhood in a showbiz family through his years in the industry.

RSVP by calling the JCC at 610-921-0624 or email info@jfreading.org







Monthly film screenings at Goggleworks
New Jewish films
November 2025 to February 2026

Shoshana

February 17, 7pm



In this edge-of-your-seat thriller inspired by real events, a British police officer and a Jewish woman fall in love amidst the political turmoil of 1930s Tel Aviv. With British control over Palestine precarious and conflict inevitable, everyone is forced to choose a side. From acclaimed director Michael Winterbottom (*The Trip*, *A Mighty Heart*).

Learn more and buy tickets at ReadingJewishCommunity.org or scan the QR code.



Movie Monday at the JCC

February 23, 2026, 1pm



The Farewell Party

International Comedy



An unlikely funny story of a group of friends at a Jerusalem retirement home who decide to help their terminally ill friend. When rumors of their assistance begin to spread, more and more people ask for their help, and the friends are faced with a life and death dilemma.



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!

Jewish Federation of Reading/Berks and Goggleworks Center for the Arts are honored to present:

12 HOURS IN OCTOBER

WITNESS THE FIRST 12 HOURS THAT CHANGED EVERYTHING



12 HOURS IN OCTOBER IS A POWERFUL FILM BASED ON **REAL EVENTS**, PORTRAYING THE TERROR, CHAOS, AND HUMAN IMPACT OF THE OCTOBER 7 ATTACK THROUGH THE PERSPECTIVES OF SEVERAL FICTIONAL CHARACTERS.

FOLLOWING THE SCREENING, JOIN A LIVE Q&A WITH **EXECUTIVE PRODUCER PERRY HIIMAN** ON THE MEANING BEHIND THE FILM AND THE IMPORTANCE OF PRESERVING THIS STORY.

Wednesday, March 11, at 7:00 PM
Goggleworks Center for the Arts
201 Washington St., Reading, PA. 19601

The number of seats is limited. Please reserve your spot at ReadingJewishCommunity.org or scan the QR code.



This film is more than a movie - it is an act of remembrance, truth, and bearing witness.

All Around the Town

Mazel Tov to **Emily and Matheus Amaral** on the birth of their twin daughters, Mila and Luana. Emily is the daughter of **Marla and Steve Baksic** and the granddaughter of **Judy Schnee and the late Jack Schnee**, longtime members of Keshar Zion.

Mazel tov to **Jan and Jonathan Simon** on the birth of their granddaughter

Eve Michaela. Eve’s parents are Zach and Katharine.

Mazel Tov to **Paula and Ivan Bub** on the engagement of their daughter Rebecca to Thom Aldurshof

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

Until next time: Shalom!

Obituary

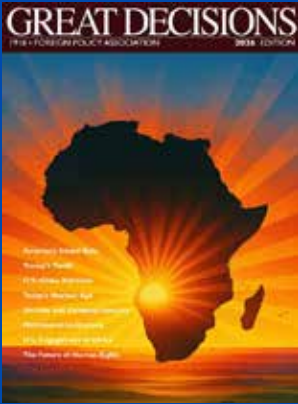
Barbara Silverberg, 76, of Flying Hills, died on Dec. 30. Barbara grew up in the Philadelphia area and graduated from Penn State. She earned a Master of Social Work degree from Marywood University and was a Licensed Clinical

Social Worker. Barbara worked for several social service agencies and in private practice for the last five years. She enjoyed spending time with her family and friends and attending cultural events. Her survivors include her daughter Shari Walsh (Brian) and grandchildren Grady and Rowan of Barto.


2026 GREAT DECISIONS

Meeting at the Jewish Federation of Reading/Berks
1100 Berkshire Blvd. Suite 125, Wyomissing

Monday mornings 10:30 a.m.
February 16 through April 6



For more information contact
Amanda Wertz at info@jfreading.org



COMMUNITY MINYAN

Please help Keshar Zion make a minyan on the first and third Thursday of every month, so those needing to say Kaddish are able to do so.

Open to the entire Reading Jewish community!
All are welcome!

Minyan at Keshar Zion
7:00 - 7:20 PM
555 Warwick Drive

February 5
February 19

For more information,
contact the Keshar Zion office at
610.374.1763
kesharzionoffice@gmail.com

Federations respond to synagogue arson attack

Jewish Federations of North America

The antisemitic arson attack against Beth Israel Congregation in Jackson, Miss., shook not just the city’s tight-knit local Jewish community but also Jews across North America.

Although Jackson doesn’t have its own professionally run Federation, as a “network community” in the Jewish Federations system, it has access to critical resources. Jewish Federations quickly mobilized to raise resources and sent skilled professionals to Jackson to assess the community’s immediate needs and provide support.

“It was important to show that the Jewish community of Jackson is not alone during this moment of crisis,” said Edward Finkel, JFNA’s Managing Director of Network Communities. “They’re dealing with something many have never experienced before, and Jewish Federations will be there every step of the way.”

One of the most pressing issues was physical security. Prior to the arson, Beth Israel did not have full-time security personnel on the premises. Jewish Federations were able to provide two security guards to protect the site, supported by the Secure Community Network (SCN). Jewish Federations’ LiveSecure investments built the infrastructure that helped SCN extend their services to communities like Jackson.

The Federation system also opened a donation page for Jackson, with all funds raised going directly to Beth Israel. In the first week, over \$100,000 was donated through this online portal.

Unfortunately, this wasn’t the first antisemitic attack against Jackson’s Jewish community. In meetings with synagogue trustees, Federation staff were struck by firsthand testimonies of the 1967 KKK bombing of Beth Israel Congregation. Nearly 60 years later, the youngest generation of Jewish Jacksonians is living through their own experience with antisemitic violence.

Being a young Jewish person in a city — and state — with a very small Jewish community has its own unique challenges; in the wake of this attack,

Jackson’s Jewish teens are bearing an especially difficult emotional burden. Federation staff heard about their feelings of isolation and knew they had to help, coordinating with BBYO to invite them to the 2026 International Convention in Philadelphia.

Although damage assessments remain ongoing and the community is in the early stages of grappling with this tragedy, Jewish Federations have played a vital role in convening partners on the ground to ensure that Beth Israel has everything it needs. Harnessing the resources of 141 Federations, most notably to provide for the physical security of Jackson’s Jewish community, has helped ease the minds of local Jewish leaders and residents.

“Whether they are navigating man-made or natural disasters, Jewish Federations are there anytime and anywhere Jews are in need,” said Finkel. “Our responsibility is to ensure flourishing Jewish life even in communities with smaller Jewish populations.”

JFNA issued the following statement in the wake of the Jan. 10 arson attack in Mississippi:

Jewish Federations are horrified and angered at the arson attack against Mississippi’s Jewish community.

Beth Israel Congregation is Mississippi’s oldest synagogue, and a staple of the community.

We are in touch with the community and the synagogue, as well as the Federation-affiliated Institute of Southern Jewish Life, and cooperating fully with law enforcement as they investigate the details of this cowardly attack. The Jewish Federation system will provide every resource and support that the community may need.

The Jewish community is resilient and will not be intimidated. We will continue to work with law enforcement and our elected officials to ensure we can live our lives safely and Jewishly.

To donate to the rebuilding effort at Beth Israel, see the link on the home page at www.jewishfederations.org/.

Please support our advertisers.

JEWISH FEDERATION IS LOOKING FOR INTERESTING PHOTOS!

Do you have important or fun photos from the JCC tucked away? We are collecting photos highlighting our community and events. Please consider sharing your photos!

Ways to share:

- Take a clear photo or scan of the original
- Email it to: info@jfreading.org

OR

Drop off copies at: Jewish Federation of Reading
1100 Berkshire Blvd. Suite 125 Wyomissing

Please include:

- Approximate year
- Names of people
- Location or story behind the photo

Your photos will be displayed in our “History of the JCC and Federation” photo gallery on our website. Originals will be safely returned if dropped off!

Thank you for helping us preserve our precious memories! ♥



KZ/RCOS Tu B'Shvat Seder
Sunday, February 1, 7:00 pm

Come celebrate the New Year for the Trees with a joint Tu B'Shvat seder, featuring special fruit from Ha'Aretz.

Location: KZ/RCOS, 555 Warwick Dr., Wyomissing

JCC Arts, Culture, and Ideas
Monday, February 9, 1:30 pm

Join Dr. Brian Kopell, Dr. Sanjai Sinha and Leslie Shlachter to unpack the current research on longevity- the number of years we live and healthspan- the years we live free from disease and disability.

Location: The Highlands, 2000 Cambridge Ave., Wyo

JCC Reading Jewish Film Series
Tuesday, February 17, 7:00pm

Shoshana a thriller inspired by real events, a British police officer and a Jewish woman fall in love amidst the political turmoil of 1930s Tel Aviv.

Location: GoggleWorks, 201 Washington St., Rdg.

JCC Movie Monday
Monday, February 23, 1:00 pm

The Farewell Party: An unlikely funny story of a group of friends at a Jerusalem retirement home who decide to help their terminally ill friend. Word spreads and people ask for help, and the friends are faced with a life and death dilemma.

Location: JCC, 1100 Berkshire Blvd., Reading

JCC ROMEO
Tuesday, February 3, 12:00 pm

"Retired old men eating out" meets monthly. Join in for camaraderie and conversation. Newcomers are welcome to attend.

Location: Paolo's, 2480 Lancaster Pike, Reading

JCC Noontime Knowledge
Wednesday, February 11, 12:00 pm

Next up in the Reading Jewish Film Series: Among Neighbors, a documentary, follows the only living survivor from a Polish town where all of the Jews were murdered... after the Nazi defeat.

Location: JCC, 1100 Berkshire Blvd., Wyomissing

JFS Friendship Circle
Thursday, February 19 1:00 pm

Thursday Film Festival, "Albert Brooks: Defending My Life" by Rob Reiner. Documentary film 90 minutes follows the life of Albert Brooks from his early childhood in a showbiz family through his years in the industry. Lunch 1pm Movie Starts at 1:30.

Location: JCC, 1100 Berkshire Blvd., Wyomissing

Literatour Noontime Knowledge
Tuesday, February 24, 12:00pm

Literatour Berks author Richard Kreitner tells the intertwined stories of six American Jews who helped shape a tumultuous time and illuminates the shifting dynamics of Jewish life in America.

Location: JCC, 1100 Berkshire Blvd., Wyomissing

Evat 5/86 to Adar 5/86

JFS Friendship Circle

Thursday, February 5, 1:00 pm

Meet Federation's new program director: Adi Shalev Smitheman, who was our schlichah for 3 years. She will tell us about herself and her background.

Lunch is \$7 at 1pm, free program at 2pm.

Location: JCC, 1100 Berkshire Blvd., Wyomissing

KZ World Wide Wrap

Sunday, February 8, 9:00 am

Join our men and women around the world in our annual world wide wrap as they put on tefillin in a show of unity.

Location: KZ, 555 Warwick Drive, Wyo.

The Eli Lipsker Musical Tribute

Sunday, February 15, 6:30 pm

Location: Chabad, 2320 Hampden Blvd., Reading

JCC Great Decisions

Monday, February 16, 10:30am

Prepare to discuss the world for 8 weeks on Monday mornings from 10:30am -12pm until April 6.

Location: JCC, 1100 Berkshire Blvd., Wyomissing

Back to Life Farm

Thursday, February 19 7:00 pm

A co-founder of "Back to Life Farm", will share his personal story behind a healing home for veterans with PTSD, where recovery happens through caring for rescued animals. An evening of listening, hope, and support.

Location: JCC, 1100 Berkshire Blvd., Wyomissing

Pajama Havdalah

Saturday, February 21, 6:00 pm

PJ Library & RCOS invite all families to a special Havdalah with craft, dinner, story time and Havdalah service. Wear your pajamas!

Location: RCOS, 555 Warwick Drive, Wyo.

Chabad: An evening of Fragrances

Tuesday, February 24, 7:00pm

Create your own signature fragrance and learn the mystical meaning of scent.

Location: Chabad, 2320 Hampden Blvd., Reading

Happy 100th birthday, Arthur Fischman!

By Sari Incledon

Jewish Family Service

Berks County centenarian Arthur Fischman was busy during the last months of 2025 celebrating his special birthday. In September, he was feted along with 22 other centenarians by the Berks County Area Office of Aging at the Doubletree by Hilton in Reading.

He was also honored for his service to our country during World War II. In November, Arthur's family and friends gathered from many states to celebrate his birthday and shared happy memories and reminiscences. Finally on his actual birthday, Dec. 19, his neighbors in Sinking Spring organized a surprise party, and in his honor, partygoers collected and knitted items for veterans in need.

I enjoyed visiting Arthur in January to learn more about him. Both sets of his grandparents arrived in the U.S. during the great wave of Eastern European immigration. His parents, Irene Boxer, a homemaker and bookkeeper, and Julius Fischman, a butcher, raised Arthur and his sister Phyllis (14 years younger) in Newark, N.J. That city was a popular destination for immigrants, and at one point it was home to 80,000 Jews and had numerous synagogues and Jewish cemeteries and newspapers.

Arthur recalls attending synagogue with his grandfather and had his Bar Mitzvah at Congregation Adas Israel. He was a good student, enjoyed many sports and participated on his high school's swim team. He feels fortunate that his parents were supportive and encouraged him to follow whatever path interested him.

Like other young men of his generation, he was drafted following his high school graduation in 1943. Arthur served a year with the Army Corps of Engineers, but his low vision limited his service opportunities. He went to basic training



in Fort Belvoir, Va., and learned mechanical and topographic drafting, which wound up being useful later in his career. One interesting part of his military service was time spent in Oklahoma as a military policeman guarding Italian prisoners of war.

Arthur attended NYU as a commuter student on the G.I. Bill. He enjoyed the business school because all his teachers were business professionals and great role models.

Arthur started his career with sales jobs. He became a buyer for a chain of auto parts stores. In 1950, a company that he dealt with as a buyer offered him a job as general manager. That company, Newark Auto Products, was founded in 1907 and originally made canopies and seat covers for horse-drawn carriages. It evolved to produce made-to-order items like custom-fit carpets, truck liners and door panels for classic car enthusiasts and restoration professionals. Arthur eventually became president, CEO and the main stockholder of Newark Auto Products. He retired in 1995. He contributed to the Newark business community by serving on the Board of Directors of Broad National Bank from 1978-1999.

In 1947, after graduating from college, Arthur met Lori Seifer on a blind date, and they married soon after. She was a highly accomplished artist, working with watercolors, pastels and ceramics. While raising their three daughters Lori attended Montclair University and graduated summa cum laude with a degree in English Literature. The couple were married for 68 years until Lori died in 2017.

Arthur and Lori lived in West Orange, N.J., and enjoyed participating in a variety of cultural pursuits. They were members of several art museums and subscribed to the New York City Ballet and New Jersey Symphony. They enjoyed chamber music concerts. Their daughters played instruments and Arthur continued a lifelong participation in a wide array of sports including handball, paddleball, tennis, racquetball, volleyball and bowling.

In 2006, Arthur and Lori moved to Sinking Spring, encouraged by their daughter Ilene,



a physical therapist and owner of Integral Physical Therapy. His daughter Cheryl and sister Phyllis eventually moved here as well. His daughter Lisa lives in Maryland, and her son, Sean, his wife Kim and their children, Owen and Hope live in Michigan.

Moving to a new community later in life isn't always easy. The Fischman's were fortunate that a New Jersey friend went to medical school with Reading native Dr. Hal Cohn, and he introduced Art to a group of men that he enjoyed having lunch and playing tennis with, which included Bob Brok, Jerry Fogelman and Paul Isenberg.

Art enjoyed being part of the Torch Club — where members prepare presentations on a wide range of topics that interest them. One of his presentations that he fondly recalls is "Words, Syllogisms, Palindromes and Neologisms."

These days, Art continues to be an avid reader and loves the audio books that he receives in the mail from Carnegie Library for Accessible Media for Pennsylvanians. He especially likes mysteries, biographies and nonfiction.

Sandy Sigal, who was a caregiver for Lori for nine years. is his "personal assistant."

In an interview with WFMZ, Arthur expressed what he thought was a key to a long life. "I'm not a pessimist at all. I'm an optimist, and I think that has a lot to do with how you deal with stress or things that just don't seem so pleasant, and I've pretty much lived my life that way."

Braving the cold to keep people fed



Jenn Reilly, Lisa Levine, Vicky Miller, and Katie Huey at the Jan. 7 JFS Food Pantry.



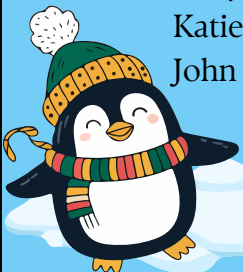
At right, Margo Levin, Judy Schwank, Mike Schein, and Sari Incledon registering clients at the JFS Food Pantry on Jan. 13

Many thanks to our January Food Pantry
Volunteers who braved the cold to distribute
food to about 500 households.

MaryAnne Avins
Cindy Balchunas
Paula Bub
Jeff Gernsheimer
Sharon Gernsheimer
Patty Hartman
Katie Huey
John Incledon

Pete Jacobson
Sid Lempiner
Lisa Levine
Vicky Miller
Annette Peppard
Jenn Reilly
Mike Robinson
Judy Schwank

Mike Schein
Ellen Schwartz
Russ Shanahan
Oleg Umanov



Friendship Circle fun



Top: Louise Zeidman, Judy Synnamon, and Gloria Isman enjoying the Friendship Circle Chanukah celebration on Dec. 18

Above: Chef Mike Robinson grilling hot dogs on Dec. 18

Friendship Circle meets twice a month with fun and educational programs and great fellowship. See the upcoming schedule below.

JFS thanks our Chanukah volunteers:

- Chefs Mike Robinson and John Incledon for making latkes and hot dogs for Friendship Circle’s Chanukah party
- Latke deliverers: Cindy Balchunas, Sheila and Jeff Bornstein, Corinne and Esther Bratt, Paula Bub, Sue Farrara, Mike Robinson, Judy Synnamon, Sharon Syret, and Oleg Umanov

A special thank you to Esther Shanahan, RCOS Sisterhood, and everyone who donated to the Mitzvah Menorah project in order to provide Chanukah gifts for JFS clients and bring them holiday cheer!

JEWISH FAMILY SERVICE THANKS THE RCOS FOOD FESTIVAL COMMITTEE FOR THE GENEROUS DONATION OF BRISKET, MATZAH BALL SOUP, KUGEL AND APPLESAUCE FOR JFS CLIENTS.

SPECIAL THANKS TO ROBERT SCHNEIER FOR DELIVERING THE FOOD.

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FRIENDSHIP CIRCLE

Feb 5- “Meet Federation’s new Program Director”

Come meet Federation’s new Program Director, Adi Shalev Smitheman, who was our Israeli schlichta for 3 years. She will tell us about herself and share her background and experiences.

Feb 19- “Thursday Film Festival”

“Albert Brooks: Defending My Life” a documentary directed by Rob Reiner. A tribute to the American actor, comedian and film director, and screenwriter Albert Brooks and follows his life from early childhood in a showbiz family. (90 min)



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.

The Light Ahead: Celebrating 25 years of hope, healing and community

By Rabbi Yosef Lipsker
Chabad Center of Berks County

On the evening of Oct. 26, more than 250 people gathered at Chabad of Berks County for a powerful and moving gala dinner, “The Light Ahead.” The event marked a significant milestone: 25 years of Chabad of Berks County’s unwavering commitment to the recovery community.

The atmosphere of the evening was one of gratitude, reflection and renewed purpose. We came together not only to celebrate past achievements but to recognize the countless lives touched through years of quiet dedication, compassion and being there for others, often in moments of great vulnerability.

The banquet hall at Chabad was transformed into a state-of-the-art space, creating an ambience that reflected the significance of the event. The experience was enhanced by exceptional catering, with food that was both abundant and beautifully prepared, contributing to an atmosphere of celebration befitting the milestone.

Chabad’s work in recovery, spanning a quarter of a century, grew out of a meaningful and enduring relationship with the Caron Treatment Center, whose dedication to its patients and openness to collaboration helped shape and strengthen these efforts. The partnership demonstrated the power of aligning professional treatment with ongoing community support, ensuring care did not end when formal treatment concluded.

One of the highlights of the evening was a video presentation that powerfully illustrated the strength and impact of community. Through personal stories and shared experiences, the video reminded everyone present that recovery

is never a solitary journey. It is sustained by connection, dignity and people who show up day or night with care and understanding.

The program featured several meaningful remarks that underscored the importance of the work being celebrated. Vic Hammel, who served as the evening’s chairman, spoke passionately about the vital role this mission plays in supporting the local Jewish community, emphasizing the responsibility to be present, responsive and compassionate. Sandy Solmon highlighted the broader impact of collaboration, reflecting on how partnerships strengthen not only individuals in recovery but the wider community as a whole. John Driscoll, CEO of the Caron Treatment Center, reaffirmed Caron’s deep and ongoing commitment to our collaboration, expressing appreciation for the shared values and mutual dedication that have defined the partnership for 25 years.

The gala honored Susan Fromm, Richard Ehst and Jordan Berkowitz, whose commitment and support have helped make our work possible. Their recognition reflected the broader truth of the evening: that lasting change is built through partnership, generosity, and shared responsibility.

The evening concluded with a clear commitment to expand and strengthen the vital work ahead, ensuring that Chabad of Berks County will continue to be a beacon of hope for individuals and families navigating the challenges of recovery.

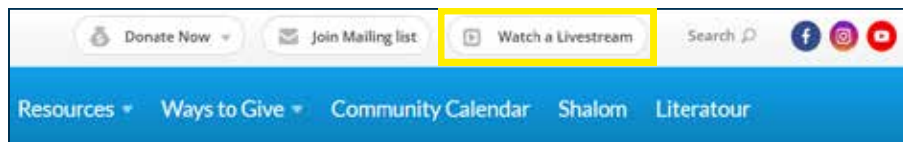
“The Light Ahead” was more than a gala —it was a testament to what can be accomplished when a community comes together with compassion and resolve. As Chabad of Berks County looks to the future, the message was clear: the work continues, the light grows stronger, and no one has to walk the path alone.



Chana and Rabbi Yosef Lipsker with honoree Susan Fromm at Chabad of Berks’ “The Light Ahead” gala, which celebrated the organization’s 25 years of working with Caron Treatment Centers.,

LIVE STREAMING AT YOUR FINGERTIPS!

Click the new button on JFR’s website to stream live or catch up on past programs!



*Please note that not all programs are live-streamed, as it depends on the speaker.

**Please Join Us on Friday,
February 14th, 2026 for
Kabbalat Shabbat
6:30PM at Keshar Zion
Synagogue 555 Warwick
Drive Wyomissing, Pa.
19610**

For more information
please call the office at (610)374-1763
or email us at kesharzionoffice@gmail.com

 **REFORM CONGREGATION
OHEB SHOLOM**  **KZ Keshar Zion
Synagogue** 

**Please Join REFORM CONGREGATION OHEB SHOLOM
and KESHER ZION for a joint Tu B'Shvat Seder on**

Sunday, February 1st @ 7:00 pm

There is no cost to attend.

RSVPs are welcomed, but not required.
If you have any questions, please contact:

RCOS at 610-374-1763

Keshar Zion at 610-374-1763

On Tu B'Shvat, we celebrate a New Year for the Trees—
rejoicing in the fruit of the tree and the fruit of the vine.

Some celebrate with a special Tu B'Shvat Seder,
modeled after the Passover Seder,
featuring special fruit from Ha'Aretz.

Tu B'Shvat anticipates the beginning of spring in Israel,
while sustaining rains are at their peak.







AWARD-WINNING MEMORY CARE MEETS PURPOSEFUL LIVING

Our approach to memory support emphasizes connection, engagement and joy. Residents thrive in a nature-connected neighborhood where they're supported by life-enriching activities tailored to personal interests and abilities. It's all about purposeful living for your loved one, and peace of mind for you.



See for yourself — scan to learn more or call 610.775.2300 to schedule your tour.



American Jewry’s future lies not on the coasts but in the heartland

By Joe Roberts

We are living through a moment when American Jews are being asked to do something impossible: We are asked to feel safe while our children are targeted on campuses. We are asked to be quiet while “Zionist” becomes a slur. We are asked to trust institutions that suddenly can’t recognize antisemitism unless it arrives wearing a swastika and carrying a banner.

We are asked, in other words, to normalize the abnormal.

Jewish life in America is at an inflection point. The pressures facing us from all sides are unparalleled in modern American Jewish history. And yes, philanthropic dollars have surged into the fight, with real accomplishments to show for it. But the national Jewish conversation still has a blind spot so large it hasn’t even entered the conversation.

Here is the truth we have to say out loud: The survival of American Jewish life will not be decided only in the biggest coastal hubs. It will be decided in the places where Jewish life is fragile enough to fail and close enough to revive.

I am grateful for the billions that have poured into Jewish defense, education, campus life and security. National organizations and large communities deserve support. They are visible targets and anchor institutions. Donors understandably give where they live and where their families have deep roots. The gifts are rational. The priorities are understandable.

But the map is incomplete.

If smaller communities in the American heartland thin out, age out or disappear, we will have traded a broad national Jewish presence for a brittle coastal future. We will become a people whose American story narrows to a handful of metropolitan ZIP codes. That is not merely sad. It is reckless.

Because small and midsized

communities are where Jewish life is most at an inflection point. These are places where the margin for error is thin, but the upside is enormous.

These communities are not helpless, and they are not waiting to be rescued. Generations of Jews have poured their sweat, their tears and their philanthropy into making sure there would be something here for their children to inherit. They built buildings and balance sheets but also habits of showing up for minyan, for committee meetings, for carpool, for shiva. What they need now is not a savior but partners who understand that their stubborn perseverance is itself one of the great assets of American Jewish life.

These are communities where a single new family can revive a congregation. A single inspired professional can reverse a decade of decline. A single smart investment can take an entire ecosystem from survival to growth.

In these communities, Jewish life does not survive on inertia. It survives on intent.

Here is what that looks like on the ground: A day school that provides excellent education but is financially strained; a JCC trying to keep early childhood strong while juggling rising staffing costs; a synagogue with committed leadership but the constant anxiety of whether there will be enough young families to sustain the next 20 years; a security bill that lands like a tax on Jewish belonging; a community that wants to build a proud, confident relationship with Israel, but lacks the resources to do it at the scale of the challenges.

Now add the broader national reality. The post-Oct. 7 world did not simply increase antisemitism. It changed its posture. It made hostility to Jews and hostility to Israel fashionable in places that shape culture and status. It gave permission to people who were previously embarrassed by their prejudices. It

introduced a new test of Jewish belonging to American life: the expectation that Jews must publicly distance themselves from Israel to be considered morally acceptable.

That expectation is poison.

And smaller communities feel the tremors acutely because they do not have institutional redundancy. In major hubs, if one program falters, another picks up the slack. In the heartland, a single vacancy in leadership or a single lost cohort of young families can trigger a chain reaction that is hard to stop and even harder to reverse.

We are not short on generosity. We are short on alignment.

The return on investment in the heartland is extraordinary. A million dollars in a major city might renovate office space. A million dollars in a small community can change the future. It can endow a senior professional position. It can keep Jewish education affordable for young families. It can stabilize early childhood as a pipeline for long-term engagement. It can fund Israel education that is proud and literate. It can cover security without cannibalizing the programming that actually makes Jewish life worth protecting.

It can buy time.

And time is what small communities need most to turn a fragile moment into a durable revival.

There is also a deeper philosophical point we should not ignore.

A Judaism that can only thrive in a few mega-communities is a Judaism that has quietly surrendered a core part of its identity. The American Jewish story has never been only coastal. It was built across the map by families who refused to accept that meaningful Jewish life was a luxury reserved for big cities. They built synagogues, schools, committees and institutions in places that many Jews have never heard of, let alone been to. They believed Jewish life should be national, not regional.

We should be no less ambitious than they were.

So here is my challenge to national Jewish donors and legacy philanthropists:

Adopt a heartland community.

Not as charity. As strategy. As peoplehood. As an investment in a national Jewish future that actually deserves the name.

Perhaps your grandfather started a schmatta business in Toledo, Ohio, before moving west to Chicago. Maybe your great-grandparents ran the only kosher butcher shop in Tulsa, Okla., before relocating the family to Dallas. Maybe a few generations ago, your family immigrated and found work in the mills of southern Maine before ending up in Boston. Maybe there’s just a community that needs your support and can put your dollars to good work. Whatever the reason, I implore you to pick one.

Fund the bridge years that allow a small community to recruit and retain excellent clergy and professionals. Underwrite the innovation pilots that keep young families rooted and engaged. Strengthen early childhood and accessible Jewish education, still the most reliable engines of continuity. Support Israel education that is confident and literate, not brittle, apologetic or reactive. Invest in security, yes, but do not let security become the only story we tell ourselves about the future. Fear can be a warning system. It cannot be the whole blueprint.

If we are serious about confronting the crisis of Jewish life in America, we must widen our aperture. The map of Jewish resilience cannot be reduced to a few major metros and a nostalgic belief that they will always carry the rest.

The heartland cannot be a footnote to the American Jewish story. It must be a proving ground.

And in this moment, investing in smaller communities is the most realistic way to ensure that American Jewish life in 2050 is not smaller, older and more anxious, but broader, younger and more confident.

If we want a national Jewish future, we must fund a national Jewish present.

Joe Roberts is the executive director of the Jewish Federation of Tulsa, Okla. This piece originally was published on <https://ejewishphilanthropy.com>.

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Plenty of Purim fun ahead at RCOS

By Vicki Graff

Reform Congregation Oheb Sholom

Purim means spring is on its way, and what better way to celebrate than with a carnival, megillah reading and spiel. We have a way for everyone in the community to celebrate Purim, and we are looking forward to gathering for fun and joy with YOU!

The Purim Carnival, organized by the Youth Committee, is scheduled for Sunday, March 1, noon to 1:30 p.m. We've delayed the start time a bit to make sure everyone can attend, and we'll have an activity planned for Religious School students between the end of school and beginning of the carnival.

At the carnival, you can expect games, a hot dog lunch with some additional snacks, face painting, interactive activities, a costume contest and more. We'll have plenty of

hamantashen for noshin' too!

The carnival is youth-oriented, but all members of the congregation are welcome to attend as guests or volunteers!

There is a fee to attend. Sign up to attend at ohebsholom.org and email vhgaff@gmail.com if you'd like to volunteer!

On Erev Purim, Monday, March 2, join us for the Megillah reading at 6:30 p.m. followed by the Spiel at 7:30. The Megillah reading is the official retelling of the story of Queen Esther, while the Spiel, organized by the Ritual Committee, is the unofficial retelling.

This year's Spiel, "Purim Side Story", will be told with music from "West Side Story." Stay after to enjoy a hamantashen oneg with the congregation.

New this year, as a fundraiser and

delight-raiser for the Youth Committee, we are offering an opportunity to purchase a Mishloach Manot bag for your family or a friend.

Mishloach Manot, sometimes known as "Shalach Manot" is the Jewish tradition of sending "goodie bags" to friends and neighbors on Purim.

The idea comes from the Book of Esther and is all about spreading joy and making sure everyone has enough treats for a festive Purim. At its heart, it is one of the many ways we, as Jews, uplift our community. Each bag will be filled with sweet and salty snacks, a holiday card, and, of course, hamantashen! Bags can be ordered "allergy friendly" if needed.

Please purchase tickets for the Purim Carnival and reserve your Mishloach Manot bag at ohebsholom.org.



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American Jewish Committee

The Australian Jewish community, one of the oldest and largest outside Europe and the Americas, is facing an unprecedented surge in antisemitism. The Dec. 14 Hanukkah terror attack at Bondi Beach — targeting a public Jewish celebration — underscores the urgent need for government action to protect this community and confront both domestic and foreign-driven antisemitism.

Who are Australian Jews?

The Australian Jewish community traces its roots back to 1788, making it one of the oldest continuous Jewish communities in the world outside Europe and the Americas. Today, Australia is home to around 115,000-120,000 Jews, making it the ninth-largest Jewish community globally as well as the largest in the Indo-Pacific region.

Jews make up roughly 0.4% to 1% of Australia’s population and are concentrated primarily in Melbourne and Sydney. The community is notably traditional: about 50% identify as traditional, Modern Orthodox, or Orthodox. Australia also has the highest number of Holocaust survivors per capita outside of Israel.

What Happened at Bondi Beach?

On Dec. 14, an antisemitic terrorist mass shooting occurred at Bondi Beach in Sydney during a public celebration marking the first night of Hanukkah. The attack took place at a Chabad-organized event attended by over 1,000 community members, families, and visitors. Australian authorities have described it as a deliberate antisemitic terrorist act targeting the Jewish community.

The attack was carried out by Naveed Akram, 24, and his father, Sajid, 50. The son was investigated in 2019 over ties to a Sydney-based Islamic State terror group but was cleared after six months, officials said. Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese said the attack was “motivated by Islamic State ideology.” Homemade Islamic State flags were found, along with an improvised explosive device, in the suspect’s vehicle.

According to videos, eyewitness accounts, and news reports, the two terrorists opened fire on the crowd from a nearby elevated position. The incident left 15 people dead, including community members of all ages, a Holocaust survivor and two rabbis. Dozens were injured, including police officers. One of

the attackers was killed by police at the scene, and the second was taken into custody in critical condition. Investigators also found and rendered safe improvised explosive devices.

Australian leaders, including the prime minister, condemned the attack as an act of evil antisemitism and affirmed Australia’s commitment to stand with its Jewish community. Vigils, support efforts, and expressions of national solidarity followed as the nation mourned the victims.

It was the deadliest mass shooting in Australia in nearly 30 years and has intensified concern about antisemitism’s real-world consequences.

The attack in Sydney’s Bondi Beach — targeting Jews far from the Middle East — was widely viewed as an embodiment of the call for a globalized intifada, in which Jewish people are treated as legitimate targets simply for who they are. In this framing, Bondi was not an isolated act, but part of a broader pattern in which radical rhetoric fuels and normalizes real-world antisemitic violence across the diaspora.

Antisemitism in Australia

Antisemitism in Australia has surged dramatically since the Oct. 7, 2023, Hamas massacre in Israel. According to the Executive Council of Australian Jewry, Australia’s main representative body for the Jewish community, more than 2,000 anti-Jewish incidents were recorded between October 2023 and September 2024—an increase of 316% over the prior year, not including online abuse.

Incidents have included:

- Antisemitic chants at protests immediately following October 7th
- Arson attacks on synagogues, a child care center, and Jewish-owned businesses
- Widespread graffiti targeting Jewish schools and institutions
- A mass doxxing incident exposing over 600 Jewish creatives and academics

According to a survey conducted by the Australian Academic Alliance Against Antisemitism (5A), in 2024, over 60% of Australian Jewish students who experienced antisemitism felt unsupported by their institutions.

Australia’s response

Especially following the Bondi attack, there is a feeling that the government has not done enough to address

surging antisemitism. Here is what the government has done so far:

- Australia formally adopted the IHRA Working Definition of Antisemitism in 2021 and joined the Global Guidelines for Countering Antisemitism in 2024.
- Launched Special Operation Avalight, a federal task force addressing antisemitic violence.
- Passing privacy reforms and stronger hate crime laws, including mandatory minimum sentences for terror offenses.
- Grant for security funding
- Appointing a Special Envoy to Combat Antisemitism and requiring universities to adopt an IHRA-based definition of antisemitism.

Identifying multiple attacks — including synagogue arson — as directed by Iran’s IRGC, leading to a historic expulsion of Iran’s ambassador.

Government criticized

The Jewish community and international observers, including AJC, have strongly criticized the Australian government for its failure to address rising antisemitism.

In September, AJC CEO Ted Deutch and Asia Pacific Institute Director Shira Loewenberg visited Australia, warning government officials and law enforcement that failure to act against antisemitism could lead to further violence. They emphasized that the community was at risk and that Australia’s reputation in the U.S. and worldwide was at stake.

Before the Bondi Beach attack, Australia’s Special Envoy to Combat Antisemitism Jillian Segal warned that the government’s response to rising antisemitism was inadequate, citing

incidents from Sydney Opera House protests to Harbour Bridge rallies with extremist imagery, and urged full implementation of her antisemitism plan, released in July 2025.

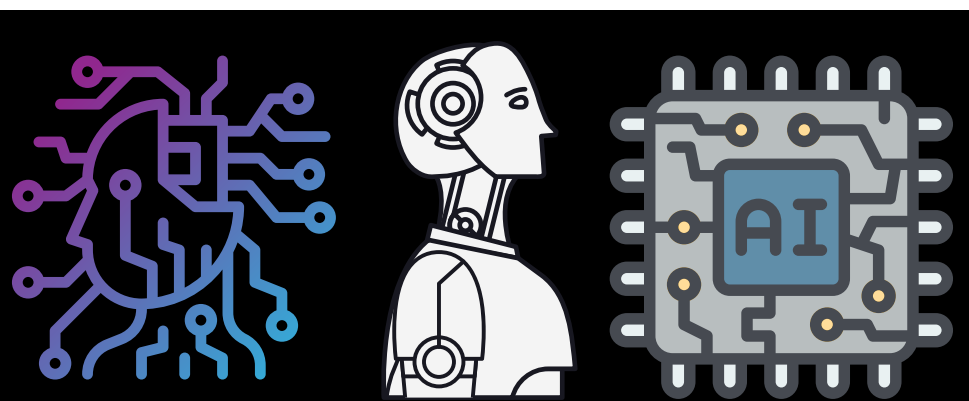
Opposition Leader Sussan Ley and coalition members criticized Albanese for failing to curb rising antisemitism, citing graffiti, arson, and campus harassment as examples of inaction. They called on Parliament to urgently pass stronger antisemitism legislation.

In August 2025, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu warned Albanese that Australia’s recognition of a Palestinian state “pours fuel on the antisemitic fire,” increasing threats to the Jewish community, and urged decisive action before the problem escalates further.

American Jewish Committee (AJC) is harnessing the full power of its global advocacy network to demand action from world leaders. The Bondi Beach attack is yet another example of why governments must go further than implementing security measures to thwart the surging threat of antisemitism.

Jews around the world must be able to practice their religion safely and securely, and we need American leadership at the forefront of this fight. The State Department’s Office to Monitor and Combat Antisemitism plays an integral role in leading efforts to safeguard Jewish communities around the world.

The AJC is grateful for the Senate’s confirmation of Rabbi Yehuda Kaploun as the U.S. Special Envoy to Monitor and Combat Antisemitism.



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Contact Us
Carole Robinson at 610-921-0624

 **Jewish Federation of Reading/Berks**