

Shalom 03|26

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

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Yashek Lecture focus on Matisse and occupation of France

By Richard Bradbury
Development Director

The community is invited to attend the 20th annual Richard J. Yashek Memorial Lecture on Wednesday, March 25, at 7 p.m., in the South Lounge of the McMillan Campus Center on the campus of Albright College. Parking is available in the lot at the corner of 13th and Bern streets. The lecture is free and open to the public, including interested teens, college students (the Yashek Lecture is an Experience Event), and adults. A coffee and dessert reception will follow.

This year's speaker is Christopher C. Gorham, a lawyer, educator and acclaimed author whose books include *Matisse at War* and the Goodreads Choice Award finalist *The Confidante*. His writing has appeared in *The Washington Post*, *Literary Hub*, *Paper Brigade* and elsewhere. He is a frequent speaker at conferences, literary events, colleges and book club gatherings. He lives in Boston and can be found at ChristopherCGorham.com and on social media @christophergorham.

From Ann Pryor, Senior Communications Manager, Citadel Press/Kensington Books.

Matisse at War: Art and Resistance in Nazi Occupied France is a vivid portrayal of the advancement of fascism and war into French life and culture during World War II through the lens of one of the country's most celebrated post-impressionists and his family.

Drawing on intimate letters between Henri Matisse and his family and friends, and benefitting from experts, archivists, and curators at fine art institutions in Europe and the U.S., Gorham has spotlighted a vital chapter of Matisse's operatic life — a time of prodigious creation against a backdrop of the four-way war among the Germans, Italians, Allies and the French Resistance. *Matisse at War* is a unique, timely and bittersweet biography that will be studied for decades to come.

In May 1940, as Parisians fled the advancing



Christopher C. Gorham

German Army, Matisse was returning to the French capital. Sick, elderly and stunned by the success of the blitzkrieg, the world-famous artist was compelled to safeguard 40 years of artwork. From Paris he returned to his adopted home, the ancient port of Nice on the Mediterranean, where he passed the terrible years of war and occupation. To leave France, he felt, would be a betrayal.

To examine the life of Matisse and his family during the occupation of France is to explore the choice forced upon them and their fellow citizens: courage or survival, authoritarianism or democracy?

Jewish Federation of Reading/Berks, the Yashek Family and Albright College are thrilled to host Christopher C. Gorham. We hope you will join us at 7 p.m. on Wednesday, March 25, for the 2026 Annual Richard J. Yashek Memorial Lecture.

Richard J. Yashek was born in Lübeck, Germany, on Feb. 15, 1929. He, his parents and younger brother Jochen lived a normal life until 1935, when Adolf Hitler's Nazi Party began to change the daily life of all German Jews. In 1941, the Yashek family was deported to Latvia. In March 1942, the family was separated. Richard stayed with his father; his younger brother with

his mother. Richard never saw his mother and brother again. In October 1944, his father was separated from him and never seen again.

Yashek survived and eventually came to the United States with the help of members of his mother's family. He worked for the family business, J. C. Ehrlich Co. Inc. in Pottsville, while he took English courses in the evening with a German teacher at the high school. He served in the Army from 1951 to 1953, and completed his high school GED while in the service.

After his tour of duty in the Army he returned and resumed working for J. C. Ehrlich Co. as a technician. While working at the Williamsport office, he was introduced to Rosalye Levine, a librarian at Montoursville High School. In early 1954 he proposed and on Nov. 14, 1954, they were married. In February 1955 he was transferred to the Lancaster office. While living in Lancaster, his wife gave birth to daughters Linda and Kimberly. In 1977 the Yasheks moved to Reading. At the time of his retirement, Richard was vice president of J. C. Ehrlich Co. Richard died in April 2005; Rosalye (nee Levine) Yashek passed away in 2024. They are survived by their two daughters and three grandchildren.

Jewish Federation of Reading/Berks extends our deep appreciation to the Yashek family for their generous support of this free, public lecture series, now in its 20th year.

Jewish Federation extends our thanks to the leadership, staff and students of Albright College for our 45-year partnership. Together, we have hosted an esteemed list of scholars, artists and thought leaders from around the globe. We further honor Albright's commitment for being the home of the Lakin Holocaust Library and Resource Center since 1993.

Finally, a very special thank you to Vic and Dena Hammel for their enduring commitment to Jewish Federation and the Richard J. Yashek Memorial lecture.

Small but mighty: Reflections from my first JFNA Conference

By Adi Shalev Smitheman
Program Director

A few weeks ago, I had the privilege of representing the Jewish Federation of Reading at my very first Jewish Federations of North America national conference. Walking into a space filled with thousands of Jewish professionals from across the country was an incredible experience. It was a powerful reminder that while every community is unique, we are all part of one vibrant, global tapestry.

The Versatility of Our Community

In larger cities, Federation roles are often highly specialized, with entire departments dedicated to a single niche. But in a community like ours, we thrive

on versatility. I found myself torn between sessions on community and Jewish life, Israel education, young adult engagement and more. In our Federation, these aren't separate categories that never touch, they are all part of the daily work we do to sustain Jewish life.

I also participated in a session specifically for small Federations, which reinforced what I see every day: Our impact isn't measured by the size of our staff but by the depth of our relationships. In Reading, the work is personal. Progress is built on trust and credibility earned over years of shared Shabbatot, celebrations, and challenges. We don't just run programs; we nurture a community.

Continued on Page 4



Warm thoughts as March arrives

By Richard Bradbury
Director of Development

Happy March, Shalom readers! If you're even a little bit like me, you may be hoping March comes in like a lamb and goes out like a lamb! No lion, thank you, I'm good.



So much for my sNOw Dance. I've obviously lost my mojo. As our days get longer (daylight savings time begins Sunday, March 8) and the "astronomical" start of spring is March 20, I eagerly await the arrival of warmer days!

As I enter the first March at the Federation, I'll get to celebrate and learn about Purim! My only references for Purim are hamantaschen (poppy seed is my go-to!) and noise makers. And the hysterical comedy "For Your Consideration," a film within a film where they are shooting a film entitled "Home For Purim," featuring Catherine O'Hara (may her memory be for a blessing).

Looking through the archives of *Shalom*, particularly the March issues, I was able to gain a deeper understanding of the holiday, and I was moved by what I was reading. I loved learning of Queen Esther's bravery, upon revealing her true Jewish identity to the king in order to save the Jews from a genocidal attack. And Esther's resolve to approach the king uninvited — a crime punishable by death — so courageous! Her commitment to her people and her selfless act is a lesson for us all.

I was very moved to learn of the three days of fasting and prayer instructed by Esther and practiced by all the Jews before she approached the king. Its a remarkable display of communal strength, faith and solidarity by the Jews of Shushan. I understand this fifth century BCE event was history's first documented case of antisemitism. What a shame the ancient scourge of antisemitism is still with us and grows worldwide at an alarming pace.

As the Jewish people looked to Queen Esther for justice, leadership and guidance, we look to our leaders, Jewish and non-Jewish, for the same and a path to understand the history of our forebearers. Whether our leaders come from the world of politics, education, art, literature, journalism, or other, we look to them for direction, understanding and a deeper appreciation of our Jewish identity. These learned individuals bring us together and give us a sense of community.

I admit to being extremely proud to say I work for an organization that gives our community multiple opportunities to listen, meet, engage in dialogue and interact with notable and scholarly thought leaders from around the world and across diverse

disciplines.

The 45th Annual Leo Camp Memorial Lecture was my first experience meeting and listening, in-person, to opinions and insights concerning the ongoing conflicts in the Middle East from a former ambassador to Israel and Egypt. I am anxiously looking forward to attending my first Richard J. Yashek Memorial Lecture on March 25 featuring author Christopher C. Gorham speaking about his newest novel: "Matisse at War."

Since I arrived at the Federation nine months ago, many community members and I have had the unique opportunity to meet, listen and learn from geopolitical scholars, Israeli officials, published authors via Literatour Berks, filmmakers, musicians, journalists, theatre artistic directors, art historians, health care professionals, and visual artists through our Reading Jewish Film Series and Noontime Knowledge.

Jewish Federation events gives our members a "salon" atmosphere and personalized moments with our guests. And if you cannot attend in person, you may go to our website to live-stream or watch our programs at your leisure. Kudos to former Program Director Vicki Haller Graff and our new Program Director Adi Shalev Smitheman. I stand in admiration of their commitment to researching and attracting high-quality, engaging and relevant programming to our community.

You may know that many program guests, in addition to working in their disciplines, also make their living as speakers; they charge a fee for their time and talent. If speakers happen to come from out of town (sometimes

out of the-country), the Federation is expected to cover travel expenses (air, rail, drivers, mileage), accommodations, meals, etc.

Thank you for allowing me to wax (prosaically) about Federation's extraordinary programming and the people who make it happen. Here is where we THANK YOU for making our programming possible. Many of you have given, and given generously to the Federation for years – decades – a lifetime, and we thank you for your kindness. Without your financial support, programs could not/would not happen. We are partners; these programs happen BECAUSE OF YOU. Federation depends on your financial support to keep us moving forward and thriving.

Shortly, Federation will begin our 2026 Pledge Campaign. In a pledge campaign one promises financial support due at a later date. When you make a pledge, the Federation can better prepare for the year ahead with the knowledge of approximately how much money will be available. A Pledge Campaign will not stop anyone from making a donation anytime throughout the year.

This year, we ask donors who have never donated to make a first-time gift. Consider a monthly gift, spreading your giving across 12 months: \$15 per month for 12 months, will make a "chai-level" gift of \$180. If you receive and enjoy *Shalom*, consider a gift of \$36 (double-chai) to assist us in paying for printing and mailing costs. Please feel free to contact me to discuss payment plans, recurring gifts or other ways of giving including volunteerism, gifts of appreciated stock or donating a vehicle. You can reach me at richardb@jfreading.org or 610-921-0624. I'd love to meet you!

Development

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Chai Circle

L'Chaim Society

Book of Life

Letter of Intent

Jewish Federation gratefully acknowledges these community members to thank them for their generosity to our 2025 Annual Campaign.

Glenn & Gaye Corbin (*Acharayut*)
William & Susan Weiser (*Ruach*)

We apologize for inadvertently omitting your names on the original list of donors.

 Jewish Federation of Reading/Berks

 Jewish Federation of Reading/Berks

ALL IS WELCOME!

JEWISH FEDERATION OF READING/BERKS INVITES YOU TO

COMMUNITY SHABBAT

MARCH 13, 2026

FEATURING MR. SHABBOS AND THE SHABBATONES
ACAPELLA CHOIR

6:00 p.m. Candle Lighting
6:45 p.m. Dinner

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

Kosher meal, served by Zami Catering from Brooklyn, NY
All orders must be placed by 4:30 p.m. on Thursday, March 5, 2026

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



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COMMUNITY
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ReadingJewishCommunity.org

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today!**

A Message from the CEO

Getting out and about — Networking and Gathering

By **Cindy Gerber Tomlinson**
Chief Executive Officer

Your Federation staff is out and about gathering ideas to help our community grow and prosper. Thank you so much to those who attended the meet and greet and shared your creative thinking and desires. Thank you to the members of the Federation board who have expressed their thoughts and visions for the Jewish Federation of Reading/Berks. We are shaping your Federation to look a little bit familiar, and a little bit like a new, shiny penny.



of your ideas together, along with what we are gathering from other Federations our size, and other Jewish organizations. As you know, I attended the General Assembly in November in Washington, DC and came home with great inspiration and strategic thinking. Adi just returned from the FedPro conference in Phoenix, Ariz., where she met with representatives from other Federations and learned about new and creative programming ideas. Margo recently attended the BBYO conference in Philadelphia, where she learned from the internationally known speakers and heard from Jewish teen leaders about their vision for now and for the future.

As a staff, we are working on our goals and objectives to bring our vision

into a reality for a bigger and brighter future for the Reading/Berks Jewish community. Our finance committee, executive committee and board have approved an operating budget that will make it possible for us to achieve these initial goals. So, we have been hard at work, reinventing your Federation, taking things that we have done in the past that work well and combining them with new ideas and visions for now and the future.

Networking is an important part of any professional life, and we have been doing a great deal of it. We are working with colleagues from Jewish Federations of North America (JFNA) on all kinds of initiatives, including security, grant opportunities, access to high quality and world renowned speakers, strategies to combat antisemitism, developing a NextGen group for young adults through those in their 40s, organizational development, and creative fundraising, to name a few.

We also work closely with PJLibrary to provide excellent books and programs for the youngest members of our community. Whether we meet at one of many Berks County libraries or at an ice cream shop, we gather parents and little people to enjoy each others' company, learn, and have fun together. Many strong friendships are formed at these gatherings.

We roll up our sleeves with the American Jewish Committee (AJC) and the AntiDefamation League (ADL) to stay on top of the latest developments around our country and the world when it comes to relating to the non-Jewish communities and strengthening our relationships with them. There is so

much going on every day, and we must think about when and how to respond, so as to keep our Jewish community informed and place it in high esteem among the people of Berks County and beyond. We work closely with the mayor's office and deepen our bond to stay in his view and partner for on-going support.

Finally, we meet with our major donors to hear their thoughts about where and how they wish their donations to be used. We are very mindful of being sure that donors feel that they have a say in what they want their money to do and how they want it to work for our Jewish community. Maybe they are passionate about supporting intermarried couples, or educating our youth, or feeding the hungry. Perhaps it's adult education or Jewish music or creating camp scholarships that excite them. It could be Holocaust studies or fighting antisemitism that resonates most. We want to match dollars to tangible services and concrete experiences so that donors feel satisfied and proud of their decisions and generosity.

If you would like to network with us, please let us know! Let's meet for coffee at the JFR office or at a local coffee shop. Let's take a walk in the beautiful warmer weather that is just around the corner. Let's do lunch or dinner. Let's meet in person or on Zoom or Teams, or talk on the phone, and share with us what is important to you. Let's network and get out and about, together!

610-223-3983
610-921-0624
cindygt@jfreading.org

THE 20TH ANNUAL RICHARD J. YASHEK MEMORIAL LECTURE

ART AND RESISTANCE IN NAZI OCCUPIED FRANCE

Matisse at WAR

Presented by Christopher C. Gorham

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 25

7:00 p.m., Albright College, McMillan Center, South Lounge
Experience event. Free and open to the public.

Shalom

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

Your Clothes Can Change Lives

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

CommunityAid THRIFT STORE AND DONATION CENTER
5370 Allentown Pike
Temple, PA 19560

or in our parking lot bin

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



Syrian Jewish culture gets Jane Austen treatment in 'Sisters of Fortune' upcoming Literatour event

By Adi Shalev Smitheman
Program Director

The Cohen sisters are at a crossroads. And not just because the obedient middle sister, Fortune, has secretly started to question her engagement and impending wedding even as her family scrambles to prepare for the big day. Nina, the rebellious eldest sister, is single at 26 (a spinster, according to her community's standards) when she runs into an old friend who offers her a chance to choose a different path. Meanwhile, Lucy, the youngest and a senior in high school, has started sneaking around with a charming older bachelor.

As Fortune inches even closer to the chuppah, the sisters find themselves

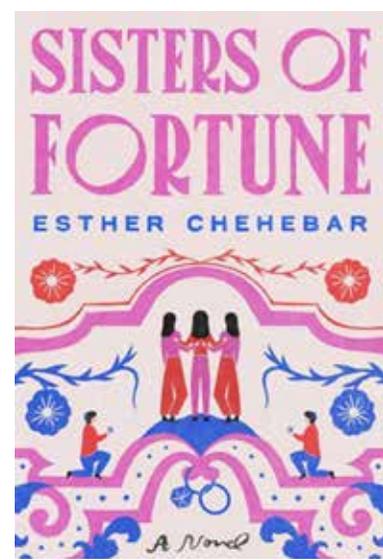
in a tug-of-war between tradition and modernity, reckoning with what their tight-knit community wants for them — and what they want for themselves.

Lest you think this is a floaty rom-com, think again! While Esther Chehebar offers us a story about dating, ambition and coming of age within an immigrant community, this novel explores the roots that entwine our lives with the ones who love us best, the dreams we hold for our daughters, and the winding paths we take to our own happy endings.

Esther Chehebar is a contributing writer at *Tablet* magazine, where she covers Sephardic Jewish tradition and community, and a member of Rebbetzin Chaya Mushka

Bikur Cholim, a nonprofit supporting the growing Syrian Jewish community in the Crown Heights section of Brooklyn, N.Y.. Her first book, "I Share My Name," was an illustrated children's book explaining the Sephardic tradition of naming children for their grandparents.

I hope you will join us for our upcoming Literatour event on Monday, March 23, at 6 p.m. at the Exeter Community Library when Esther Chehebar will be leading a discussion of her debut novel, "Sisters of Fortune," as well as selling and signing copies of her book following the event. Copies are also available to borrow through the Berks County Public Library system.



SMALL BUT MIGHTY

Continued from Page 1

Innovation is a Team Sport

Out of the many ideas shared at the conference, one I have taken to heart is that "Innovation is a team sport". Great ideas don't just appear out of nowhere; they emerge when more people bring their perspectives to the table.

I invite you to be part of that team. We are constantly looking for ways to ensure that everyone, including our mixed-heritage families, feels a deep sense of

belonging here. My goal isn't to simply hand you a finished calendar of events, I want to invite you into the process.

We are looking for passionate individuals to join our committees and work alongside our professional team. Your voice is the key to our success.

Strengthening Our Shared Home

It was important for me to reflect on how the Federation serves as a bridge for our community. We are part of a beautiful ecosystem alongside our synagogues, which

remain the vital spiritual pillars of Jewish life in Reading. The Federation's role is to support and weave these threads together, ensuring our entire communal infrastructure remains healthy and connected. To do this effectively, we are committed to fostering open, two-way communication. We want to be an organization that listens as much as it speaks, ensuring our work reflects your needs.

Looking Ahead

I returned from the conference with a notebook full of inspiration and a renewed

sense of pride in Reading. Over time, you will see these lessons take shape in our communal life, not as sudden changes, but as steady, thoughtful growth.

We may be a "small Federation" by the numbers, but we carry the full promise of Jewish life on our shoulders. I am more confident than ever that our future is bright because we are building it together.

To take part, please email info@jfreeding.org or call 610-921-0624, and we will connect you with the relevant staff member.

Federation programs promote learning in community



At left, Esther Bratt, Sue Wachs, Carol Cohn and Shirley Boscov were among our friends from the Highlands at our 92nd Street Y program. Check our calendar for upcoming programs. At right, Dr. Jodi Radosh and Dr. Victoria Williams present a program on Freedom of the Press and Democracy. at Noontime Knowledge.



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

PURIM OF THE CRYPTO-JEWS
By Ronit Treatman

In 1492 the Catholic Monarchs issued the Alhambra Decree, expelling the Jews from Spain. Four years later they were expelled from Portugal. The Iberian Jews could leave, convert, or be killed. Many of those who converted continued practicing Judaism in secret.

These secret or crypto-Jewish traditions have persisted to this day. Please join us to see some of their artifacts and learn about their customs.




Wednesday, March 11, at noon

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

THE POWER OF POETRY TO TOUCH YOUR HEART AND SPARK CHANGE
CONVEYING MESSAGES WITH RHYME THAT CAN LAST THROUGH TIME

By Dr. Phillip Tietbohl

Join us for an interactive experience exploring the therapeutic power of poetry and how rhyme enhances memory. Enjoy light verse and custom poem samples, then collaborate in creating a group poem after a brief brainstorming session—an uplifting and engaging experience.



Tuesday, March 24, at noon

How to respond to antisemitism in schools

By Jonathan Avins
Federation chairperson

What do you do when your child comes home from school and says someone hassled them because they're Jewish? What do you tell your child? What do you? Who do you talk to? Why is there antisemitism in schools?

Antisemitism in schools is a serious and growing concern, affecting Jewish students' safety, mental health, and ability to learn. It can appear in subtle, normalized ways or as overt harassment and violence. Antisemitism isn't only explicit slurs. There appear to be four common forms:

- Harassment and bullying: **Name-calling, jokes, or stereotypes about Jews, Holocaust "jokes" or denial/minimization. Social exclusion or targeting on social media**
- Political hostility crossing into antisemitism: **Holding Jewish students responsible for actions of Israel. Singling out Jewish students to "explain" or defend global events. Using classic antisemitic tropes (e.g., Jews as manipulators or controllers) under political language**
- Vandalism and symbols: **Swastikas or antisemitic graffiti on walls, lockers, desks, or bathrooms, Defacing Jewish student spaces or religious items**
- Curricular gaps or bias: **Holocaust education that is minimal, inaccurate, or decontextualized.**
- Teaching about Jews only as victims, not as a living, diverse people. Allowing biased materials or speakers without proper context**

Why it matters: Student safety: **Antisemitism creates fear and isolation.** Mental health: **Jewish students report anxiety, stress, and feeling silenced.** School climate: **Tolerating antisemitism undermines equity and inclusion for all students.** Legal implications: **In the U.S., antisemitism can fall under civil rights protections when it targets shared ethnic characteristics.**

Antisemitism appears in schools for multiple, overlapping reasons, and it's imperative to understand that it's usually learned, not innate. Here are the main drivers, explained plainly.

1. Prejudice is learned early; Children absorb attitudes from **Family beliefs, Peer groups, Online content, Community norms.** If antisemitic ideas are expressed (even casually or as "jokes"), they can take root before students have the tools to question them.
2. Misinformation and stereotypes; Antisemitism often relies on false narratives, such as: **Jews having secret power or wealth, Jews being blamed collectively for political or economic problems, Conflating Jewish identity with actions of governments or institutions.** These ideas circulate widely online and are rarely challenged unless schools explicitly teach critical thinking and historical context.
3. Social media amplification; Platforms can: **Spread extremist or conspiratorial content quickly, Normalize hate through memes, irony or coded language, Radicalize students through algorithms that reward outrage.** Young people may repeat antisemitic language without fully understanding its meaning or history.
4. Political and global conflicts spilling into schools; Conflicts in the Middle East sometimes lead to: **Collective blame of Jewish students, Treating Jewish identity as political rather than ethnic/religious, Hostility disguised as "activism" that crosses into harassment.** This is especially harmful because Jewish students may be targeted regardless of their views.
5. Lack of education about Jewish history and antisemitism; Many curricula: **Focus narrowly on the Holocaust without explaining how antisemitism works, Don't address modern antisemitism or how it adapts over time, Fail to include Jewish voices beyond victimhood narratives.** Without this context, students may not recognize antisemitism when they encounter it.
6. Bullying dynamics; **Antisemitism often functions like other forms of bullying: Targeting minorities seen as "different", Using slurs or symbols to provoke reactions, Exploiting power imbalances.** When schools don't respond clearly, behavior can escalate.
7. Institutional hesitation; **Some schools struggle because: They fear controversy or accusations of bias, Staff lack training to identify antisemitism, Policies address racism broadly but not antisemitism specifically.** Silence or inconsistency can unintentionally legitimize harm.

Why this matters: Antisemitism in schools doesn't just affect Jewish students: **It normalizes hate, It weakens trust in institutions, and It often precedes or overlaps with other forms of extremism**

Addressing it well improves the environment for everyone. When it appears in a classroom or meeting, the response matters as much as the content. Silence or deflection often signals acceptance, while a calm, principled response can stop harm, educate, and restore trust.

Below is a practical, step-by-step framework that works across K-12, higher education, nonprofits, and professional settings.

1. Address it immediately and clearly. Do not ignore it. Even brief antisemitic remarks can make Jewish participants feel unsafe.

Antisemitism appears in schools for multiple, overlapping reasons, and it's imperative to understand that it's usually learned, not innate.

What to do: **Interrupt calmly: "I need to stop us there." Name the issue: "That comment reflects an antisemitic stereotype." Set a boundary: "That's not acceptable in this space."**

Why this works: **It signals institutional norms. It protects targets without putting them on the spot. It prevents normalization,**

Avoid: **Nervous laughter, Changing the subject, "Let's hear all sides" when harm has occurred**

2. Separate intent from impact. Many incidents come with defensiveness: **"I didn't mean it that way."** Respond with: **"Intent aside, the impact is harmful."** **"We're responsible for how words land here."** This keeps the focus on: **The behavior, Community standards, Repair, not punishment (unless warranted)**
3. Don't ask Jewish participants to explain or defend themselves. Common mistake are: **Turning to a Jewish student or colleague to "respond" or "educate".** A Better approach is: **Take responsibility as facilitator or leader, Use general principles, not personal testimony, if appropriate, offer resources later—not in the moment.** This avoids: **Tokenization, Emotional labor, Further isolation**
4. Clarify the difference between critique and antisemitism. This is especially important when discussions involve Israel, politics, or power. You can say: **"Criticism of governments is legitimate."** **"Blaming Jews collectively, invoking conspiracies, or singling out Jewish identity crosses into antisemitism."** Ground rules to reinforce: **No collective blame No stereotypes or conspiracies No questioning Jewish legitimacy or belonging**
5. Reframe with facts and context (briefly). If misinformation is involved: **Correct it succinctly, Avoid debates that center hate.** Example is **if there's no evidence for that claim, and it echoes a long-standing antisemitic conspiracy.** Then redirect: **Back to the learning objective or agenda, To a broader, values-based discussion**
6. Follow up after the incident. Immediate response is necessary—but not sufficient. Afterward: **Check in privately with affected individuals, Document what happened, Apply policies consistently, Offer additional education or training if appropriate.** What follow-up communicates: **This was taken seriously, The burden doesn't rest on those harmed, The institution is accountable.**
7. Establish norms before incidents happen. Prevention makes response easier. Effective norms include: **Clear definitions of antisemitism, Explicit inclusion in anti-bias policies, Expectations for respectful disagreement. Training for staff and facilitators.** Say early and often: **"We challenge ideas, not identities."** **"Hate speech and stereotypes are not debate."**
8. When antisemitism is persistent or severe. If behavior continues or escalates: **Enforce consequences according to policy, Involve administration or HR, Prioritize safety over "open dialogue".** There are moments when: **Education is appropriate, And moments when firm limits are required.**

>>>What makes a response effective by a parent

An effective response is: **Immediate, Specific, Calm, Values-based and Consistent,** It does not require: **Perfect wording, Lengthy lectures, Public shaming**

>>> What can schools do? Actions fall into four categories:

Prevention and culture - **Clearly define antisemitism in school policies (alongside other forms of hate). Communicate zero tolerance for harassment, with consistent enforcement. Include Jewish identity and antisemitism in efforts.**

Education - **Teach accurate Holocaust education, including causes and consequences. Include contemporary Jewish life and diversity, not only persecution. Help students distinguish between legitimate political debate and antisemitism.**

Response - **Take reports seriously and respond promptly. Support affected students with counseling and accommodations if needed. Address incidents publicly (without naming students) to reinforce norms.**

Staff training - **Train teachers and administrators to recognize antisemitic tropes. Provide guidance on moderating difficult classroom discussions.**

>>> What parents and students can do

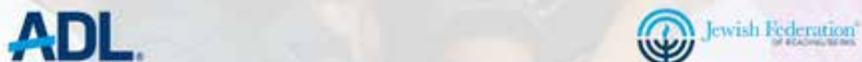
Document incidents (dates, locations, witnesses, screenshots).

Report through school channels and follow up in writing.

Ask about school policies and training on antisemitism.

Seek support from trusted community organizations if needed.

Powerful Back to Life Farm story shared at JCC



WORDS TO ACTION

RECOGNIZE AND RESPOND EFFECTIVELY TO ANTISEMITISM

Teens and parents are invited to two simultaneous workshops, led by ADL facilitators, that offer practical tools and a supportive space for both youth and parents.

Sunday, April 26, from 12:30 - 2:30 PM
The Jewish Federation of Reading/Berks

For full details and to RSVP, please visit JFR website

A Feb. 19 program at the JCC introduced the community to Back to Life Farm, a nonprofit supporting IDF veterans and discharged soldiers coping with PTSD. Farm co-founder Assaf was there to discuss the organization's remarkable work.

RootOne: Empowering our teens to connect with Israel

By Adi Shalev Smitheman
Program Director

On March 15, your teens will have a special opportunity to learn about RootOne, a nationwide initiative that supports Jewish teens in experiencing Israel through meaningful, immersive summer travel.

RootOne, powered by The Jewish Education Project and made possible by generous philanthropic support, helps make Israel trips more accessible by offering vouchers up to \$3,000 for eligible participants.

Designed for Jewish students in grades 9 through 11 (and current 12th-graders for summer 2026), RootOne partners with a wide range of established youth travel programs. These trips allow teens to explore Israel's history, culture, and contemporary society — from iconic historical sites to conversational encounters with Israeli peers. Participants not only build lifelong friendships but strengthen their Jewish identity and sense of community.

Before traveling, students complete engaging pre-trip learning

that prepares them to get the most out of their experience. Upon return, alumni opportunities help sustain their connection to Israel and Jewish life long after the summer ends.

We're delighted to welcome Niv Sadeh, RootOne Shaliach with the Kaiserman JCC, who will lead our Israel 101 session — an informative, interactive introduction to RootOne trips and how teens from our community can benefit. Whether your teen is dreaming of adventure, deepening their heritage or

exploring Israel from a fresh perspective, this program is a fantastic first step.

Join us to learn, ask questions, and discover how the RootOne experience can help shape the next chapter of your teen's Jewish journey on Sunday, March 15, from 2 to 3 p.m. at Chabad of Berks, 2320 Hampden Blvd, Muhlenberg Township.

Registration is required. Check JFR website/email. For any questions, please contact Adi at 610-921-0624 or AdiS@JFRReading.org.

The power of an invitation: Why bringing a friend matters more than ever

By Adi Shalev Smitheman
Program Director

Most of the time, when I met someone outside the Jewish community, and we talked about Israel and supporting the Jewish community, I heard "I grew up with a lot of Jewish friends" or "Some of my closest friends are Jewish."



In today's world, when social media controls the narrative, and it's full of lies and incitement against Jewish people and Israel, it's up to us to share the truth and to stand up for ourselves. Today's reality made each one of us an ambassador for our community. Does it mean that we should all be influencers? Absolutely not.

But it's up to us to show our friends (and if you feel comfortable, also colleagues) the truth and the beautiful things we have in our Jewish community. It's up to us to share our culture and tradition, expose them to new things they may not be aware of and give them the chance to be curious and ask questions (there are no wrong/stupid questions).

I'm sharing my thoughts with you because I want to encourage you to invite your friends to our programs and events, exposing them to our beautiful Jewish community and the different educational programs we offer. I would also like to invite you to share with us a difficult situation you encountered when you weren't sure how to explain something, and it placed you in a tough spot.

Our programs are open to all, and

it's important to us that the JCC is that place where you and your friends can get answers (or at least have a healthy discussion {or debate}) and to celebrate your Judaism and identity.

Each one of you is a leader of our community. When you care, others care; when you show up, others show up; when

you get involved, others get involved.

You can find our upcoming programs and events on our weekly email (every Monday morning), the JFR website and the *Shalom*.

If you have any question or thoughts about a program, please don't hesitate to contact me at AdiS@JFRReading.org

All Around the Town

Mazel tov to **Bry Gulotta and James Rowe** on the birth of Gwendolyn Danielle Rowe.

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

Until next time: Shalom!

Reading NextGen
Young professionals' network

NextGen is a network of young professionals in the Jewish community, looking to give back as they build connections and community. Opportunities include social events, volunteering, and networking.

Are you between the ages of 25 and 45?
Contact Adi at AdiS@JFRReading.org to join the program.

ROOTONE
YOUR ADVENTURE IN ISRAEL AWAITS

Join Niv Sadeh, RootOne & Kaiserman JCC Shaliach, to learn about RootOne trips to Israel and how to receive a \$3000 voucher. Starting with Israel 101 (bring your questions!) and followed by exploring all your opportunities to go to Israel!

- Grades 9th, 10th & 11th
- \$3000 voucher for your Israeli adventure
- Ask your Questions! Israel 101 with Niv
- Registration is required. Check JFR website/email

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 <https://goggleworks.org/films/12-hours-in-october/> or check the JFR website/email

Sunday, March 15, at 2:00-3:00 pm
Hosted at Chabad of Berks, 2320 Hampden Blvd, Reading, PA 19604

Remembering a life filled with miracles

By Esther Shanahan

My dad's life was a miracle. His parents, both Holocaust survivors, met in a displaced persons camp after the war, grieving the loss of their spouses and children. Like a daisy growing in the crack of a sidewalk, love bloomed in the most unlikely of circumstances, and they fell in love and got married. A miracle. Sol Deutsch was born in Máramaros on Nov. 28, 1950. Another miracle.

He spent most of his childhood in Israel and emigrated to the United States in 1960. He arrived in New York a few months before his future wife did, and he always liked to say that they just missed

each other. Sol met Rachel (nee Meilik) in July 1982 at the Tamarack Hotel in the Catskills. After a whirlwind romance, they were married that November, on his birthday.

The most important thing in his life was family. He was thrilled to welcome twins Stuart and Esther, in July 1983, and was the best dad in the entire world. He was reliable; funny; kind; loving; and adventurous; with a mischievous streak.

He died on Jan. 24, but the miracle of his life and love will endure in his wife, Rachel, his children, Stuart (Janice) Deutsch and Esther (Russ) Shanahan, five grandchildren, and his dog, Max.

Obituary

Lydia Ramos, 88, of Shillington died on Feb. 9. Lydia grew up in Puerto Rico. She worked at Citi Bank in New York and moved to Reading in 2006. She enjoyed going to casinos, playing bingo, shopping, and celebrating Jewish

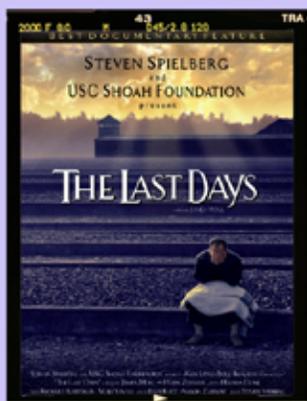
holidays. Lydia was proud of receiving the Melvin Jones Fellow Award from the Lions Clubs International Foundation for her dedicated humanitarian services. She is survived by her husband, Paulo Kuczer, her brother Richard Ramos, her sister Olga Rodriguez and her niece Miriam Oliver.

Sharing sobering experience



Dr. Charles Barbera, CEO of Reading Hospital speaks to our community about his experiences at Auschwitz during a recent weeklong experience there.

Movie Monday at the JCC March 30, 2026, 1pm



The Last Days

Oscar-winning documentary executive produced by Steven Spielberg

Focuses on the plight of five Hungarian Jews who survived imprisonment in Auschwitz. Though these survivors recount the horrors they witnessed and endured as a result of the Nazis' "Final Solution," their individual triumphs are a testament to hope and humanity.



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!

HAPPY PASSOVER

**Tuesday, March 10th
12:00 pm**

at the Exeter Community Library

JOIN ADI SHALEV SMITHEMAN THE NEW PROGRAM DIRECTOR OF THE JEWISH FEDERATION OF READING/BERKS AS SHE PREPARES TWO OF HER FAMILY'S SPECIAL IRAQI PASSOVER RECIPES. LEARN ABOUT ADI'S FAMILY IN ISRAEL AND ABOUT HER GRANDPARENTS' LIFE IN IRAQ.

Please register online at www.berkslibraries.org/branch/exeter
Limited seating available

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Jewish Family Service and United Way: Sharing a commitment to caring

Jewish Family Service

By Carole Robinson
Jewish Family Service

My Texas grandsons, Cameron and Jackson, excitedly Facetimed me to show me the snow in their backyard. They were bundled up and happily playing in 1 inch of snow. I was not quite as delighted with our snowy 10 inches, especially when the township snowplow repeatedly blocked our driveway with mounds of snow. Needless to say, I am over this cold and snowy winter we are having!



Besides commiserating about the extreme cold, I spent much of January working on a United Way grant. Jewish Family Service has been a United Way of Berks County agency partner for over 20 years. United Way funds programs and services that fall within four focus areas: education, financial stability, health and safety net services. JFS qualifies for funding in two categories: our food pantries and our supportive services. The United Way grant supports us in our mission to strengthen the quality of life in the Jewish and broader Berks County community.

I won't bore you with the 45 pages of data I compiled for United Way, but I will share some of the more pertinent information.

- We distributed 302,000 pounds of food to 2,050 households in 2025, giving each family about 50 pounds each time they came to our pantries.
- Analysis shows the growing need for our food pantries. Pantry numbers increased 9% since 2024.
- 45% of our clients come more than twice a year.
- 91.8% of our clients are Hispanic and 85.3% of them live in the Reading School District.
- The poverty level in Reading is estimated to be 27% based on the poverty rate reported in the area (PA.gov, 2025).
- PA is the state that has been hit hardest by food inflation, with an 8.2% rise in the cost of groceries.

Despite nominal wage increases, people are struggling with the rising cost of everyday essentials. A United Way of PA report found that 40% of households in Berks County are struggling to make ends meet. Asset limited, income constrained, employed (ALICE) households earn above the federal poverty level but cannot afford the basic cost of living. These statistics explain why we are facing the most critical period of food insecurity since the COVID pandemic.

Just to put a face on these numbers, let me tell you about David. He is 74 years old, a veteran, and has been living with HIV for 38 years. His health limits his ability to work. David's income is limited to Social Security and the money he makes walking dogs. Although David owns his home, he would not be able to afford to stay there without the food he gets at our pantry. He has been coming to our pantry for many years and relies on this monthly assistance. David is usually the third person in line waiting for food. He drives to our pantry the evening before we open to make sure that he gets food. David told me: "The food you give me really helps. Fuel oil is high, cable is expensive, and I have lots of credit card debt. Every bit of my income goes to pay bills. This pantry has been a godsend!"

In addition to fighting food insecurity, JFS assisted over 220 individuals and families in 2025 in other ways, with the help of the United Way grant. Our services include providing information and referral to community agencies and government benefits, counseling and assistance in decision making and helping



UNITED WAY
Berks County



Sid Lempiner preparing to load food into waiting cars at the JFS Olivet pantry in 2025.

seniors and their families choose long-term care facilities that provide the appropriate level of care. We also make seniors aware of low-income housing options and assist them in filling out applications. We help seniors who choose to remain in their homes access appropriate care. One of our most important jobs is outreach through hospital visits, nursing home visits, home visits.

Outreach is critical for JFS given our client base, which is mainly senior citizens. Whom does JFS help?

- We service over 10% of our community.
- 38% of them fall below or at 150% of the 2025 Federal Poverty Level.
- 82% of the clients we served in 2025 were seniors
- We are a resource for seniors and their out-of-town families; 24% of the seniors we serve have no family living in the area.
- 10% of our clients used our programs/services 10-24 times in 2025.
- 8% of our clients used our services 25 or more times. The people who are most dependent on our help receive more services and we spend more time and resources helping them.

For example, Jacob is a senior citizen with

no family, living in a one-bedroom apartment. His only income is his Social Security. Jacob's medical conditions prevent him from working to supplement his fixed income. He is ineligible for subsidized housing because he has a criminal background. Jacob relies on us for rent assistance. "You keep me from being homeless. I would be out on the street in the winter. I couldn't manage without your assistance, and I am extremely appreciative."

By investing in local agencies such as JFS, United Way helps ensure that community members facing hardship, from families struggling with food insecurity to older adults in need of assistance, receive support. United Way of Berks County helps people in need and addresses critical issues to make our community a better place for everyone. They raise and distribute funds to support a vital network of health and human services and improve lives by inspiring collaboration, volunteerism and financial support to build a stronger community.

Together, JFS and United Way are ensuring that no one has to face misfortune on their own. While we may have six more weeks of winter according to Punxsutawney Phil, no member of our Jewish community needs to shiver through the cold alone!

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! ♥

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 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.

*Program subsidized by
The Jewish Federation of Reading/Berks*

Friendship Circle fun



Top: Mary Engelson and Judy Synnamon enjoying a Friendship Circle musical program on Jan. 22

Above: Carol Perlmutter and Adi Shalev Smitheman following Adi's presentation to Friendship Circle on Feb 5

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

Jewish Family Service
invites you to a

PASSOVER SEDER

Thursday, March 26
11:45 am at the JCC

Led by Sari Incledon and Carole Robinson

Reservations Required
by March 16
610-921-0624

FRIENDSHIP CIRCLE

Mar 5- "Chazz Aden Constituent Services Advisor"

Chazz Aden, Constituent Services Advisor to Rep. Johanny Cepeda-Freytiz of the 129th Legislative District, will discuss ways their office helps constituents deal with state government. Chazz will speak about property tax/rent rebates and unclaimed property and answer any questions.

Mar 26- "Passover Seder and Meal " 11:45AM

Jewish Family Service invites you to a Passover Seder led by Sari Incledon and Carole Robinson. Reservations are required by Mar 16th. Call 610-921-0624 or email CaroleR@jfreeding.org to RSVP or with questions. ***Please note the time change for this program***

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.



MARCH 2026

Upcoming events offered by the Jewish Federation of Reading/Berks (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 listed here, read articles throughout the Shalom or see our online calendar at readingjewishcommunity.org/calendar. Contact 610.921.0624 or info@jfreaing.org with questions.

SUN	MON	TUE
01 Family Purim Carnival 12:00 PM at RCOS	02 Erev Purim Purim Service & Megillah Reading 6:00 PM at KZ ----- RCOS Megillah Reading 6:30 PM at RCOS ----- RCOS Purim Spiel 7:30 PM at RCOS	03 Purim Family Purim Extravaganza 5:00 PM at Chabad
08 Women's Bus Trip 9:00 AM at Chabad	09 JCC Arts, Culture, Ideas 1:30 PM at The Highlands	10 JCC Romeo Club 12:00 PM at Paolo's
15 RootOne youth program 2:00 PM at Chabad	16 Israeli cooking class with Revital Kaikov Shalev 5:30 PM at Chabad	17 Growth & wealth preservation 9:30 AM at JCC ----- Chabad Pre-Passover Night Out 6:00 PM at Chabad
22	23 Literatour Book Club "Sisters of Fortune" 6:00 PM at Exeter Library	24 Noontime Knowledge: "Listening, Learning, Laughing, Doing" 12:00 PM at JCC
29	30 Movie Monday, "The Last Days" 1:00 PM at JCC	31

ADAR - NISSAN, 5786

WED	THU	FRI	SAT
04	05 JFS Friendship Circle 1:00 PM at JCC History of a Conflict 6:00 PM at JCC	06	07
11 Noontime Knowledge: "The Purim of the Crypto- Jews" 12:00 PM at JCC ----- "12 hours in October" screening & Q&A 7:00 PM at GoggleWorks	12 History of a Conflict 6:00 PM at JCC	13 Community Shabbat 6:00 PM at Chabad	14 Tot Shabbat 10:00 AM at RCOS
18	19 Rosh Chodesh Nissan	20	21
25 Richard J. Yashek Memorial Lecture "Matisse at War" 7:00 PM at Albright College	26 JFS Passover Seder 11:45 AM at JCC	27 "Can We Put the AI Genie Back in the Bottle" 7:00 PM at RCOS	28

Purim is a celebration of footnotes

By Rabbi Brian Michelson
Reform Congregation Oheb Sholom



Every year, Purim shows up and presents itself as the noisiest holiday on the Jewish calendar. There are costumes, groggers, baked goods, and at least one person who insists their costume is “conceptual.”

We might think that Purim’s main lesson is simple: be loud, be joyful, and boo Haman like you mean it. It is the holiday that I describe to non-Jews by explaining that if I don’t have a headache at the end of the night, we have not had enough fun or celebrations.

However, buried — almost hidden — inside the Megillah is a surprisingly modern idea that doesn’t get enough attention: Purim is a celebration of footnotes.

Seriously.

The Book of Esther is obsessed with documents. It tells us, on more

than one occasion, that letters were written, sealed, copied, translated and distributed across an empire stretching from India to Ethiopia. The Megillah repeatedly emphasizes that these decrees go out “to every province according to its script and to every people according to its language.” This information is not poetic filler. It should be seen as the very heart of the story.

In ancient Persia, power didn’t just come from kings and armies. It came from paperwork. Haman understood this. His plan wasn’t just violent — it was bureaucratic. He didn’t swing a sword; he drafted a memo. Genocide began as a policy proposal sealed with the mark of the king. Esther’s countermove was not a miracle or a great battle, but a revision. A second set of letters. A clarification. A footnote to history that changed everything.

Here’s the quiet genius of Purim: The Jews never erased the first decree. They couldn’t. Persian law didn’t allow it. Instead, they lived with contradiction. Two royal edicts existed simultaneously,

pointing in opposite directions. Survival came from knowing how to read carefully. This may be the most Jewish skill of all.

As Jews, we are a people who live in the margins of texts. We argue with commentaries, add clarifications and scribble questions in the white space. We don’t just read the headline — we ask: “Who wrote this? For whom? In what language? And what’s missing?”

Purim reminds us that redemption does not always arrive full of thunder and lightning. It shows up as a second set of instructions, as a second draft. Sometimes salvation looks like the

ability to say, “Wait — there’s another version of this story.”

Which might be why Purim still feels so relevant. We live in an age of loud decrees, viral pronouncements and absolutist takes delivered in all caps. Purim whispers back: “Slow down. Read closely. Check the footnotes.”

Then put on a ridiculous costume, eat a cookie shaped like the villain’s hat and celebrate the quiet power of thoughtful revision. After all, the world is often changed not by who shouts the loudest, but by who writes the smarter addendum.

March ✨ Adar-Nissan	
 Shabbat Candle Lightings	 Torah Portions
March 6 5:43 p.m.	March 7/18 Adar Ki Tisa (Exodus 30:11-34:35)
March 13 6:51 p.m.	March 14/25 Adar Vayak’hel-Pekudei (Exodus 35:1-40:38)
March 20 6:58 p.m.	March 21/3 Nissan Vayikra (Leviticus 1:1-5:26)
March 27 7:05 p.m.	March 28/10 Nissan Tzav (Leviticus 6:1-8:36)

Purim at RCOS

Sunday March 1st
Family Purim Carnival- 12:00-1:30pm
Games, Prizes, Food, Bounce House and so much more. Register online



Monday March 2nd
Megillah Reading- 6:30pm
The Purim Spiel- 7:30pm
Adults and Children welcome for the "retelling of Purim" Light Refreshment served afterwards



All February
Mishloach Manot
Spread Purim Cheer to friends and family. Purchase a Basket of Treats and pick up at RCOS. Check RCOS website for details



REFORM CONGREGATION OHEB SHOLOM Jewish Federation of Reading/Berks

Mediterranean Nights

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

SATURDAY, APRIL 11
6:30 PM

Cocktails, Dinner, Music & Balis Volunteer Appreciation Award Presentation to Jill Haas

\$40 per person

Smart Casual Attire

RSVP by March 25 by visiting www.ohebsholom.org or mail your check with any seating preferences to Reform Congregation Oheb Sholom 555 Warwick Drive, Wyomissing, PA 19610

JEWISH FAMILY SERVICE NEEDS:

PLASTIC GROCERY BAGS FOR OUR FOOD PANTRIES!



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

Jewish Federation of Reading/Berks

Berks BBYO members take part in Philly convention



By Bella Karchevsky
BBYO

Berks Chai BBYO, our local BBYO chapter for teens in grades 8-12 spent a February weekend at the International Convention in Philadelphia! They attended engaging programs, met

teens from around the world, and got to spend time with celebrities and influencers!

Want to get involved? Contact Luba Karchevsky at luba.karchevsky@gmail.com or Michele Leisawitz at MBL617@aol.com

JFS hospital, outpatient visits

By Carole Robinson and Sari Incledon

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

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

If you or a loved one is at a local hospital or nursing home and would like

a visit, please call us.

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

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

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

"ART, CULTURE & IDEAS"

THE HIGHLANDS AT WYOMISSING

MONDAY, MAR 9
1:30 PM

CULTURAL CENTER AT THE HIGHLANDS AT WYOMISSING
2000 CAMBRIDGE AVE.

SPOTTING THE RED FLAGS: PROTECT YOURSELF FROM MISINFORMATION AND TODAY'S TOP SCAMS
PRE-RECORDED PROGRAM

Jewish Federation of Reading/Berks

Art, Culture & Ideas is a monthly series. Upcoming dates: June 8

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.

COME TO

KESHER ZION SYNAGOGUE'S

PURIM SERVICE

AND

MEGILLAH Reading

DON'T FORGET YOUR COSTUME

LIGHT REFRESHMENTS WILL INCLUDE

HAMENTASCHEN
(SO PEOPLE CAN BITE OFF HAMAN'S EARS!)

MONDAY, MARCH 2ND, 2026

AT 6:00PM

FOLLOWED BY

PURIM SIDE STORY

AT 7:30

FEATURING THE RCOS PLAYERS

MUSIC BASED ON WEST SIDE STORY

CHABAD OF BERKS
INVITES YOU TO A

FAMILY PURIM

EXTRAVAGANZA

IN OUTER-SPACE

MEGILLAH BLASTOFF
HA-MOON-TASHEN
OUT OF THIS WORLD DINNER
DECORATE YOUR OWN OUTERSPACE CRAFT

TUESDAY, MARCH 3RD | 5 PM
2320 HAMPDEN BLVD, READING PA 19604

www.ChabadofBerks.org/RSVP

RCOS to honor congregant Jill Haas for volunteerism

Reform Congregation Oheb Sholom

Reform Congregation Oheb Sholom is celebrating a dedicated volunteer once again during Mediterranean Nights at RCOS on Saturday, April 11, at 6:30 p.m.

This year's Ruth & Irvin Balis Volunteer Appreciation Award honoree is Jill Haas, who has been an active RCOS member for more than 20 years.

In her longtime tenure on the Ritual Committee as a member and chairperson, she helped plan programs such as the Purim Spiel, Shabbat by the Stream and Shabbat monthly honors. She played a leading role in the selection process for student cantors.

Her other roles included secretary of Sisterhood for eight years, serving on the Board of Trustees and on the

committee that plans the annual Balis dinner, and doing a great deal to make the annual Food & Cultural Festival a success.

Jill says volunteerism has been important to her since she was a child. When her young family — husband Dr. Michael Haas and sons Derian and Tristan — moved to Berks County in 2001, she wasted little time getting involved in RCOS.

"I grew up knowing it was important to volunteer in community, school and



religious organizations after watching my mother participate in many of these things," she said. "Volunteering at RCOS was a natural fit. I was asked to join the Ritual Committee shortly after our arrival in town and have been on that committee ever since. I am in my second stint as committee chair.

"Over the years, I have participated on many committees and boards that interested me including the Temple Board, Religious School, Food Festival, Sisterhood and the Balis Committee. I think the secret is the people. When you enjoy spending time with the people on your committee, it is easy to volunteer.

The Food Festival is a particular favorite.

"I love the Food Festival and have been running the apple cake sales with Holly Michelson for decades," she said. "Although it is a long weekend with setup and sales, I love how our congregation comes together for the event and the huge support we get from the Berks County community.

"I am also clearly passionate about temple ritual and helping to create an enjoyable and spiritual experience for all

our religious services."

All of this work is in recognition of the crucial role the congregation plays for so many.

"It is about two things: community and spirituality," Jill said in explaining the importance of RCOS to her and the community. "Our religious services fit my spiritual needs and I think Rabbi Michelson is an integral part of that. When our boys were younger, the Religious School was extremely important not only for the Jewish education, but also for establishing bonds of friendship with other Jewish families.

"I feel that strong sense of community every time I attend a Shabbat service, committee meeting or Sisterhood event."

Join RCOS in paying tribute to Jill's tremendous work by sending your RSVP to attend the Mediterranean-themed dinner on April 11.

The event starts at 6:30. Cost per person is \$40. Smart casual attire is requested. RSVP by March 25 by visiting www.ohebsholom.org or by mailing a check to the RCOS office.

Learn more by calling 610-375-6034.

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Growth and wealth preservation

By Howard Blanck
Senior Resources

Before retiring from public education, I developed and taught a personal finance course to hundreds of high school seniors. I was pleasantly surprised to find that a few actually listened and applied the concepts in beneficial ways! To put it bluntly it is often a different story with adults, especially those with substantial assets.

In the course of my career in helping people with their finances here are just a few examples of some situations I have encountered:

1. One family won over \$1 million in a lottery and lost all of it in a year.
2. Another family had seven figures invested in the stock market and lost nearly half of it in the 2008 financial meltdown.
3. Another family simply had no

investments at all, but had 16 whole life insurance policies. I was able to help them recover in excess of \$110,000 in cash value that they otherwise would not have received, not to mention they no longer had to pay the premiums and the list goes on and on. This brings us to the fundamental question: where is the best place to invest for both growth and safety?

Many seasoned investors will tell you without hesitation to look to various aspects of the stock market, but is it? Before going any further, I should mention I have studied it and invested in various aspects of it for over 45 years, but not for retirement. Why not? Because there are too many pitfalls, and at the top of the list is risk.

Memories are short and right now the market is very high, but in 2000 the tech

bubble burst, in 2001 we had 9/11 and the downslide that followed. In 2008 we had the national financial meltdown, in 2020 the COVID-19 pandemic and some further downside in 2022 and 2023.

History also shows a severe downturn can take years or even decades to recover. No one knows when or even if this will happen or when it could drop again. Win or lose you still may have fees to pay, current taxes and issues with how to pay for a nursing home situation and more. Reality should become clear, and these are just a few of the problems that exist. Is there a solution? Yes!

There is a way to follow the markets, but only when they rise without current taxes, upfront fees or risk. You may even get up to 12% added to your account on the first day and much more.

When presenting these concepts to groups or individuals, I often hear "this sounds too good to be true". My response is maybe it isn't "too good to be true" but maybe what you have is so bad.

On Tuesday, March 17, at the Jewish Federation we will present a free program on these and other concepts to help you safely grow and protect your wealth without risk, current taxes and other issues. We will also discuss what is really going on with your life insurance policies and other forms of insurance. We will even show you a method to get a guaranteed monthly income that you can't outlive!

There will be refreshments at 9:30 a.m. and the program will start at 10 at the JCC. We will answer all of your questions and concerns in an informal and friendly manner.

**GROWTH & WEALTH
WITH HOWARD BLANCK OF SENIOR
RESOURCES**

Some of the topics we will discuss:

What is really going on in the stock market and how you can be affected by fees, taxes and other expenses	How the medicaid spend down works
where you can invest without fear of loss and still make more than stock market-related investments over time	Do I need life insurance, health insurance, long-term care, and how can I get huge savings?

How to accumulate and protect your wealth

Tuesday, March 17
9:30 - 10:45 am at JCC
Registration is required through JFR website and email

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20-23**

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Wednesday | April 1

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PREPARE NOW FOR YOM HASHOAH

Let all future generations sing this song,
We are here!

These are lyrics of The Partisans' Song/ Zog Nit Ken Mol. The words were written in the Vilna Ghetto in the midst of the Holocaust. We are here, but six million Jews, including one and one-half million children, did not survive the Shoah. We remember them on Yom HaShoah. Holocaust Remembrance Day will be April 14 this year. It corresponds with the Hebrew date 27 Nisan, when the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising began.

One way to remember the lives lost is to light a Yellow Candle. These Yellow Candles, a project of the Federation of Jewish Men's Clubs, recall the yellow star Jews were made to wear by the Nazi regime. By lighting these lights, we make their lives an important part of our lives. By displaying these lights in our windows, as Hanukkahs in the window are a public display of the miracle of Hanukkah, we publicize the miracle of Jewish survival. By making charitable contributions to fund these candles, we help ensure their lives will not be forgotten by maintaining our synagogue, saying, "We are here!"

Please support this Yom HaShoah remembrance by ordering one or more Yellow Candles. You may request to have the candle(s) delivered to your home by Sunday, April 19, or you may pick the candle(s) up at Keshar Zion Synagogue after Passover.

You may use the order form below.

Yellow Candle Order Form

I would like to remember the Shoah by lighting a Yellow Candle.

Name _____

Number of candles _____

I will pick up at Keshar Zion Synagogue, 555 Warwick Drive

Please deliver to my home _____

Donation (suggested minimum \$18/candle) _____

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Chabad activities included, clockwise from top left:
An evening of Jewish music to honor the legacy of Rabbi Eli Lipsker, father of Rabbi Yosef Lipsker and a pioneer of bringing Jewish and chassidic music to the world. Dan Pardo and Ari Lipsker provided beautiful music for the event.

With the great snowstorm of 2026 forcing Chabad Hebrew School to close, Chabad International organized a Zoom meeting with the many kids affected all over the U.S. participating and enjoying a morning of learning. These pictures depict some of our students here in Reading.

Chabad hosted a CHS Tu B'Shvat Shabbat dinner, with the Shivat Haminim, the 7 "kinds" being incorporated in to all the dishes served. The warm, festive atmosphere included singing and dancing.



Please Join Us on Friday,
March 20, 2026 for
Kabbalat Shabbat
6:30PM at Keshet Zion
Synagogue 555 Warwick
Drive Wyomissing, Pa.
19610

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

Concerns raised over treatment of Holocaust survivors

Jewish Federations of North America

A new national study finds that aging service providers are missing an essential skill for serving thousands of Holocaust survivors and other older adults with a history of trauma, as the vast majority of organizations lack capacity to use a Person-Centered, Trauma-Informed (PCTI) approach.

The study arrived days before International Holocaust Remembrance Day, which fell on Jan. 27 — the date the Auschwitz concentration camp was liberated in 1945.

Without a PCTI framework, survivors and other trauma-impacted older adults can be unintentionally re-traumatized while seeking services—particularly as the effects of trauma can intensify with age.

“While 67% of organizations serving Holocaust survivors reported having high capacity to utilize the PCTI approach, only 39% of aging services organizations overall actually demonstrated the same,” said Shelley Rood Wernick, Associate Vice President of the Center on Aging, Trauma, and Holocaust Survivor Care at Jewish Federations of North America (the Center).

The 2025 study, conducted by Jewish Federations’ Center for Aging, Trauma, and Holocaust Survivor Care, presents new data on aging services organizations’ readiness to serve trauma-impacted populations. Findings are detailed in the report *Compassionate Care in America: Results from the National Study on the Person-Centered, Trauma-Informed Approach*.

Building on lessons learned from working with Holocaust survivors, PCTI care is a holistic approach that promotes

health and well-being by recognizing the lifelong impact of trauma, resisting re-traumatization and strengthening the agency, dignity, and resilience of individuals receiving care.

“Knowledge of how trauma impacts people as they age is crucial,” Wernick said. “If we miss this connection, services are at best underutilized—and at worst, they can re-traumatize the very people we are trying to help.”

The study was researched and written by Hayley Bunting-Herzog, Senior Manager, Vanessa Rubenstein, Manager, and Carmel Rabin, Director of Research and Evaluation at the Center.

“The findings demonstrate encouraging growth in the adoption of the PCTI approach across the aging services sector,” Rabin said. “At the same time, they underscore the need for further investment to ensure all aging services organizations are equipped to provide trauma-informed care to all aging Americans.”

Research cited in the study suggests nearly 90% of American adults have experienced at least one traumatic event in their lifetime. Lessons learned from serving Holocaust survivors can be applied to help all older adults who have experienced trauma.

Key findings:
• Just over half of surveyed organizations (53%) reported a high or very high understanding of how trauma impacts Holocaust survivors, while 44% reported moderate, low, or no understanding.

• Sixty-seven percent of organizations serving Holocaust survivors reported

deep capacity to use the PCTI approach, while 33% did not.

• Seventy-six percent of organizations reported that the PCTI approach was integrated into care for Holocaust survivors, while 26% said it was not.

The study shows that investing in PCTI care capacity delivers results. Center-funded organizations demonstrated significantly higher capacity:

• Ninety-two percent of Center-funded organizations reported using the PCTI approach when serving Holocaust

survivors, compared to 67% of non-Center-funded organizations.

• Ninety-one percent of Center-funded organizations reported deep capacity to provide PCTI care to Holocaust Survivors, compared to 55% of non-Center-funded organizations.

With renewed funding from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services’ Administration for Community Living, the Center is awarding new grants across the country to increase capacity for PCTI services.





Donation Drive for Berks Encore Winter 2026

The Keshet Zion Social Action Committee is partnering with Berks Encore on a donation drive to collect items from their Wish List.

Berks Encore delivers Meals on Wheels, has 6 senior centers with daily health and wellness activities, provides Medicare Counseling, and offers grocery shopping services, well checks and friendly visits.

Office Supplies:

- Manilla Folders
- Pens
- Highlighters
- Rubber Bands
- Scotch Tape
- Staples
- Paper Clips
- Copy Paper
- Envelopes

Kitchen Supplies:

- Trash Bags
- Disposable Aprons
- Disposable Hair Nets
- Cans of Regular/Decaf Coffee
- Paper Plates
- Plastic Utensils
- Thermal Cups (non-Styrofoam preferred)

Cleaning Supplies:

- Disinfectant Spay
- Clorox Wipes
- Paper Towels
- Disposable Gloves

Additional Items:

- Tissues
- Toilet Paper
- Gas Gift Cards
- Grocery Gift Cards
- Craft Supplies
- Puzzle/Activity Books
- Android Tablets (contact us for specific details)

Donation drop-off will be in Keshet Zion Synagogue at **555 Warwick Drive, Wyomissing** from **February 9, 2026** through **March 20, 2026**. Please place your donations in the black bin located in the lobby of the building. Thank you for helping us with this mitzvah project!

If you have any questions, please call the KZ office at (610) 374-1763 or email us at keshetzionoffice@gmail.com



Chabad of Berks County Presents:

WOMEN’S TRIP TO LAKEWOOD, NJ FOR PASSOVER SHOPPING!

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SUNDAY, MARCH 8TH

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RETURN BY 8 PM

**RESERVE YOUR SEAT ONLINE:
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COMMUNITY MINYAN

Please help Keshet 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 Keshet Zion
7:00 - 7:20 PM
555 Warwick Drive**

**March 5
March 19**

**For more information,
contact the Keshet Zion office at
610.374.1763
keshetzionoffice@gmail.com**

Words have consequences, especially when you are Jewish

By Marcia Bronstein
Director, American Jewish Committee Philadelphia/Southern New Jersey
The following column appeared in the Philadelphia Inquirer.
 In January a Pittsburgh-area man admitted in federal court that he made an online antisemitic threat to a public official.

“Go back to Israel or better yet, exterminate yourself and save us the trouble,” Edward Owens Jr. wrote on Facebook Messenger, adding, “we will not stop until your kind is nonexistent.”

This was not some random act — it is part of a larger issue of rising political violence and an example of what many Jews encounter when they turn on their phones or scroll through their feeds.

American Jewish Committee’s just-released State of Antisemitism in America 2025 Report lays bare the scope of the problem. Online is where American Jews experience antisemitism the most, with 73% seeing or hearing antisemitic content or being personally targeted.

Of those who experienced online antisemitism, 54% found it on Facebook — up seven points from 2024 — while 38% experienced it on YouTube. That is an especially alarming number given it demonstrates an 11-point jump from the year before. Instagram and TikTok also saw concerning increases in reported antisemitic content.

What were once quiet murmurings are now getting very loud. Words matter. AJC’s report found that 55% of American Jews are altering their behavior out of fear of antisemitism. That includes the 39% who are not posting content online that could

identify them as Jewish or reveal their views on Jewish issues.

It’s self-censorship as a means of self-preservation. You don’t know who is reading or who may be triggered by what you post. The *Pittsburgh Jewish Chronicle* reported that the FBI examined Owens’s phone and found searches tied to antisemitism and “Pittsburgh Jews.”

Owens also texted a friend that he was “ready to hunt down Jews for extermination.” Those may have just been the words of a bitter man who felt Jews were to blame for everything lacking in his life. But Owens also owned several guns, including a 9mm pistol FBI agents found in his truck with hundreds of rounds of ammunition.

We don’t know whether Owens’ words would have turned into violence — the online threats and gun charges were handled separately in this case. However, we also don’t have the luxury of parsing whether someone is merely spewing venom to put a scare into people or is contemplating something more sinister.

Either way, it has an impact. AJC’s report found that 21% of American Jews who experienced antisemitism online felt physically threatened by these incidents.

Put yourself in the shoes of the official who received Owens’ message. Chances are you’ll be rattled by what you read and contact the authorities, who are better equipped to hunt down cowards like Owens who use online aliases. Then you’ll have a better idea of what it’s like to be an American Jew in 2026.

Jews in America had long been insulated from violent antisemitism.

It was something that happened elsewhere. Then, the 2018 Tree of Life synagogue massacre in Pittsburgh where 11 people were murdered changed that and precipitated hundreds of incidents in which Jews have been targeted simply for being Jewish.

Last April, Gov. Josh Shapiro’s residence was torched on the second

night of Passover. As with the Owens case, this is what public officials who are also publicly Jewish are currently facing.

Owens is a sorry footnote in this spasm of hate. He will rightfully be forgotten after he is sentenced in April. But what we can’t forget is that he has plenty of company. Jewish or not, that should worry us all.

Jewish Federation of Reading/Berks

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5:30 PM

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SISTERS OF FORTUNE
 ESTHER CHEHEBAR

AUTHOR OF: SISTERS OF FORTUNE

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Join us for an evening with Esther Chehebar, author of *Sisters of Fortune*! Esther will be leading a discussion of her novel as well as signing & selling copies during the event.

QR code: VISIT THE FEDERATION WEBSITE

Jewish Book Council | Jewish Federation of Reading/Berks | DoubleTree by Hilton

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Contributions as of Feb. 12

Jewish Federation

In memory of:
Susan Ansell - Joel and Marsha Adelman

Jewish Family Service

In memory of:
Marilyn Orlin - Andy and Corinne Wernick
Susan Ansell - Andy and Corinne Wernick
Sol Deutsch - Judy Synnamon

Yvonne Oppenheimer Fund for Community Engagement

In honor of:
Rebecca Bub's engagement - Debbie, David, Scott, Mark and Abby Goldberg

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- 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 Fund for Adult Programming
- Evelyn Thompson Fund
- Yvonne Frey Oppenheimer Fund for Community Engagement

CHAZZ ADEN CONSTITUENT SERVICES ADVISOR



MARCH 5 2:00 P.M.
at the JCC, 1100 Berkshire Blvd Wyomissing

Chazz Aden, Constituent Services Advisor to Rep. Johanny Cepeda-Freytiz of the 129th Legislative District, will discuss ways their office helps constituents deal with state government. Chazz will speak about property tax/rent rebates and unclaimed property and answer any questions.

To RSVP call 610-921-0624

info@jfreading.org

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

ISRAEL'S HUMANITARIAN AID TO GAZA

BY MORAN SHALEV

Come to hear firsthand about the work that was done on the Humanitarian aid that was sent from Israel to Gaza

12:00 pm
Wednesday, April 15, 2026
READING JCC
1100 BERKSHIRE BLVD., STE. 125, WYOMISSING

Stay tuned for more information and registration

Jewish Federation of Reading/Berks

HOW CAN YOU HELP?

Jewish Family Service is grateful to our committed volunteers!

Here are some ways that you can help:

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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

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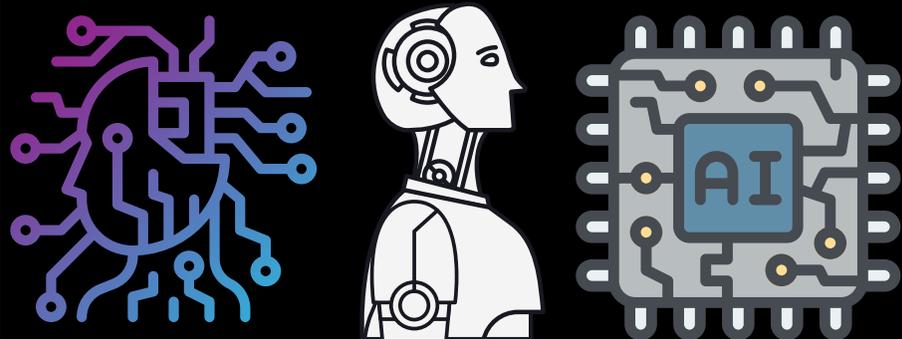


Contact Us

Carole Robinson at 610-921-0624



Jewish Federation of Reading/Berks



RCOS Member Dr. Leamor Kahanov
Provost + Senior Vice President
Alvernia University

"Can We Put the AI Genie Back in the Bottle?"

Friday, March 27 at 7:00 pm
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