

TOLEDO Jewish News

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JFGT's Robin Isenberg connects with family, witnesses on trip of a lifetime to Israel

SARAH READDEAN | THE BLADE

A work trip for a Sylvania Township resident turned into the trip of a lifetime, a family reunion, and a part of history.

"I got to go to my cousin's husband's funeral and be with my family at a time when it's life altering and it's history, it's a historic moment," said Robin Isenberg, vice president of operations for the Jewish Federation and Foundation of Greater Toledo.

Ms. Isenberg's third cousin was married to Col. Asaf Hamami, the highest-ranking Israel Defense Forces officer whose body was taken to Gaza on Oct. 7, 2023, when Hamas launched a surprise attack on Israel.

More than two years later, as part of the October cease-fire agreement, his body was returned Nov. 2 to the country — and Ms. Isenberg and her mother just happened to be there at the end of a recent trip.

Col. Hamami was commander of the IDF's Southern Brigade in the Gaza Strip. When Hamas invaded, "he went down there to see what was going on, and he got down there and said, it's a war. And he actually was the one that declared war to the people up north," her mother, Rhoda Miller, said.

He was killed, and family members spent the last two years wondering when his body would be returned. They honestly didn't think it would, Ms. Isenberg said.

Their family is from Romania. Ms. Miller's grandmother came to America in the early 1900s, and her youngest brother survived the Holocaust and moved to Israel. Ms. Miller connected with her cousins about 10 years ago.

"There's a Jewish expression, 'bashert,' God just made it happen," said Ms. Miller, who is the membership and community outreach coordinator at Congregation B'nai Israel. "This is God planning this. You make plans and God laughs."

Stephen Rothschild, CEO of the Jewish Federation, said it's common for people visiting Jerusalem to run into someone they may have a connection to.

"To me, it's not surprising that something like that happened," Mr. Rothschild said. "It's those kinds of experiences that happen a lot, and I think in part because the Jewish world is so small. When you're on a trip like that, you come to realize it."

ISRAEL | CONTINUED ON PAGE 2



▲ Robin Isenberg, left, and Rhoda Miller stand with a flag for Col. Asaf Hamami in Robin's office. The colonel, their cousin's husband, was killed Oct. 7, 2023 by Hamas. | Photo Abby Hoicowitz



▲ (L to R) Saphir Zohav Hamami, Rhoda Miller, Robin Isenberg, and Dorit Zohav Erlich, in Israel. | Photo courtesy of Robin Isenberg



▲ IDF Chief Eyal Zamir speaks at Col. Asaf Hamami's funeral in Israel on Nov. 4. | Photo courtesy of Robin Isenberg



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An Israeli partnership

Ms. Isenberg took a two-week trip to Israel at the end of October to participate in the Partnership2Gether HaTikvah Summit 2025. It was her first time visiting the country.

A program of the Jewish Agency for Israel, P2G is a people-to-people project that connects Israelis with U.S. communities, Mr. Rothschild said. The Jewish Federation of Greater Toledo has been involved with the partnership for decades, he said.

The local federation is one of 17 Jewish communities in the United States, the Jewish community in Budapest, and two municipalities in northern Israel involved with P2G of Western Galilee. The program builds connections between the communities through cultural, social, medical, educational, and economic programs.

People from Israel have visited Toledo and other partnered communities to share their own experiences and form friendships. Children in local synagogues’ religious schools exchange letters with children in Israel. The partnership helped fund a new facility in one of its sister Israeli cities, where portions of the summit were held. The cities also send members of their communities on mission to Israel.

“It’s so hard for Americans of any faith or any background to really know

and understand citizens of another country, unless you have real personal relationships,” Mr. Rothschild said.

While representing Toledo’s Jewish community in the northwestern Israeli cities of Nahariya and Akko, Ms. Isenberg and her mother visited kibbutzim, or agricultural settlements; met with schoolchildren; did volunteer work, and met American and Canadian soldiers training to enter the IDF.

“We heard all kinds of stories about what people’s experiences were like. We painted with kids in a school. We visited bilingual schools where there’s Arab children and [Jewish] children,” Ms. Isenberg said. She noted that the trip helped her see firsthand why the partnership is so important to having a global Jewish identity, supporting one another, and making a difference in Israel.

“To gain an on-the-ground understanding and to see the people that we work with in their working environment, to understand the challenges that they face ... those are meaningful and important connections and experiences,” Mr. Rothschild said.

The sites of Oct. 7

There was an add-on for the trip to spend time in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv. One day was dedicated to seeing sites related to the Oct. 7 attacks.

The mother and daughter saw the Kfar Aza kibbutz that was attacked, as well as Re’im, where the Nova Music



▲ Col. Asaf Hamami’s grave after his body was returned to Israel. | Photo courtesy of Robin Isenberg

Festival took place.

“We saw the devastation. It’s still sitting there. The homes are burned out. There’s bullet holes in everything,” Ms. Isenberg said.

“Signs out in front that said so-and-so and so-and-so were murdered here,” her mother added.

They heard stories from people who were there and saw memorials dedicated to those who were killed and kidnapped that day. Ms. Isenberg said she went inside the dumpster where children hid and saw the debris that was left.

From the kibbutz, which remains mostly empty, they could even see Gaza in the distance.

“We know all about what’s going on in Gaza,” Ms. Miller said. “We forget that there’s a lot of destruction and stuff that happened in the north.”

People in the northern parts of Israel on the border with Lebanon, where their trip started, had to evacuate their homes, and those who have gone back have since increased security.

“They are rebuilding, but I don’t think they have any intention of taking down those desecrated [sites] for a while. I think they want to keep them there so that people can see. It’s real-life testimony as to what happened,” Ms. Isenberg said.

After seeing Kibbutz Re’im, they went to where burned and shot-out cars of people trying to escape were stacked. Ms. Isenberg compared it to a junkyard.

Ms. Isenberg said she didn’t feel unsafe visiting those places.

“It was kind of scary because that’s how those people felt on Oct. 7,” she said. “They were dancing at a music festival, going about their business, it was a holiday, in their kibbutz, and out of the sky drops terror.”

But as a Jew in America, “I’m more afraid to be in Toledo, Ohio, on this campus, than I am to be on the streets of Tel Aviv,” Ms. Isenberg said.

Her mother urged others not to be afraid to visit Israel.

“It’s a peaceful place,” Ms. Isenberg agreed. “They don’t want war and they want to live quietly.”

Family connections

Ms. Isenberg booked the pair an extra day of the trip. They had nothing to do — until the opportunity of a lifetime presented itself.

On Nov. 2, they visited Hostages Square in Tel Aviv. Ms. Miller was standing in front of Col. Hamami’s picture, saying the Jewish prayer for the dead. They were awaiting his body to come back and buying necklaces that said “tikvah,” or hope, in Hebrew, just as his body was on its way back.

“While we’re standing in Hostage Square, we look at each other with chills,” Ms. Miller said, because they realized why their cousin Dorit Zohav Erlich, the colonel’s mother-in-law, couldn’t have dinner with them that night.

“She sent us a second message that says, ‘I hope you’re not mad at me, but the reason we’re not having dinner is because Asaf’s body has been returned to Israel,’” Ms. Isenberg recalled Tuesday from the Jewish Federation offices in Sylvania.

They were invited to the funeral. As “mishpachah,” or family, they were able to get through security and sit in the family section, right behind the officer’s wife and children.

“There were thousands of troops and people because this guy was a national hero,” Ms. Miller said.

Israeli President Isaac Herzog came up to the two of them and gave his condolences in Hebrew. They also saw former Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant and IDF Chief Eyal Zamir.

“There are these ministers of defense, these colonels, the secretary of the army, with tears running down their cheeks, doing a eulogy. We had no idea what they were saying, but we knew it was very sad,” Ms. Miller said. “It was so beautiful that we were there.”

Col. Hamami’s mother-in-law wrapped herself in a flag honoring him during the funeral. She offered it to her American relatives to take home, and it now hangs in Ms. Isenberg’s office.

“Of course it’s special because it’s family,” Ms. Isenberg said. “But if it weren’t for the Jewish Federation and its commitment to Israel and its commitment to Jews all over the world and making connections and the partnership, we would not have even been in Israel.”

This article first appeared in The Blade, where the author is a features writer. It is republished here with permission.

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Q&A with local artist Cyd Gottlieb

Cyd Gottlieb is a multidisciplinary artist based in Toledo, Ohio whose work centers on creative problem-solving through experiential, visual, and interpretive programming. Her abstract style, developed during recovery from

a spinal cord injury, serves as a medium for processing emotions and bodily sensations. Gottlieb's art explores introspective healing, using layers of paint and mixed media to guide viewers through a visual journey that evolves with each piece.

Career highlights include a recent two-person show at River House Arts (OH), the Ohio Arts Council ADAP grant award for 2025, a residency fellowship with Penland School of Craft (NC), and contributions to cultural texts published by Harvard University Press. Her work is part of the Sanda Findley Collector's Corner at the Toledo Museum of Art (OH), and artworks are also currently carried by COOP Gallery (TN) and Wavelength Space (TN). A self-taught artist, Gottlieb holds a BA in Hispanic Language and Literatures from Boston University.

Toledo Jewish News (TJN) recently spoke to Cyd about her inspiration,

approach, and more.

TJN: What inspired the idea of Dreidels in Bagels? It's such a fun and unexpected pairing.

Cyd Gottlieb: On my end, the pairing seems natural. Last year, leading into the third annual Local Artists' Holiday Trunk Show (organized by the Arts Commission with the Libbey House Foundation), I decided to experiment with new materials and try a change in stylistic approach. Looking to explore product design and celebrate my Jewish culture during the Christmas season, I made some dreidels out of clay and hand-shaped some stands. Thanks to the texture of the kind of modeling clay that I used, or maybe because of the stand's organic shape, I fell headfirst into the obvious everything bagel. People would ask me where I had seen that idea before... and I'd say, "Me?" Some friends offered to help trademark the idea, and a design patent is pending.

TJN: What was it like to see Dreidels in Bagels sell out twice, and how has that shaped how you approach your art now?

CG: It was really surprising to receive that gush of support for my studio work as I simultaneously ventured into a full-time practice. I had just received an Ohio Arts Council project grant to bridge

my abstract visual works with autobiographical storytelling/narrative, and Dreidels in Bagels developed in parallel. Enthusiasm from various communities helped me to recognize that I could share cultural perspectives more openly and with confidence. So, in anticipation of my fourth Local Artists' Trunk Show, I landed another project grant that funded one season's production of Dreidels in Bagels. If able to sustain year-round production (for a line that continues to be hand-shaped), then maybe a Judaica genre unfolds.

TJN: How important is it for you to root your work in community, both locally in Toledo and beyond?

CG: I didn't expect to find comfort and stay, upon returning to my hometown; however, my work grows because of my roots. It's essential to understand challenges and embrace contemporary moments.

TJN: How do you envision your art evolving in the next few years? Are there new mediums or collaborations you're excited about exploring?

CG: Coming out of this dreidel

DREIDELS | CONTINUED ON PAGE 25

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TOLEDO Jewish News



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Books, Authors, and Big Ideas: Annual NW Ohio Book Festival Begins

In October and November, more than 100 guests attended Jewish Federation of Greater Toledo's (JFGT) 21st Annual NW Ohio Book Festival featuring authors Rob Kutner ("The Jews: 5,000 Years and Counting"), Robert Steinfeld ("3...2...1...We're On the Air"), and Sam Bierstock ("Full Circle").

One book festival event remains this year: Thursday, December 4 (7 p.m.) featuring **"Tiny Pep Talks: Bite-Size Encouragement for Life's Annoying, Stressful, and Flat-Out Lousy Moments"** by Paula Skaggs and Josh Linden. The cost is \$18 per person (includes appetizers and drinks) or \$40 per person (includes book, appetizers, and drinks). For safety reasons, the location will be shared with attendees prior to the event. Read more about Skaggs, Linden, and their new book at jewishtoledo.nwojewishbookfestival25. Register online at form.jotform.com/jewishtoledo/jfgtprograms or with Sherry Majewski at 419-724-0351 or sherry@jewishtoledo.org.



▲ Rob Kutner



▲ Sam Bierstock



▲ Sam Bierstock signs books after his presentation.



▲ Justin Feldkamp interviews Robert Steinfeld



▲ Friends greet each other at event with author Sam Bierstock.



▲ Rob Kutner meets with community members.



▲ More than 60 guests gathered for author Robert Steinfeld's visit.

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Received between October 11-November 10, 2025

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In Celebration of Joel & Linda Beren's 45th Wedding Anniversary and both of their Birthdays
• Dr. Eli Abramson and Ms. Nora Romanoff

In Memory of David Weinberg

In Memory of Marcia Hess

In Celebration of Maureen Glasser's Special Birthday

In Memory of Barry Fishler

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• Mr. and Mrs. Joel Beren

In Honor of Nora Romanoff's Special Birthday

• Mrs. Marla Levine and Ms. Sandy Romanoff & Mr. Joe Greenberg

In Honor of Paul Goldner's Special Birthday

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In Celebration of Nora Romanoff's Special Birthday
• Mr. and Mrs. Fred Treuhaft

Ruth Fajerman-Markowicz Holocaust Resource Center Fund

In Honor of Hindea Markowicz speaking at the Genealogy Fair at the main library
• Toledo Lucas County Public Library

JFGT financial assistance and cancellation policies for programs

Financial assistance for programs

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We understand that each person's financial situation is different, and cost can be a barrier for participation in various activities. We don't want program fees to be an obstacle for you or your family to attend our events or participate in our programs. Assistance is available and confidential. For more information, please contact Ben at 419-724-0408 or ben@jewishtoledo.org.

JEWISH FEDERATION & FOUNDATION OF GREATER TOLEDO'S CANCELLATION POLICY

The Jewish Federation & Foundation of Greater Toledo (JFGT) cancellation policy is established to ensure a fair and transparent process for participants who need to cancel their registration for JFGT events. Our primary goal is to accommodate all participants while managing the logistical aspects of each event efficiently. This policy will generally apply to JFGT events unless otherwise stated in connection with the registration for the event.

POLICY:

Participants who wish to cancel their registration for any events must do so by 48 hours prior to the event. Cancellations made after this date may result in forfeiture of the registration fee.

To cancel your registration for any event, please send an email to sherry@jewishtoledo.org with the subject line "Cancellation: [Your Name]". Include your full name, registration information, and a brief reason for the cancellation in the email.

Make sure to send the cancellation request before the 48-hour deadline. Cancellations made on or before the 48-hour deadline are eligible for a full refund of the registration fee.

Cancellations made after the 48-hour deadline may not be eligible for a refund. However, Jewish Federation & Foundation of Greater Toledo may consider exceptional circumstances on a case-by-case basis.

If you are unable to attend any Federation-sponsored event after the cancellation deadline has passed, you may nominate a substitute participant at no additional cost. Please notify Sherry Majewski (sherry@jewishtoledo.org or 419-724-0351) of the substitution at least 24 hours before the event.

Participants who do not attend events without providing prior notice will not be eligible for any refunds or substitutions.

If any event is canceled by the Jewish Federation & Foundation of Greater Toledo due to circumstances beyond our control, such as a natural disaster, pandemic, or other unforeseen events, we will make every effort to reschedule. If rescheduling is not possible, participants will receive a full refund of the registration fee. Jewish Federation & Foundation of Greater Toledo is not responsible for any additional costs incurred by participants, such as travel or accommodation expenses.

Jewish Federation & Foundation of Greater Toledo reserves the right to amend this cancellation policy at any time. Participants will be notified of any changes via email or through our official website.

By registering for any events sponsored by Jewish Federation & Foundation of Greater Toledo, participants acknowledge that they have read and understood this cancellation policy and agree to abide by its terms and conditions.

JFGT 2025 Holiday Office Closures:

Date	Day of Week	Holiday	Office Hours
December 24, 2025	Wednesday	Christmas Eve	Close at 1 p.m.
December 25, 2025	Thursday	Christmas	Closed
December 31, 2025	Wednesday	New Year's Eve	Close at 1 p.m.

Time Change

The office closes at 3:30 p.m. Fridays now through March 7, 2026.

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Happy Tears

LAUREN SACHS

When my husband died in August of 2020, I struggled to find an answer when people posed the familiar question: “How are you?” Initially, I felt I had to provide an answer that would make my interlocutor feel at ease, saying things like, “I’m OK. Thank you for asking.”

My nephew became a bar mitzvah just a few months later, and I distinctly recall Brad’s brother asking me this very question at the subsequent celebration. My answer was as direct and honest as possible: “Please don’t ask me that question; I don’t want to ruin your party.” In other words, at the height of my grief when people made genuine inquiries about my well-being, I knew that the most truthful answer was not socially acceptable, and certainly not something I could discuss at a family simcha. At some point, my answer became a compromise of sorts, offering a bit of insight about my family’s well-being while also shielding the questioner from too much behind-the-scenes drama. I would often say, “My girls are doing really well, so I guess I must be doing alright, too.” Eventually, as I worked on healing from my grief, I felt comfortable saying: “I am doing as well as I can.”

Once I started attending a spousal

loss support group through hospice, I learned that I was not alone in struggling to find the right way to address this commonplace question. Many in the group felt compelled to hide their pain and answer the question with a plastered smile. Some who were bereaved chose to avoid social outings altogether, too worried about how they would be perceived, or too exhausted from grief to even consider such scenarios. Often we discussed the challenge of finding ways to balance our need for connection with the worry of either burdening friends and family or being met with a blank stare. For all these reasons, many participants spoke about how the group was one of the few places they could show up as their most authentic selves - a setting where they could allow themselves to feel unburdened and inherently understood.

As I began to consider the hustle and bustle of the holidays this year,

I thought about how many people struggle with their mental health throughout the season. Though it is a time of celebration and happiness for many, it can also be a fraught time for those who are dealing with financial stress, the loss of a loved one, or who lack a solid system of social support. It occurred to me that anyone who is managing these or other burdens may feel as I once did when well-meaning people make such innocuous inquiries. Obviously, it may not always be safe or appropriate to open up about our stressors. At the same time, I believe that our society has made significant progress in helping people feel comfortable discussing emotional difficulties. As a mental health professional and someone who has experienced profound grief, I am grateful for the destigmatization of mental health challenges that has arisen through awareness campaigns, conversation on social media, and even the personal disclosures of various

celebrities and public figures. As the secular year draws to a close, it feels like a critical juncture and an ideal time to ask that most basic question of yourself: “How are you?” Even if you cannot be as open as you would like with those in your orbit, it is imperative that each of us take stock of where we are and conduct an honest self-assessment about how we are feeling and doing. If you are able to find a safe haven where you can unburden yourself and get emotional sustenance from others, even better. Perhaps that sanctuary will come in the form of a support group, a close friend, a therapist, a yoga studio, a family member, a clergy person, or a significant other. No matter where you find that refuge, I believe that establishing, or building upon, those relationships is the true gift of the season. With the end of 2025 approaching, here are my New Year wishes for you: the inner peace that comes from finding self-trust, the hope that you will connect with those around you, and the chance for you to be your most genuine and authentic self.

Lauren Sachs holds a bachelor’s degree in English and Psychology, and a Master’s Degree in Social Work, from the University of Michigan. After completing advanced clinical training at Yale University, she worked as a therapist and consultant in a variety of settings. During her time in Jewish Toledo, Lauren has received the Harry Levison Young Leadership Award and the Shining Light Award, and is currently serving as the Chair for the 20th Annual NW Ohio Jewish Book Festival. In addition to her involvement within the local Jewish community, Lauren serves as a volunteer for Hospice of Northwest Ohio. She is also the author of a forthcoming book about her late husband, his joyful approach to life and work as an oncologist, and how examining his life helped her better cope with her grief. To learn more about Lauren’s journey and her work on living well after loss, visit www.literally-lauren.com.

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Attorney General commemorates lives lost on October 7

On October 7, 2025, Ohio Attorney General Dave Yost delivered to Jewish Toledo “A Proclamation Commemorating the Israeli Lives Lost on October 7, 2023.”

The Proclamation states, “As Attorney General of the State of Ohio, it is my honor to recognize and commemorate the immense loss on October 7, 2023, to Israel and its families, to honor the victims, and to pray for prosperity, peace, and security for Israel as its people continue to heal and move forward.”



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How Rachel Goldberg-Polin and Jon Polin find grace in their shattered world

CHANAN TIGAY | JTA

This interview first appeared in J. The Jewish News of Northern California, where the author is the editor-in-chief. It is reprinted here with permission.

Rachel Goldberg-Polin and Jon Polin need no introduction. Since their son, Hersh, was kidnapped from the Nova music festival in southern Israel on Oct. 7, 2023, taken hostage in Gaza and, later, murdered by his captors, the American-Israeli couple have become, for many, the personification of an entire nation’s pain.

They didn’t want this. They surely didn’t ask for it. “We’re the manifestation of everybody’s worst nightmare,” Rachel said. And yet, it is precisely that fact, coupled with the almost supernatural grace they have brought to their international advocacy for Israel’s hostages, that helped make Hersh one of the most recognizable faces among the captives and why his death last year hit so hard.

It’s also why Jews have looked to them as exemplars of how to respond to one of the worst periods in Jewish history. Despite all they’ve gone through, and all they continue to endure, Hersh’s parents still see this as a moment of opportunity for cross-cultural connection.

“You’ve got your narrative, we’ve got our narrative,” Jon said. “You’ve suffered, we’ve suffered. You’ve got your Bible that says something. We’ve got our Bible that says something. You’ve got your claims. We’ve got our claims. And you know what? We’re never going to shout each other. Let’s look forward and start right now and dedicate ourselves to something better for all of us. I still feel that way.”

The couple was scheduled to speak recently at the Z3 Conference in Palo Alto, California, near where they lived in Berkeley before moving to Israel in 2008. This interview, conducted by J. Jewish News of Northern California, has been edited for length and clarity.

A lot of people here in the United States, and also in Israel, felt as if they knew Hersh after Oct. 7. Some did, but most of us didn’t. I wonder if you could tell us about him as a person, and what it was like to be his parents.

Rachel Goldberg-Polin: Hersh, obviously, was a curious citizen of the world. “Obviously,” just because that’s really what I’ve come to realize is the most apt way of describing him. He was always hungry for knowledge, but very much outside of the confines of normative learning. So school was not really interesting to



▲ Hersh Goldberg-Polin with his parents, Rachel and Jon, in an undated photograph taken prior to Oct. 7, 2023. | Courtesy Goldberg-Polin family

him. He did enough to get by, but was always an underachiever in school. And yet he was this voracious reader about whatever subject was floating his boat. As a young kid, he was obsessed with geography, obsessed with American presidents, obsessed with Native American history, obsessed with the Civil War.

And as he became a young man — I still think of him as a boy. He was a very young 23. He had just turned 23 on Oct. 3, three days before we said goodbye to him and he went down to the Nova festival. He was obsessed with his favorite soccer club, his Jerusalem Hapoel soccer club. He loved trance music and music festivals, and used them as an opportunity to get to know and meet different people from all over the world. He was very committed to traveling by himself when he went to those festivals, because he said when you travel in a clump, then you stay in a clump. And he wanted to meet people from everywhere.

He was also a real professional listener, which I’ve grown to understand is such a rare gift that is hard to learn. I’m trying to learn it in his memory and as part of his legacy. To train myself to really be with whoever’s speaking and not be thinking, what am I going to say next? What do I want to share? What do I want to say? What do I want to ask? And he was not afraid of having those pauses in between when someone was speaking. He would digest it, and then he would react.

We’ve had so many people come to us in these past two years to tell us about little moments that they had with him that were special, because they really felt heard. And in this time of such challenge in civil discourse everywhere around the

“We take so much strength from so many people around the world who think they’re taking strength from us.”

Jon Polin

world, when the new way of speaking is screaming, it is, I realize now, a unique blessing.

Jon, I saw you recently wearing a T-shirt that had an image of Hersh, and under it the Hebrew phrase “yehi zichrecha mahapeicha” — may your memory be a revolution. What kind of revolution did you have in mind?

Jon: It’s not the revolution of taking to the streets with fires burning. It’s a revolution for good. Hersh really, really — in some ways, naively — wasn’t jaded, and really it’s a revolution for bringing more good to the world. I was walking down the street this summer with my daughter, and a man who we didn’t know stopped me and said, “Hey, Hersh’s dad” — that’s how he referred to me — “can I show you something?” And he shows me that the screensaver on his phone is a picture of Hersh. And he said to me, “Every morning the first thing I do is turn on my phone and look at this picture and say to myself: What can I do today to be better? What can I do today to make the world better?” And right then I said, that’s the greatest legacy a person can have.

Rachel: Hersh still believed in goodness and possibility. But he also was a realist. When he was in high school in 2014, a young Israeli Ethiopian man named Avera Mengistu wandered into Gaza and Hamas took him hostage. Hersh

was 15 years old and he came home and he was beside himself. He couldn’t believe that people were not on the streets advocating for Avera Mengistu. There were four or five people who would stand up on this square at the top of Ben Yehuda Street in Jerusalem a couple times a week, and they reminded me of the people on the UC Berkeley campus lawn who say “No nukes” — like, six people with gray hair and long braids. And then there was a short, dark boy with big, black-framed glasses standing with them. And it was 15-year-old Hersh. [Mengistu was released by Hamas in February.]

The resonance of him being out there as a kid, protesting in the street to bring someone home from Gaza, is quite extraordinary.

Rachel: We said before he was a hostage, he was a hostage advocate.

You’ve become the personification of an entire nation’s trauma. Obviously, you never wanted to be symbols like this, but you are now. Can you talk about what it’s like to have people look to you in this way?

Jon: We talk about this a fair amount, and sometimes wonder, can we just go and escape in privacy somewhere? And the answer is, maybe — but not in Israel. Part of us just wants to do that. But another part of us is saying, this has been thrust upon us, this horrific, terrible

Yad Vashem says it has identified 5 million Holocaust victims: ‘Behind each name is a life that mattered’

The milestone was achieved through the use of artificial intelligence.

BY GRACE GILSON | JTA

Yad Vashem, Israel’s Holocaust memorial, says it has reached a major milestone in its efforts to uncover the identities of all of the Jews murdered in the Holocaust, crossing the 5-million name threshold with the help of AI.

That leaves 1 million names still unknown from the tally of 6 million murdered Jews that is synonymous with the genocide perpetrated by the Nazis during World War II.

Two years ago, Yad Vashem inaugurated a 26.5 foot-long “Book of Names,” which included the names of 4,800,000 victims of the Shoah, at the United Nations headquarters in New York City.

Since then, researchers deployed AI technology and machine learning to analyze hundreds of millions of archival documents that were previously too extensive to research manually, according to Yad Vashem. In addition to covering large amounts of material quickly, the algorithms were taught to look out for



▲ The Hall of Names at the Yad Vashem Holocaust Museum in Jerusalem. | Courtesy Yad Vashem

variations of victims’ names, leading to the new identification of hundreds of thousands of victims.

Yad Vashem estimates an additional 250,000 names could still be recovered using the technology.

“Reaching 5 million names is both a milestone and a reminder of our unfinished obligation,” said Dani Dayan, the chairman of Yad Vashem, in a statement. “Behind each name is a life that mattered — a child who

never grew up, a parent who never came home, a voice that was silenced forever. It is our moral duty to ensure that every victim is remembered so that no one will be left behind in the darkness of anonymity.”

How to contribute to Jewish Federation and Foundation of Greater Toledo



Jewish Federation and Foundation of Greater Toledo is a 501(c)(3) not for profit corporation that gratefully accepts gifts of securities and IRA’s. Most gifts are tax deductible. There is one EIN 34-4428259. Gifts can be made to Jewish Federation (JFGT) to the Annual Campaign or for other unrestricted or designated uses, and gifts can be made to Toledo Jewish Community Foundation (TJCF) for restricted or unrestricted purposes and can include gifts to donor advised funds.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR MAKING GIFTS FROM IRA’S

Jewish Federation of Greater Toledo accepts IRA Charitable Rollover contributions to the Annual Campaign.

Notify your bank/broker of your intentions to contribute with an IRA to Jewish Federation of Toledo (JFGT) or Toledo Jewish Community Foundation (TJCF). IRA contributions must be in the form of a check per the IRS. Please instruct your broker to make a check payable to the Jewish Federation of Greater Toledo, and then notify Yi Shaw, Controller of Jewish Federation of Greater Toledo/Toledo Jewish Community Foundation at 419-724-0371 or via email Yi@JewishToledo.org

org to inform her of the contribution. IRA gifts cannot be used to fund a Donor Advised Fund.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR MAKING GIFTS OF SECURITIES

Jewish Federation of Greater Toledo accepts donations of stock as payment for pledges made to the Annual Campaign and other unrestricted and designated uses.

Stock gifts need to be received by 12 p.m. (noon) on December 30, 2025 in order to sell before the market closes.

When the stock is held by your broker or commercial banker:

Notify your broker of your intentions to donate securities to Jewish Federation of Toledo (JFGT) or Toledo Jewish Community Foundation (TJCF). Your broker should then notify Yi Shaw of Jewish Federation of Greater Toledo/Toledo Jewish Community Foundation at 419-724-0371 or via email at Yi@JewishToledo.org to discuss the details of this transaction. Your broker can contact Charles Schwab or Pershing and provide the following account information to process the transfer:

Charles Schwab – Jewish Federation of Greater Toledo a/c# 2198-2998, DTC #0164, Code 40. A

nominal fee will be charged for stock or mutual funds. Typically, not more than \$10.00.

Pershing – Jewish Federation of Greater Toledo a/c# 33W-261392. Please note: a minimum transaction fee will be charged for all stock transactions. Mutual Funds is a nominal fee.

To ensure faster processing, it is important that your broker submit your full name along with complete stock information to Jewish Federation of Greater Toledo/ Toledo Jewish Community Foundation.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR WIRING FUNDS

Notify your bank/broker of your intentions to perform the wire to Jewish Federation of Toledo (JFGT) or Toledo Jewish Community Foundation (TJCF). Your broker should then notify Yi Shaw of Jewish Federation of Greater Toledo/Toledo

Jewish Community Foundation at 419-724-0371 or via email at Yi@JewishToledo.org to discuss the details of this transaction.

PERSONAL CREDIT CARD & CHECK PAYMENT DEADLINES

Credit card payment information must be received at Jewish Federation of Greater Toledo by 12 Noon Tuesday, December 30, 2025 for 2025 tax purposes. As stated above, **payments by check need only be postmarked December 31, 2025 for 2025 tax purposes, or you can make payments online at www.JewishToledo.org by midnight on December 31, 2025.** Please call the accounting department before 2:00 pm each day at 419-724-0368 to process a credit card payment over the phone, except **December 31, 2025 (by 12 p.m).**



Donate online at www.jewishtoledo.org
Text “CAMPAIGN” to 44321

Donate by check to: Jewish Federation of Greater Toledo, Attention: Wendy Goldstein, 6465 Sylvania Ave., Sylvania, Ohio 43560. Contact Wendy at 419-724-0360

or wendy@jewishtoledo.org. Call Yi at 419-724-0371 or email her at yi@JewishToledo.org for stock or IRA gifts.

Please note that checks need to be post-marked by December 31, 2025 to be a 2025 charitable contribution.



Holiday Season Safety Tips

DAVE TULLIS
Security Director
✉ dave@jewishtoledo.org



The holiday season brings joy, celebration, and a unique set of safety challenges to our homes. As we embrace the festive spirit, it's crucial to stay mindful of the various risks that can compromise our safety and security. This guide aims to equip you with practical holiday safety tips, ensuring your home remains a haven of happiness and security during this bustling period.

Check your fire/smoke detectors

Ensuring the functionality of fire and smoke detectors is a non-negotiable aspect of holiday safety. These devices are critical for early detection of fires, which can escalate quickly amidst holiday decorations and cooking.

During the holiday season, fire departments experience a notable surge in emergency calls, a trend primarily driven by the increased use of candles, elaborate holiday decorations, and cooking-related incidents. Candles, while creating a festive ambiance, are a common source of home fires when left unattended or placed near flammable materials.

Holiday decorations, particularly those involving electrical components like lights, can overheat or short-circuit, leading to fires. Additionally, the bustling nature of holiday cooking often leads to distractions, resulting in unattended stoves and ovens that become fire hazards. This convergence of factors makes the holiday season a critical time for heightened fire safety awareness and vigilance in homes.

To ensure your smoke detectors are functional, routinely test them and replace batteries at least once a year. Ideally, you should try to install smoke detectors in every bedroom, outside sleeping areas, and on each floor of your home, including the basement.

Be careful of porch pirates

The holiday season unfortunately sees a spike in package thefts, making porch pirates a real concern. To protect your deliveries, consider scheduling them when someone is home or use secure delivery options like lockboxes. Another effective deterrent is installing a home security camera.

Even if porch pirates strike, footage from these cameras can aid in recovering your stolen items and preventing future thefts.

If you're traveling, make your home look busy

An unoccupied home can attract unwanted attention from burglars. When traveling, it's key to create an illusion of occupancy. Use light timers to mimic your usual activity patterns and ask a trusted neighbor to collect your mail and packages.

Leaving a car in the driveway and using sound simulators can further enhance this facade of occupancy, keeping intruders at bay.

Get a burglar alarm to prevent holiday theft

Burglar alarms significantly improve your home's defense against break-ins. Criminals often bypass homes with visible alarm systems, opting for easier targets.

Opting for monitored burglar alarm systems can enhance police response times and provide peace of mind. Knowing your home is well-protected allows you to fully immerse yourself in the holiday festivities, free from worry.

Don't post your travel plans online

Social media platforms, while great for sharing life experiences, can inadvertently become tools for burglars scouting for unoccupied homes. When you post about your holiday travels or showcase new, expensive items, it signals to potential thieves that your house is an ideal target. Burglars often use this information to determine not just which homes are empty, but more crucially, those that will remain so for an extended period. This knowledge enables them to plan break-ins with more time and less risk of interruption.

The risk amplifies when you detail the length of your trip or tag locations in real-time, as it confirms your absence and gives burglars a timeframe to operate. Moreover, posts

showing valuable items in your home can entice burglars, combining the lure of unguarded valuables with the certainty of an empty residence.

The simple solution? Limit sharing your holiday plans and acquisitions on social media or at least wait until you are back home. Tightening your profile's privacy settings can also help control who sees your posts. By being mindful of what you share online, you can significantly reduce the risk of making your home a target during the holiday season.

Get your chimney inspected and cleaned

A cozy fire is synonymous with holiday warmth, but a neglected chimney can pose serious risks. A dirty or clogged chimney can lead to fires or carbon monoxide poisoning. Regular inspections and cleanings by professionals ensure your fireplace remains a safe source of holiday cheer. Typically, chimneys should be inspected annually, especially if they're used frequently.

Maintaining a safe and secure home is paramount during the holiday season. By implementing these holiday safety tips, you can enjoy the festive period with an assured sense of security.

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Contact Tim Hagen, Technology Coordinator at Jewish Senior, Family and Social Services, at 419-724-0412 or Tim@jewishtoledo.org

POLIN | CONTINUED FROM PAGE 7

personal tragedy that’s part of a national tragedy that’s part of a global tragedy. And somehow, largely due to Rachel’s eloquence, there are people who are strangely looking to us. And we’re saying we might need to embrace this. Because part of the story is also the lack of clarity, leadership, morality, voices of sanity in the world today. And if somehow, in some small way, we can be a little bit those voices, it’s so important that we need to do it.

Rachel: We all experience loss. It makes us human. It’s a commonality that we all have. What’s different about our experience is that it was so completely public, and that is really scorching. And it is definitely hard, you know? When we go out, we are kind of the trigger for people — we’re the manifestation of everybody’s worst nightmare. That is a sad thing to be. A lot of people see us and they can’t help but cry. And I know that they are coming at it from a place of empathy and love. They’re feeling our pain. But it’s difficult to have that when you’re walking down the street just trying to go wherever your destination is, and to have people crying along the way, whenever they see you.

Jon: To the extent that we, in some way, are offering strength to anybody out there, it’s symbiotic. I’m not asking that people start coming up even more on the streets to say things and hug us, bring things to our apartment. But that stuff that we’ve been experiencing for 751 days has been remarkably strengthening. We buried Hersh 419 days ago, and we continue to be strengthened by the people who come anonymously and leave baked goods by our door every Friday. We take so much strength from so many people around the world who think they’re taking strength from us.

Rachel: Everybody is holding everybody, and I feel like that is where we as the Jewish people are, and have to be, now. And I don’t care if your hair looks that way, and you cover your knees down to here, and you pray with this book, and you don’t pray at all. It doesn’t matter.

It seems that many believe what you’ve endured must afford you special insight into what’s going on in the Middle East. That you’re singularly able to see through the confusion, right into the heart of what’s happening. I’m wondering if the terrible price you’ve paid has given you any particular understanding that’s different from what you understood before Oct. 7.

Jon: We have definitely been, against our wishes, thrust into the underworld of geopolitics and how it works. We watch the news like everybody else, and we read newspapers like everybody else, and we now understand that there’s the story that we all look at and hear

and are told, and [then there are] the things we see out there every day of how the world [really] works. And I wish we could unsee it but, unfortunately, we’ve now learned that the world works on concepts like interests and equities. Every leader has them. And sometimes those interests and equities align with the will of the masses. And sometimes there are other things at play. I don’t know what to do with this information, other than it’s a hard burden to carry to know this reality.

With all that being said, I go back to something that I thought on Oct. 6, 2023, and I still think it today. There’s a better way. There’s a better path. And despite the pain, despite the suffering, despite all the agony that so many have felt, we can’t lose sight of that better path. I always say, let’s pick a day and say, “We’re moving on. We’re only looking forward. You’ve got your narrative. We’ve got our narrative. You’ve suffered, we’ve suffered. You got your Bible that says something. We’ve got our Bible that says something. You get your claims. We’ve got our claims. And you know what? We’re never going to outshout each other. Let’s look forward and start right now and dedicate ourselves to something better for all of us.”

You made aliyah in 2008. Can you tell me what it means for you to live in Israel? And I’m also curious if that meaning has changed over the course of the years you’ve lived there and specifically after Oct. 7.

Rachel: What really brought us here was very simple. Jon had said for years, we have an opportunity to be part of this giant Jewish experiment of living as a Jewish people in a Jewish homeland. We happen to be observant Jews who pray every day and we thought, how is it that every day we’re asking God to please allow us to return to Jerusalem? And Jon said, “We can go.” When you’re actually able to get on a plane and 12 hours later to be in this place, it started to feel inauthentic to be praying for that when we had the ability to do it.

So we came and we really did feel, and do feel, that we are privileged to live here. I certainly have had challenges all these years, because my Hebrew is not great, and I’ve felt like a fish out of water, and I’ve felt like a stranger in a strange land. And yet it’s my land. I feel privileged that I have lived here. I feel privileged that I raised children here. I feel privileged that my three children were and are bilingual, and that they had an opportunity and have the opportunity to still be part of this experiment.

We’ve had an enormous challenge thrust upon us. When I say us, I mean all of the nation of Israel and the people of Israel worldwide. But at the same time, with this great calamity comes extreme opportunity —



“I pray that we will have the resilience, the recovery, the healing and the comfort that is needed to take this chance and make something really luminous.”

Rachel Polin

extreme, extreme opportunity. And I pray that we will have the resilience, the recovery, the healing and the comfort that is needed to take this chance and make something really luminous.

Jon: You asked what we’ve learned or how things have changed. Something that’s become really clear to us, maybe to everybody in the world, is there is an intertwined sense between Israel and the Jewish people globally. We’re all connected, like it or not, and I would like to see us use this as an opportunity. How do we take this little country in the Middle East, this concept of an independent Jewish state with sovereignty and agency, and say, no matter who the government is, who the prime minister is, who’s in charge, this is a concept that’s bigger than us or any entity. How do we make this a source of pride and inspiration for all of us?

This is going to be your first time in the Bay Area since Oct. 7. What are you anticipating on coming here?

Rachel: Unfortunately, we won’t be there very long. But I know that it will be an embrace from the wonderful Bay Area Jewish community. We have felt the love and support and appreciate it. It sounds crazy to say that we feel it, but it’s like a visceral, tangible, tactile feeling of support and love. And we felt your confusion and we felt your pain and we felt your concern, and it helped us, and it touched us, and we will always feel a huge debt of gratitude to the Bay Area, because that’s where Hersh was born, and that’s where our older daughter, who’s younger than Hersh, that’s where she was born. They were both born at Alta Bates Hospital in Oakland. Jon and I had just gotten married, and we spent almost three years before Hersh was born in the Bay Area. It’s very much woven into the core of who we are. And I think in many ways, it was a foundation that made us strong as a unit in order to face this unbelievable mission that we are in now.

Jon: I just specifically want to bring it to Hersh for a minute and say, it’s amazing that we lived in the Bay Area for seven years. It left such an indelible, lasting mark on our identities. Hersh left the Bay Area when he was 3½ years old. He was blessed to grow up at Gan Shalom in Berkeley and to be part of Congregation Beth Israel in Berkeley

and the Berkeley JCC. He lived 20 more years outside of Berkeley, yet Berkeley, California, and the Bay Area more broadly were such a prominent part of his personality, his thinking, who he was as a person. You could take the 3½-year-old out of Berkeley, but you can’t take the Bay Area out of the boy. It was the embodiment of so much about who Hersh was.

Rachel: I think it’s a lot of why he never liked to wear shoes.

I’m curious about the power of prayer. You talked about living in California and praying about returning to Jerusalem. Can you talk about your own approach to prayer now, and if that’s changed in any way — but also what it’s like to know that there are thousands of people you don’t even know praying for you every day?

Rachel: It absolutely works and is felt and is appreciated. And I am bottomlessly, endlessly grateful to the people who still have us in their prayers. Because I’m telling you, unfortunately, we need it. I think we might always need it.

I’m so thankful that I have prayer as a tool that I use daily. Every day, I open my eyes and immediately say the line that many Jewish people say upon waking, thanking God for giving me back my soul, and [saying] that God has tremendous faith in me, and that’s why I woke up this morning.

When I go to do my morning prayers, it’s such a relief. It’s the best therapy. You know, Rabbi Nachman, the famous mystical Kabbalist, said, “Life makes warriors out of all of us, and the most potent weapon is prayer.” And so I say to people, use it. Everyone has their pain, and we have this toolkit accessible to us. I pour my soul out in the morning, and then I can start my day. The question was, how has it changed since Oct. 7. I think I use it more. I lean on it more. I think that it’s more transformative. All of us have a different idea of God. What is God? Nobody knows what God is. It’s very confusing. But I have this idea of God, and I’ve been in a relationship with this idea of God. I’m so thankful, because when Oct. 7 happened, I wasn’t approaching a stranger. I’m thankful that I still have that and I’m grateful that people are shooting energy our way. I think it changes the sender and it changes the recipient.

Baby Loves Shabbat

Last month's Baby Loves Shabbat included shadow play with Morah Mushka to go along with the theme "Days of Creation." Attendees also shaped challah, explored the sensory bin, climbed on gross motor toys,



created with unique crafts, snacked, and played music with Miss Risa. See page 14 for more information on upcoming Baby Loves Shabbat programs with Jewish Federation of Greater Toledo and Gan Yeladim.



See page 14 for upcoming dates



Shlichim spend time with Jewish Toledoans

Jewish Toledo recently welcomed two shlichim from Israel, Romi and Sahar, through the Jewish Agency for Israel (JAFI). Over their weekend in town, they met with Gan Yeladim Preschool and religious school students, babies and toddlers at Jewish Federation of Greater Toledo and Congregation B'nai Israel's (CBI) Tot Shabbat, CBI congregants, BBYO members, and more. The ShinShinim program is the "year of service program" that offers Israeli

high school graduates an opportunity to delay mandatory service in the Israel Defense Forces and serve Diaspora communities for up to 10 months. The program allows communities to meet young Israeli ambassadors who perform meaningful service prior to entering the army. A growing program, the number of ShinShinim in Jewish communities more than quadrupled over the last decade.



Romi and Sahar played laser tag with Toledo BBYO members as part of their weekend visiting the community.



Have you heard of PJ Library?

PJ Library sends free, award-winning books that celebrate Jewish values and culture to families with children from birth through 12 years old.



Scan here to register your child for their books!



Questions: Contact PJ Library Program Professional, Marnie Younker, at marnie@jewishtoledo.org or 419-724-0365



JFGT PJ Library & Youth Programming



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PJ Library is supported by The Inspiration Fund.

Gan Yeladim

A school where the possibilities are endless.
A school where my risky play is encouraged.
A school that makes me smile.
Gan Yaladim, a home away from home.



Chabad and Jewish Federation of Greater Toledo
Supported by the Federation's Annual Campaign

Learn more: Reach out to Mushka Matusof at mushka@jewishtoledo.org or visit www.jewishtoledo.org/about-us/gan-yeladim-preschool



Register:
<https://form.jotform.com/jewishtoledo/gan2025-2026>



Once Upon a Festival of Lights

There's no better way to celebrate the season than by coming together as a community! Enjoy these snapshots of Hanukkah joy showing families lighting menorahs, friends spinning dreidels, and neighbors sharing in the warmth and light of the holiday. Take a look and see if you spot any familiar faces; who do you recognize in these moments of celebration?





Jewish Federation and Foundation of Greater Toledo Programs and Events



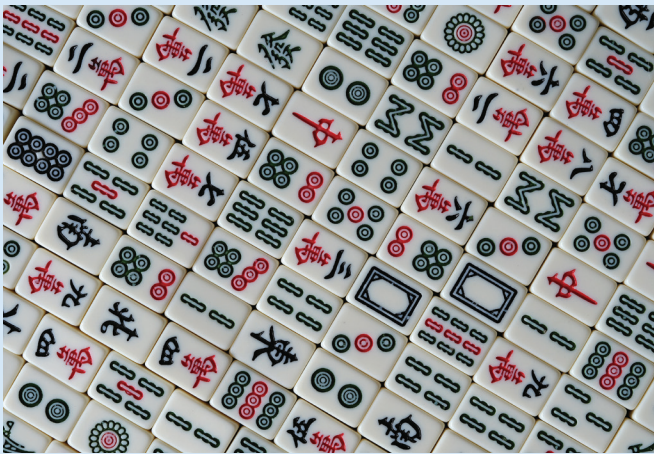
2026 Mahjong Cards available

The deadline to purchase is January 25, 2026.

Thanks to your generous support, Hillel419 will receive a check for \$765 from 2025 sales of Mahjong cards. This year, The National Mahjong League will be giving back \$6 for every card sold. Please continue to support Hillel at UT and BGSU.

Large card: \$15
Standard card: \$14

Make your check payable to Lois Levison, 6634 Kingsbridge Dr., Sylvania, OH 43560. Be sure to include your name, address, phone number and email along with the size and number of cards being purchased. Cards will be mailed around April 1.



THURSDAY, DECEMBER 4

BOOK FESTIVAL
"TINY PEP TALKS"

Need a pep talk? "How about Tiny Pep Talks" from two comedians who offer hilarious encouragement for your most mundane struggles? Authors Josh Linden and Paula Skaggs are rooting for you and will be in town. The event begins at 7 p.m. Cost is \$18 per person, includes appetizers and drinks, or \$30 per person, includes copy of book, appetizers, and drinks. For more information, see page 13 or visit jewishtoledo.org/nwojewishbookfestival25.

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 7

LATKES & LIGHTS 2025

Celebrate the Festival of Lights—with a wild twist! Join us for an evening of Hanukkah fun and dazzling lights at the Toledo Zoo. Dinner will be available all evening (event begins at 5 p.m.), so you can stop in before, after, or in between your zoo adventures to warm up, see new friends and old, and do some Hanukkah crafts. This event is open to families of all ages



Friday Poker

Fridays this winter

Enjoy an afternoon of nickel/dime bet poker from noon-3 p.m. Snacks are available while you play.

Contact Hannah Loeser at 419-724-0401 for location and additional information.

and stages—the perfect way to celebrate together! RSVP Required by Monday, December 1.

WEDNESDAYS, DECEMBER 10 & 17

DEVICE ADVICE WITH TIM

See page 21 for more information.

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 11

SHINE A LIGHT ON ANTISEMITISM

Jewish Federation of Greater Toledo (JFGT) is hosting its annual Shine a Light on Antisemitism program from 7 to 8:30 p.m. Featuring Zack Bodner, author of "Why Do Jewish? A Manifesto for 21st Century Jewish Peoplehood," the event comes at a moment when antisemitism is surging around the world and Jewish identity is being challenged and reshaped. Zack Bodner's book will be available for purchase at the event. See page 19 for more information.

FRIDAY, DEC. 19

BABY LOVES SHABBAT PLAYDATES

Presented by Jewish Federation of Greater Toledo, each playdate will feature creative play, light snacks, challah, Shabbat songs and more. Participants who register are entered to receive a special Shabbat Box to use during the playdates and take home afterward. Future dates are Fridays, Jan. 16, Feb. 13, Mar. 13 and April 17 at 9:30 a.m. RSVPs are required by the day prior to each session to marnie@jewishtoledo.org.

THURSDAY, JANUARY 22

LADIES WHO SOAR

Join at 5:30 p.m for an evening of art, inspiration, and community. The event will feature local Toledo mural artist Dean Davis, the creative force behind Art Farm, River Gallery Studio, and the River Gallery Project. RSVP by Friday, January 16. See page 15 for more information.

SUNDAY, JANUARY 25

WINTER FILMS - INTERNATIONAL HOLOCAUST REMEMBRANCE DAY FILM

Sponsored by Jewish Federation of Greater Toledo, this event will include a 3 p.m. screening of "Elie Wiesel: Soul on Fire"



(87 minutes, English, French, German.) The cost is \$5 per person and includes snacks and the movie. See pages 15 and 18 for more.

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 10

MAHJONG & MORE

Jewish Federation of Greater Toledo presents Mahjong & More. Gather your girlfriends for a fun night out to sip, nosh, and learn the art (and luck!) of mahjong. The event takes place from 5:30 to 7:30 p.m. and costs is \$18 per person. It includes dinner and drinks. RSVP by Friday, February 6. See page 15 for more information.

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 16

BRIDGE THE GAP - AN INTERGENERATIONAL JOURNEY

Take a bus day trip to Cincinnati; the cost is \$18 per child under 18 years old and \$36 per adult, which includes bus transportation (time/location of pickup TBA), refreshments, dinner, and admission to the Cincinnati Museum Center for a guided tour of the exhibition, "Auschwitz. Not Long Ago. Not Far Away." RSVP by Friday, February 6. See page 15 for more information.

Please note: The subject matter is intense and emotionally challenging. Families are asked to use their discretion in determining whether the content is appropriate for the child they intend to bring.


SENIOR PROGRAMMING

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 18


SENIOR LATKE LUNCH: A MAGICAL CELEBRATION WITH RICK SMITH JR.

Get ready to add a little extra magic to your Hanukkah celebration! This year's celebration, from noon to 1:30 p.m., will feature the incredible Rick Smith Jr. — a world-renowned magician and Guinness World Record-holding card thrower. So come ready to spin the dreidel, share some latkes, and be amazed! We'll light up the afternoon with good friends, great food, and a show that's sure to make your Hanukkah truly unforgettable. The cost is \$10 for Annual Campaign donors and \$25 for non-donors. RSVP by Wednesday, December 10.


For more information and resources, visit jewishtoledo.org.



To register for an event, please call Sherry Majewski at 419-724-0351 or email her at sherry@jewishtoledo.org.



All information subject to change with updates posted on jewishtoledo.org



To have your community events listed in News You Can Use, send information to abby@jewishtoledo.org at least 45 days prior to event.

SENIOR PROGRAMMING
(CONT.)

THURSDAY, JANUARY 15 (2026)
SUDS & SCHMOOZE

Jewish Federation of Greater Toledo (JFGT) invites all Jewish Toledo seniors to start 2026 with a fresh burst of creativity and self-care. From 1 to 3 p.m. at a Holland-area location, participants will spend a hands-on afternoon making bath bombs to take home or share as gifts while enjoying light snacks, good company, and the joy of starting 2026 feeling refreshed and renewed. RSVP by Monday, January 5.

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 12 (2026)
SENIOR DIY DOORMATS

Seniors are invited to join Thursday, February 12, 2026, from 1 to 3 p.m. at a Sylvania-area location (for safety reasons, the specific location will be shared with registrants prior to the event). The cost is \$20 for campaign donors and \$50 for non-campaign donors and includes all supplies, snacks, and beverages. Participants will create a personalized doormat to welcome guests at home while enjoying time with friends, snacks, and conversation. Limited space is available. RSVP by Monday, February 2.

Featured Event



NEWS YOU CAN USE

Ladies who Soar

Ladies who Soar will take place on Thursday, January 22, from 5:30 to 8 p.m. in Downtown Toledo (for safety reasons, the specific location will be shared with registrants prior to the event). The cost is \$18 per person and includes photos, feathers, dinner, and drinks. Join for an evening of art, inspiration, and community. The event will feature local Toledo mural artist Dean Davis, the creative force behind Art Farm, River Gallery Studio, and the River Gallery Project. Dean will share his journey and how his vibrant public art has brought color and meaning to spaces across Toledo. After his talk, participants will contribute to a collaborative mural by designing individual feathers that will come together to form a set of wings. Once complete, Janell Marie Photography will capture portraits in front of the mural, symbolizing empowerment, resilience, and the power of women lifting one another up. RSVP by Friday, January 16.

Winter Films - International Holocaust Remembrance Day Film

Winter Films - International Holocaust Remembrance Day Film, sponsored by Jewish Federation of Greater Toledo, will take place on Sunday, January 25, with a 3 p.m. screening of Elie Wiesel: Soul on Fire (87 minutes, English, French, German) at a Sylvania-area location to be announced. The cost is \$5 per person and includes snacks and the movie. In commemoration of International Holocaust Remembrance Day, this powerful documentary offers a deep and personal look at the life and legacy of Elie Wiesel—Holocaust survivor, Nobel Laureate, author, and human rights advocate. See page 18 for more information.

Mahjong & More

Jewish Federation of Greater Toledo presents Mahjong & More, which will be held on Tuesday, February 10, from 5:30 to 7:30 p.m., with the location to be announced (for safety reasons, the specific location will be shared with registrants prior to the event). The cost is \$18 per person and includes dinner and drinks. Gather your girlfriends for a fun night out to sip, nosh, and learn

the art (and luck!) of mahjong. More than just a game, mahjong is a cherished tradition that brings generations together, and we’re excited to help share it forward. Whether you’re brand new or just a bit rusty, our Jewish Toledo mahjong mavens will guide you through the basics so you can play with confidence. No experience is necessary—just bring your curiosity and your crew. RSVP by Friday, February 6.

Bridge the Gap - An Intergenerational Journey

Bridge the Gap - An Intergenerational Journey will take place on Monday, February 16, as a bus day trip to Cincinnati. The cost is \$18 per child under 18 years old and \$36 per adult, which includes bus transportation (time/location of bus pickup TBA), admission, refreshments, and dinner. The community is invited to take part in a meaningful visit to the Cincinnati Museum Center for a guided tour of the exhibition “Auschwitz. Not long ago. Not far away.” This powerful exhibit features more than 700 original artifacts from Auschwitz and other sites across Europe, offering a deeply moving and educational experience that explores the history of the Holocaust and its ongoing relevance. The trip is designed for adults and their children or grandchildren in 6th grade and up to experience together. Participants will have lunch on their own at the museum and share dinner at a Kosher restaurant in Cincinnati. Find out more about the exhibit at: www.cincymuseum.org/auschwitz/. RSVP by Friday, February 6.

Please note: The subject matter is intense and emotionally challenging. Families are asked to use their discretion in determining whether the content is appropriate for the child they intend to bring.

2026 Mahjong Cards available for purchase

Thanks to the generous support of Jewish Toledo, Hillel419 will receive a check for \$765 from 2025 sales of Mahjong cards. This year, The National Mahjong League will be giving back \$6 for every card sold. Please continue to support Hillel at UT and BGSU. Large cards are \$15 and standard card are \$14. Make your check payable to Lois Levison, 6634 Kingsbridge Dr., Sylvania, OH 43560. Be sure to include your name, address, phone number and email along with the size and number of cards being purchased. See page 14 for additional information.

Seniors celebrate Mizrahi and Sephardi cultures

November was Mizrahi and Sephardi Heritage Month. Last month, Jewish Federation of Greater Toledo sponsored a program for Jewish Toledo seniors to explore the rich cultural traditions of Jewish communities from Spain and North Africa to the Middle East through stories, music, food, and shared memories. Participants also added a hands-on, creative element by decorating hamsa-shaped cookies from Dollop Shop. The hamsa, a hand-shaped symbol common in many Sephardi and Mizrahi communities, represents protection, blessing, and good fortune.



▲ Bruce creates a delicious treat



▲ Claire from Dollop Shop helps seniors design their hamsa cookies



▲ Sheryl, Janice, and Harriet getting ready to decorate cookies

ISRAEL BONDS

Celebrate Hanukkah

Give a gift that strengthens Israel and deepens their connection to the Jewish homeland.

Mazel Tov Bonds starting at \$100
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*eMazel Tov bonds are available online only

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Development Corporation for Israel. This is not an offering which can be made only by prospectus. Read the prospectus carefully before investing to fully evaluate the risks associated with investing in Israel Bonds. Member FINRA.

Jewish Toledo celebrates Hanukkah throughout the community

Latkes & Lights returns to Toledo Zoo for Hanukkah celebration

Jewish Federation of Greater Toledo invites families of all ages to Latkes & Lights 2025, an evening of Hanukkah fun and dazzling lights at the Toledo Zoo, from 5 to 8 p.m. Sunday, Dec. 7.

Guests can enjoy dinner, dessert, Hanukkah crafts and access to the zoo’s winter slide while taking in the spectacular Festival of Lights display. Dinner will be served throughout the evening, allowing families to stop in before, after or in between their zoo adventures.

Admission is \$15 per adult and \$10 per child for Toledo Zoo members, and \$30 per adult and \$20 per child for nonmembers. Cost includes admission and parking for nonmembers.

RSVPs are required by Monday, Dec. 1 at form.jotform.com/jewishtoledo/PJandFamily or by contacting Sherry Majewski at sherry@jewishtoledo.org or 419-724-0351.

Senior Latke Lunch adds a touch of magic to Hanukkah

Jewish Federation of Greater Toledo will host its annual Senior Latke Lunch: A Magical Celebration with Rick Smith Jr. from noon to 1:30 p.m. Thursday, Dec. 18, at a Toledo-area location.

This year’s Hanukkah celebration will feature world-renowned magician and Guinness World Record–holding card thrower Rick Smith Jr., known for his high-energy performances and appearances on The Tonight Show with Jimmy Fallon, Shark Tank, Ellen, America’s Got Talent and Penn & Teller: Fool Us—where he successfully fooled the legendary duo.

Guests can enjoy a festive afternoon filled with delicious latkes, good company and Smith’s signature blend of precision, humor and jaw-dropping magic.

The cost is \$10 for donors to the Annual Campaign and \$25 for non-donors. RSVPs are required by Wednesday, Dec. 10 at form.jotform.com/jewishtoledo/seniors or by contacting Sherry Majewski at sherry@jewishtoledo.org or 419-724-0351.

FLYING SOUTH THIS WINTER?

If you haven’t already let us know, call 419-724-0360 or email wendy@jewishtoledo.org to change your address so you don’t miss an issue!

TOLEDO

Jewish News

Local ladies thankful for Jewish Toledo

Jewish Toledo ladies got together in mid-November to celebrate what (an early) Thanksgiving is really about: kindness, compassion, and community. Speaker, Gail Cooper, CEO and Executive Director of Baskets of Care, joined the group to discuss the nonprofit organization, which is dedicated to providing emotional, financial, and educational support to those who have been diagnosed with breast cancer. Since 2009, Gail and the organization have worked to provide a range of services, from handmade cards of encouragement to financial assistance.

Stay tuned for more women’s programs to come in 2026.



BE PART OF THE STORY!

Toledo Jewish News welcomes community submissions, including commentary, articles of interest, and historic photos. Email materials for consideration to abby@jewishtoledo.org.

TOLEDO Jewish News

28TH ANNUAL GIVE • A • GIFT FOR KIDS

All holiday gifts should be dropped off, unwrapped, at Temple Shomer Emunim, 6453 Sylvania Ave. by 4pm on Wednesday, December 3

Supporting kids referred to us by the following agencies:

- Jewish Senior and Family Social Services
- Lucas County Juvenile Court’s CASA program

For more information call Julie Romanoff at 419-297-3029 or email sprmom88@aol.com.

Toledo Jewish Men's Club 2025-2026 Calendar

The Toledo Jewish Men's Club (The "Club") is open to all men in the Toledo Jewish Community. There are no dues or fees other than the couverte for luncheons.

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 2:
NATHAN MATTIMOE, DIRECTOR OF ART IN PUBLIC PLACES, THE ARTS COMMISSION OF TOLEDO
Nathan administers the City of Toledo's One Percent for Art ordinance, including managing new public art projects and overseeing the maintenance and conservation of more than 40 public art pieces.

TUESDAY, JANUARY 6 (2026):
SANDY SPANG, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, TOLEDO METROPOLITAN AREA COUNCIL OF

GOVERNMENTS
As TMACOG Executive Director, Sandy is responsible for leading regional economic collaboration across northwest Ohio and southeast Michigan. Sandy previously served as Deputy Director of Economic Development for the City of Toledo and a member of Toledo City Council.

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 3 (2026):
DAVID BRIGGS, SPORTS COLUMNIST FOR THE TOLEDO BLADE
Veteran observer of sports in Toledo, across Ohio, and nationally, Dave is a voting member of the AP top 25 football rankings. In addition to his role as a lead sports columnist for The Blade, Dave has written for, and appeared in, many national sports media outlets.

TUESDAY, MARCH 3 (2026):
DR. ROMULUS DURANT, CEO/ SUPERINTENDENT-TOLEDO PUBLIC SCHOOLS
Dr. Durant's 11th year as the Superintendent of TPS, he is the youngest educator to hold the position and the first awarded "Urban Educator of the Year" by the Council of Great City Schools.

TUESDAY, APRIL 7; TUESDAY, MAY 5; AND TUESDAY, JUNE 2 (2026):
TO BE ANNOUNCED

Questions?
Call Joel 419-704-5039



Co-Chairs: Mark Greenblatt, Dick Greenblatt, Matt Rubin, and Joel Beren

Winter Films - International Holocaust Remembrance Day

In commemoration of International Holocaust Remembrance Day, we invite you to a special screening of Elie Wiesel: Soul on Fire, a powerful film that explores the life, legacy, and moral voice of Holocaust survivor, Nobel Laureate, and human rights advocate Elie Wiesel.
This moving documentary offers a deep and personal look into Wiesel's journey, from the horrors of Auschwitz to his lifelong mission to bear witness and speak out against injustice. Through archival footage, interviews, and reflections, Soul on

Fire captures Wiesel's unwavering commitment to memory, compassion, and ethical responsibility.
The screening will be followed by a brief discussion and reflection, offering attendees a chance to engage with Wiesel's message and consider how we, as a community, can continue to uphold the values of remembrance, resilience, and moral courage.
Join us as we honor the victims of the Holocaust and reaffirm our commitment to "never forget."
RSVP by Friday, January 19

to <https://form.jotform.com/jewishtoledo/jfgtprograms> or Sherry Majewski at 419-724-0351 or sherry@jewishtoledo.org.



Winter Films - International Holocaust Remembrance Day
What: Elie Wiesel: Soul on Fire (87 minutes, English, French, German)
When: Sunday, January 25 at 3 p.m.
Where: Sylvania-area location TBA
Info: \$5 per person, including snacks and movie





You can help fight local hunger!

The Meijer **Simply Give** campaign runs

Sunday, September 28 through Saturday, December 27

at the Central Avenue store, which benefits the Jewish Senior, Family & Social Services Family Food Pantry

You can help by purchasing a \$10 card (or multiples of \$10) at Meijer during those days.

Make your dollars go ever further!



Double Match Day

Saturday, December 13



On Double Match Days, purchasing a \$10 card will result in a \$30 donation! Cards are available at Meijer on Central Ave. and the Sekach Building (6505 Sylvania Avenue).

You can be a hero to those who are hungry. We can serve MORE when you give MORE!






To participate, take a Meijer Simply Give card along with your \$10 and give to the cashier at the Meijer on Central Avenue



You can help fight local hunger!



My Israel trip bonded me to the land and its resilient people I love - Part One

NINA MARKOWICZ FRIEDMAN
This is the first column of a two-part series about the author's recent travel to Israel.

After the October 7 massacre, I felt a longing to travel back to Israel to show my support for the country and the people I love. My trip with Authentic Israel, created in response to October 7 for people who wanted to volunteer in Israel, took place in September 2025. Of all my trips to Israel, this one connected me in the most visceral way and gave me a close-up view of the challenges and struggles Israelis now face in their everyday lives.

As I walked through a mostly empty Ben Gurion airport, gazing at the faces on the hostage posters that greeted me on the walkway, I knew I made the right decision to visit Israel as a volunteer -- and I hadn't even left the airport! It just felt so right to be there. My heart is full



Nina Markowicz Friedman

knowing those posters no longer line the welcome walkway, as all the living hostages have returned home.

After checking into our hotel in Tel Aviv, my friend and fellow volunteer and I walked straight to the beach. This was the weekend before school resumed and it seemed as if every Israeli was out savoring the last bit of summer vacation. The beach was packed with people of all ages, living life and having fun: families swimming in the water, teens sunbathing, and volleyballs, soccer balls, and colorful Pro Kadima balls flying everywhere. That evening, we tried three or four different restaurants before finding one that had seating available. It was a stark contrast to the quiet of the airport earlier that day.

I was excited to spend the next day with Ron, a young Israeli who lived with my family for the past year through the ShinShinim program, a service year for Israeli high school graduates. These young people serve Jewish communities around the world prior to beginning their military service in the

Israel Defense Forces (IDF). Ron had returned to Israel a few weeks prior to my visit.

I brought Ron homemade chocolate chip cookies and Chick-fil-A Sauce. We enjoyed a home-cooked meal with his family and then Ron took me to visit an overlook where he goes to chill and watch the sunset. It was wonderful seeing Ron's life in Israel and getting to know his family.

Thanks to the time difference, I was up very early the next morning. The best thing to do when that happens is to walk along the Tayelet, the seaside Tel Aviv Promenade. Then my friend and I spent the rest of the day relaxing and dozing on the beach.

My Authentic Israel program began that evening. There were 19 of us from the US, Canada and Australia, two of whom were not Jewish. We got acquainted over dinner; Alon, our group leader, set the stage for the next seven days; and we heard an informative geopolitical briefing from a Middle East current affairs expert.

Our first volunteer location the

next day was the Agur Winery in the Judean Hills. Our bus route took us past the spot where, according to Jewish history, David fought Goliath 3,000 years ago. Upon arrival, we had a brief demonstration, were handed cutters and got busy picking Syrah grapes in the scorching heat. We tested the grapes, which were insanely good, and were rewarded with lunch and a wine tasting after cooling off. We learned that wineries and other time-sensitive agricultural locations desperately needed volunteers because of the reduced number of workers being let in or coming to Israel and the absent workers now serving in the IDF.

We spent that afternoon helping out at Leket, Israel's national food bank, sorting nearly 10,000 pounds of produce which was to go to 950 families. Leket rescues food surplus for people in need and, since October 7, has fed displaced families, provided food to non-profit organizations throughout Israel, and now also provides financial support to farmers to make up the difference in

NINA | CONTINUED ON PAGE 25

Shine a Light on Antisemitism: Zack Bodner, "Why Do Jewish?"

On Thursday, December 11, from 7 to 8:30 p.m., Jewish Federation of Greater Toledo (JFGT) is hosting its annual Shine a Light on Antisemitism program. Featuring Zack Bodner, author of *Why Do Jewish? A Manifesto for 21st Century Jewish Peoplehood*, the event comes at a moment when antisemitism is surging around the world and Jewish identity is being challenged and reshaped.

Bodner is a seeker, writer, storyteller, and community-builder whose insights offer guidance, inspiration, and a call to action. As President and CEO of the Oshman Family JCC in Palo Alto, California, he has spearheaded initiatives like the Taube Center for Jewish Studies and The Z3 Project, which reimagines the relationship between Diaspora Jewry and Israel. Before that, he spent 14 years as the Pacific Northwest Regional Director for AIPAC. Bodner holds a master's degree in philosophy of religion and theology and studied at Yale, Hebrew University, and Stanford.

We live in a time of rising antisemitism. Misconceptions, hostility, and violence against Jews are no longer distant warnings but daily realities for many. At the same time, Jewish identity itself is under negotiation; younger generations question what it means to "do Jewish" in a changing world. In this climate, Bodner's message has never been more urgent. He will explore how we can resist threats to Jewish life not only by defending ourselves, but by deepening our identity, taking communal responsibility, and rediscovering how Judaism can be vibrant, relevant, and resilient.

Together, we will shine a light — not just on the dangers, but on our enduring strengths, responsibilities, and hopes for the future.

RSVP is required by Friday, December 6 to <https://form.jotform.com/jewishtoledo/JCRC-events> or with Mary Bilyeu at mary@jewishtoledo.org or 419-724-0405.

The free event will include a dessert reception at a Toledo-area location (for the safety and security of our community, the location will be shared with registrants prior to the event).



WHAT: Shine a Light on Antisemitism: Zack Bodner, "Why Do Jewish?"

WHEN: December 11, from 7 to 8:30 p.m.

WHERE: For the safety and security of our community, the location of all events will be shared with registrants prior to each event

TICKETS: RSVP is required by Friday, December 6 to <https://form.jotform.com/jewishtoledo/JCRC-events> or with Mary Bilyeu at mary@jewishtoledo.org or 419-724-0405.

New JFGT Security Policy Purpose

To help ensure the safety and security of all attendees while fostering an environment of openness and community engagement, this policy outlines procedures for event registration, attendance, and security.

Registration Procedures

Individual Registration Required:

All attendees must register individually through our designated online registration form or directly with Jewish Federation and Foundation of Greater Toledo staff registrations.

Complete Data Collection:

Registrants are required to provide accurate contact information, including full name, phone number, and email address. For guests or additional attendees, the primary registrant must add each guest's details separately.

Verification & Confirmation:

Registrants will receive a confirmation email and the location of the event after registration.

Guest Policy:

Attendees need to register all guests in advance. Same-day or walk-in registrations may be limited or declined based on security considerations.

Prohibited Items

Weapons of any kind under any circumstance

Alcohol, illegal drugs, or substances (including drug paraphernalia)


All glass items

Bags over 18"x 12"x 8", camelbacks, Bota bags, and flasks

Signs, flags, banners, posters, or balloons

Flammable liquids or aerosol cans

Other items as deemed inappropriate by the Security Director or event staff



Ahava program
For families of individuals
with special needs

Ahava is a program of the Jewish Federation and Foundation of Greater Toledo that is managed by Jewish Senior, Family and Social Services and has provided a lifeline since 2016 to Jewish families in Greater Toledo who are raising children with special needs and simply want to be able to access the best care possible for their children.

Through Ahava, Federation awards local Jewish families an annual scholarship of up to \$1,500 for each child, no matter their age, to put toward the cost of therapies such as speech therapy and music therapy, equipment, medical supplies, continuing education for parents on raising children with special needs, and other resources that help positively impact individuals and their families.

For more information about Ahava, please contact Ben Malczewski at ben@jewishtoledo.org or 419-885-2561.

GO PAPER LESS

TOLEDO Jewish News

Want to opt out of the Toledo Jewish News print version? The newspaper is posted online every month (often earlier than the mail) and always FREE to read on your smart phone, computer, or tablet. Stay up-to-date on the latest of Jewish Toledo at www.jewishtoledo.org/about-us/tjnff.

To opt out, mail Abby Hoicowitz at abby@jewishtoledo.org with your name and address, and we'll remove you from the mail list. Thanks for helping us save the planet!



READ TJN ONLINE HERE



JSFSS Family Pantry

Wish List

While the Food Pantry appreciates food donations, there is a greater need for personal care and paper products. The Food Pantry depends on financial gifts or donations for personal care items. If you'd like to donate items to the Food Pantry, please consider choosing items from its wish list:

- paper towels
- facial tissues
- diapers
- feminine hygiene products
- disposable razors
- shampoo
- soap (bar soap, dish soap,

- liquid hand soap, and laundry soap)
- toilet paper (preferably individual, pre-wrapped rolls)
- Other personal hygiene items of your choice

Contact Hannah Loeser
(419) 724- 0401

HOW TO CONTACT JSFSS

Perhaps you or a family member are in need of help with senior social services. Maybe you know someone in need of support from a family pantry. Jewish Senior, Family and Social Services offers a range of services to benefit our community. JSFSS has a knowledgeable and caring staff waiting to help you.

Vice President Jewish Senior, Family & Social Services
Ben Malczewski
(419) 724-0408


Support Services Coordinator
Liz Witter, LSW
(419) 724-0406

Food Pantry and Support Services Coordinator
Stacy Willis, LSW, MSW
419-724-0407

JSFSS Office Manager and Program Associate
Hannah Loeser
(419) 724- 0401

Project Manager and Technology Coordinator
Tim Hagen
419-724-0412

jewishtoledo.org/jfs



Get Fit Classes

Monday

Prime Movers Early, 9-10am -or- Prime Movers Later, 10:30-11:30am

Join us for this upbeat and energetic dance/exercise program designed to improve your fitness level safely and effectively. This is a comprehensive workout that includes strength, flexibility, balance, posture-improvement, and more. All moves can be modified to meet specific needs.

Cardio Drumming, 12-1pm

A high-energy workout that also includes some dance moves. This can also be done seated.

Wednesday

Prime Movers Early, 9-10am -or- Prime Movers Later, 10:30-11:30am
(see description above)

Ballet Fusion, 12-1pm

A special blend of ballet warm-up, cardio drumming, and a Tai Chi/yoga cool-down. Ballet shoes are not required.

Friday


Zumba, 9-10am

Foundation Fitness, 10am-11am

Designed to improve mobility, core strength, and stability from the ground up. Focus will be on foot and ankle strength, mobility, healthy posture, pelvic floor, and breathing. Exercises can be done in chairs and/or standing.

In-person classes at Sylvania-area location. Contact Hannah at 419-724-0401 for exact location.*

* For the safety and security of our community, the location of all events will be shared with registrants prior to the event.



Can't join us in person? Tune in on YouTube at Jewish Toledo



YouTube



Tech Time with Tim

TIM HAGEN
✉ tim@jewishtoledo.org

For this month’s post, I’d like to highlight December’s Device Advice sessions. During these informal, small-group meetings at Sekach, I typically work through questions that attendees come prepared to ask about the given topic. In December (details can be found below), we’ll review the basics of cloud storage in one session and artificial intelligence (AI) in the other... in both high-level and practical ways.

Both topics remain front-and-center, evidenced not just by their coverage in tech journalism and mainstream media, but also by the frequency with which I’m asked about them here at the Federation, which is often. It’s apparent that these topics, especially AI, evoke all kinds of reactions, some infused with curiosity and hope, and others imbued with skepticism and even dismay. Please know you’re in good company should you have mixed feelings about AI’s potential as well as growing shortcomings and drawbacks. Oftentimes, Device Advice sessions generate a sharing of ideas during which, unlike a presentation, knowledge is shared from multiple people and multiple perspectives. I’ve learned so much about so many things from attendees at DA sessions. My hope is that others have

experienced the same. Should you ever have interest in attending a Device Advice but can’t due to a conflict, please know you can contact me (by email, phone, or stopping by my desk at the Sekach building) to ask your question or, if needed, to schedule an appointment to discuss. I welcome tech questions of all kinds and, simply, I’m here to help! Keep warm and until next month - Tim

Tim Hagen, Project Manager and Technology Coordinator Jewish Senior, Family and Social Services, Jewish Federation of Greater Toledo [T] 419-724-0412

DISCLAIMER
Letters, commentaries, opinions and advertisements appearing in the Toledo Jewish News reflect the views and thoughts of the writer and/or advertiser and do not necessarily represent the opinions or views of the Jewish Federation of Greater Toledo, its board of directors, officers or employees unless explicitly stated.



Device Advice programs are held on Wednesdays 11 a.m.-noon

Upcoming Tech Programs

1. December 10: Understanding Cloud Storage

2. December 17: Let’s Talk About AI

Please RSVP with Sherry Majewski at 419-724-0351 or sherry@jewishtoledo.org

* For the safety and security of our community, the location of all events will be shared with registrants prior to the event.



(Tech Time with Tim)

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April 26, 2026

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& Prizes

Participate

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Four Themes: Celebrating Judaism; The Human Spirit; Northwest Ohio Nature; That's Funny
- Prizes for winning entries: Youth, Teen, and Adult categories -
- Photos will be showcased in a commemorative book -
For more information and entry form scan QR code below or visit templese.com

Savor

Savor imaginative culinary creations
while viewing photography featuring work by members of our Jewish community, like you!
Delight in music accompanying meal

Smile!

Be included in a unique historical Toledo Jewish community group photograph



Scan QR code for more
information and entry form

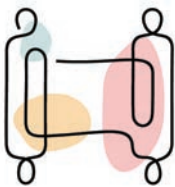


You can join in person OR join on Zoom: contact the office for information to join on Zoom.

The Gift of Mindfulness

Wednesday, December 3 at 7pm

Join us for the Temple's mindfulness program. We will explore different dimensions of mindfulness practice - different kinds of meditation, Jewish text study, small group conversations, and real-life practices that you can carry into your everyday life.



Shabbat of Song and Study

Saturday, December 6 at 10:30am

Rabbi Delson and Cantor Roher will lead a Shabbat morning service in song along with a study session in between.

Torah Today

Saturday, December 13 at 9:30am

An interactive discussion on the Torah portion for the week. Bagels and coffee are served. No experience necessary. Everyone is welcome.

Current Events

Thursday, December 18 at 2pm with Rabbi Delson

Discuss how issues in the world today affect our community

Shabbat Morning Yoga: Body and Soul

with Cantor Roher, Saturday, December 27 at 10:30am

Start your Shabbat morning with a rejuvenating spiritual practice that will give you a renewed sense of peace. The class is for all levels, using a chair or a mat, whichever is most appropriate for you. No experience needed. Call the Temple office for the Zoom link.

CONGREGATION B'NAI ISRAEL



CONGREGATION B'NAI ISRAEL

6525 SYLVANIA AVE., SYLVANIA, OHIO 43560 • 419.517.8400 • CBITOLEDO.ORG

All CBI programs and religious services are open to the members of all local congregations with RSVP unless otherwise indicated.

If you are not a CBI member and would like to attend, please contact the office at 419.517.8400 during office hours.

Bring a Guest to Shabbat at CBI

Saturday, December 6, 2025 9:30 AM

Let's learn from our forefathers and foremothers and invite a friend to Shabbat services.

Please notify the office with the name of the person that you are bringing so they can be added to the guest list.

RSVP to the office or to Kim Brody at kbrody@cbitoledo.org.

"Adding to the Miracle of Light" Volunteer Event
Making Hanukkah Goodie Bags

Tuesday, December 9, 2025 10:30 AM at CBI

Join us as we assemble Hanukkah goodie bags to donate to JFSS and to give to CBI members at local senior living facilities.

To help assemble or deliver bags, RSVP by Dec. 8th to the office or to RSVP to Fran Weinblatt at programming@cbitoledo.org.

WCBI CELEBRATES: Rosh Chodesh Kislev

Wednesday, December 10, 2025 11:00 PM

at Peace Love & Pottery 6750 Sylvania Avenue

Join us for a festive Hanukkah lunch and then create your very own Hanukkah keepsake. Lunch will be provided.

The Tikkun Olam project for this program is a monetary donation to Swaddlers, a local program that provides clothing and other basic essentials for infants and children.

A registration fee of \$15 in cash or check (made payable to "Women of CBI" will be collected at the door.

RSVP to Miriam Beckerman at wcbi@cbitoledo.org by Thursday, December 4th.

OPEN TO THE WOMEN OF ALL LOCAL CONGREGATIONS

CBI Hanukkah Celebration & Program

Come light the first candle with us!

Sunday, December 14, 2025 at 5:30 PM

~ DAIRY DINNER WITH HOMEMADE LATKES ~
~ SCAVENGER HUNTS ~ CRAFTS ~ PRIZES ~
~ COOKIE DECORATING ~THE PRICE IS RIGHT ~

Cost: Adults \$18 - Children (under 18) \$8

HANUKKAH ATTIRE ENCOURAGED!

RSVP to the office or to Gabi Mallin at gmallin@cbitoledo.org by Monday, December 8th. Last-minute cancellations or no-shows will be charged for the event if the office is not notified 48 hours before the event.

CBI Kabbalat Shabbat Services

Friday evening, December 12, 2025 6:00 PM

Join us on Friday evening as we usher in Shabbat at in-person Kabbalat Shabbat services.

"Dress in Technicolor" for a Special Torah Portion

Saturday, December 13, 2025 9:30 AM

On Saturday, December 13th, we will read Parashat Vayeishev. This Torah portion recounts the story of when Jacob gives his best loved son, Joseph, the "coat of many colors". Join us at services by dressing in many colors to commemorate that event.

WCBI BOOK CLUB: "The Love Elixir" by Linda Cohen Loigman

Tuesday, Dec. 16, 2025 10:30 AM at CBI

OPEN TO THE WOMEN OF ALL LOCAL CONGREGATIONS

RSVP to Ellen Federman at efederman@sbcglobal.net by Sunday, December 14, 2025.

Hanukkah Begins on the Evening of
Sunday, December 14, 2025

Hanukkah candles, gelt, menorahs, wrapping paper, and gift items are available for purchase at the CBI Gift Shop. To see the full Hanukkah gift assortment, please call 419.882.2111 to make an appointment.

The gift shop is open on Sundays from 9:30 - 11:30 AM when religious school is in session.

Parashat Hashavuah:
Torah Portion of the Week Discussion
Fridays at 11:00 AM at CBI

Connecting Kids to Meals
Volunteer Event

Thursday, December 11, 2025 10 AM - 12 PM

Cherry Street Mission Building, 1501 Monroe St.

RSVP to Fran Weinblatt at programming@cbitoledo.org by Dec. 10th.

CBI Office Closings

Thu. December 25	Closed	Christmas
Thu. January 1	Closed	New Year's Day

WEEKLY SERVICES SCHEDULE *except during holidays

- Monday & Thursday Morning Minyan: 8:00 AM - IP/ZM
- Monday - Thursday Afternoon Minyan: 5:45 PM - ZM
- Friday Kabbalat Shabbat: 5:45 PM - ZM
- Saturday Morning Shabbat: 9:30 AM - IP/LS
- Saturday Mincha Service: 12:30 PM - IP
- Sunday Morning Minyan: 9:30 AM - IP/ZM

CONGREGATION ETZ CHAYIM

WEDNESDAY WITH FRIENDS MOVIE

The month of December begins with a Wednesday with Friends movie showing the film, “The Women’s Balcony,” at shul on December 3 at 10 a.m. Light refreshments will be served. The movie is a heartwarming comedy-drama set in an Orthodox community in Jerusalem after a synagogue’s women’s balcony collapses. It is a good-hearted tale about tradition and women finding their voice.

MAHJ/POKER

Our Sunday poker & mahj group continues to meet monthly. We continue to build a strong community and friendships. We will be playing on December 7 and 28 from 10 a.m.to noon. Contact Marc or Nancy Jacobson if you are interested in joining either group.



PLEASE NOTE: All Zoom, virtual, and in-person programs require registration. You can contact either Nancy Jacobson at Jaco824@bex.net or Elsa Leveton at 419-473-2401 or elsa@etzchayimtoledo.org for further information and registration.

HANUKKAH SHABBAT DINNER & SERVICES

Everyone is invited to a special Hanukkah dinner on Friday evening, December 19. Services with Rabbi Jason Mark begin at 4:45 p.m. with a delicious dinner with latkes following. The cost of the dinner is \$18 per person. Shabbat services will be held on Saturday, December 20 with a kiddush lunch to follow. Please R.S.V.P. to Elsa Leveton or Nancy Jacobson by December 14.



RONALD MCDONALD HOUSE MITZVAH PROJECT

During the last several years, Congregation Etz Chayim has helped prepare lunch at Ronald McDonald House on December 25. This year, we will be working from 10 a.m.to noon. This is a meaningful way for us to help feed families. Please register with Nancy by December 18 if you are interested in volunteering. Ronald McDonald House allows 8 volunteers in the kitchen. Following the program, come back to the shul for a pizza lunch and an afternoon of games beginning at 12:30 p.m.

CHABAD HOUSE

CELEBRATE CHANUKAH!

with Chabad House of Toledo

DEC 14
4:30

ANNUAL CAR MENORAH PARADE
4:30 PM Meet at Chabad | 4:45 PM Parade Leaves
Followed by Lighting of the 1st Candle @ Chabad | 6:15 PM

DEC 15
4:45

CHANUKAH AT THE MALL
"Can Menorah" Lighting, Donuts, Music & Celebration!
4:45 PM Celebration | 5:15 PM Menorah Lighting

DEC 16
12PM

LENNY CARES LUNCH & LEARN
Join us for a special Chanukah Edition of Lunch & Learn at Chabad House

DEC 21
11AM

CHANUKAH ON ICE
Ice Skating, Menorah, & Chanukah Celebration at The Ribbon
11:00 AM - 1:00 PM

DOWNTOWN MENORAH LIGHTING
In front of the Government Center
visit chabadtoledo.com for date & time

Chanukah Events are FREE OF CHARGE and open to the entire community!
For more information about our Chanukah events, visit CHABADTOLEDO.COM/CHANUKAH
Sponsored in honor of, and with many thanks to, Joel & Linda Beren

LUNCH & LEARN

Celebrate Chanukah with Community!

Join us for a special Chanukah Lunch & Learn

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 16
12:00 PM | at Chabad House

RSVP: Lennycares@chabadtoledo.com or 419-843-9393

FREE OF CHARGE

CLASSIFIEDS

It is easy to run a classified ad in *Toledo Jewish News*!
First 12 words - \$8, \$0.10 per additional word. *Phone numbers and abbreviations count as separate words.* Ads must be received by the 15th of the month.


Simply email your ad and billing information to abby@JewishToledo.org or call 419-724-0423 for more information.

Please note: Classified ads will run every month (and the purchaser will be billed) until notification of cancellation is received.

fridayFACTS

Weekly news of the Toledo Jewish community

Where Toledo Jews Get their News



jewishtoledo.org/about-us/tjnff

Mazel Tov, Julie!

29

Jewish Federation of Greater Toledo wishes Julie Szyskowski, Accounting Associate all the happiness retirement can bring after 29 years with the organization. Thank you for the inspiration, the laughter, and the heart you brought to everything you did. You will be missed!

BUSINESS CARDS



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*Three-month minimum. Any changes to business card include extra charge.
Ads must be received by the 15th of the month.
Call 419-724-0423 for more information.

NINA | CONTINUED FROM PAGE 19

their lost revenue.

That evening we had dinner at the famous Dr. Shakshuka restaurant in Jaffa. Then some of us walked the Tayelet back to the hotel and experienced the hustle and bustle of the evening. The path and beach were filled with people running, walking, hanging out, playing night beach volleyball and listening to live music. There were young people and families everywhere -- so many strollers and so many dogs!

Day two took us to Sderot to visit the memorial on the site of the police station that was tragically infiltrated on October 7. As we stood overlooking Gaza City from within the Gaza Envelope, we learned there were siren alerts in Tel Aviv, due to a Houthi missile, which sent people to shelters. I knew my relatives back home were getting the siren alerts so I texted them not to worry -- we had left Tel Aviv and were safe. From our lookout, we could see white smoke in the distance emanating from Hamas tunnels that the IDF was blowing up.

Driving through Sderot on our way to volunteer at the Chesed soup kitchen we noted bomb shelters on nearly every block. There are some 7,000 shelters in Sderot alone, courtesy of the Israeli government. Some are brightly decorated.

The Chesed soup kitchen (where we chopped vegetables for the next day's meal), typically feeds 50 people per day and makes food baskets that feed 500-600 families every two weeks. Chesed also operates a second-hand clothing store.

We stopped to eat our packed lunches with soldiers at the Shuva Junction food station, which provides free hot meals to soldiers going in and out of Gaza. I met and got to know some of them. I let them know we think about them and they have our support. I thanked the soldiers for their bravery and for defending our

Jewish homeland. Amazingly, while these soldiers are the ones on the front lines, they thanked us for visiting Israel and offering our support. They said it means so much to them. The soldiers also mentioned that, with the news they hear from America, it must be hard for us to support them. We reassured them this was not the case.

After lunch, we stopped at the car park where over 1500 vehicles, many burned, many full of bullets holes, memorialize the devastating cold-blooded murder of people fleeing the Nova Music Festival. I saw those cars on what is now known as "death road" in news clips following October 7. Seeing them in person was crushing.

The Nova Music Festival memorial site was our final stop for the day. With artillery fire in the background, and tears in my eyes, I stared at the endless faces of beautiful young people who were murdered by Hamas terrorists. It's impossible to capture the experience fully, but the exquisitely written personal descriptions of each victim were heartbreaking and gut-wrenching.

As I made my way through the faces, I found myself in front of Hersh Goldberg-Polin's picture. While I did not know him or his immediate family personally, I am acquainted with his grandmother Leah. His great grandmother and my grandmother were friends through Chicago Hadassah. I was with Leah at a local Chicago solidarity rally a few days after October 7.

I should also mention that Ayelet Segev, mother of Tomer who was killed at the Nova Music Festival, spent the day with us. Together, we visited Tomer's picture. She had not been there before. It was a very heavy and sad day but an important and necessary one for us to experience.

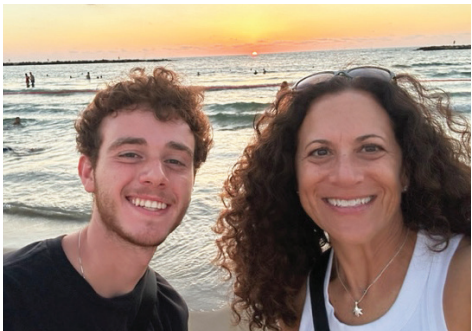
In Part 2, I will share my experiences from the second half of this extraordinary trip.



▲ Nina Markowicz Friedman, Agur Winery, 2025 | submitted photo



▲ Nina Markowicz Friedman, Rosh Haayin overlooking Migdal Tzedek Tower of Justice and Tel Aviv in the background, 2025 | submitted photo



▲ Nina Markowicz Friedman with Ron Goldenberg, Tel Aviv beach, 2025 | submitted photo

In January 2026, Nina Markowicz Friedman will be Hadassah Chicago North Shore (CNS) Executive VP followed by CNS President in 2027. Nina earned a Master of Social Work from Washington University in St. Louis and a Bachelor of Arts from The Ohio State University, is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker, and the Director of Post Adoption Support at The Cradle adoption agency in Evanston, IL. Nina grew up in suburban Toledo, Ohio, where she attended The Hebrew Academy of Toledo and is a proud graduate of Ottawa Hills High School. She lives in Glencoe, IL with her husband and two teenage sons. She enjoys playing tennis, reading, traveling and spending time with friends and family.

Nina is a member of the Hadassah Writers' Circle, a dynamic and diverse writing group for leaders and members to express their thoughts and feelings about all the things Hadassah does to

make the world a better place. It's where they celebrate their personal Hadassah journeys and share their Jewish values, family traditions and interpretations of Jewish texts. Hadassah members are proud of their Zionist mission and their role as keepers of the flame of Jewish values, traditions and beliefs as well as advocating for women's empowerment and health equity for all. Since 2019, the Hadassah Writers' Circle has published nearly 650 columns in The Times of Israel Blogs and other Jewish media outlets. Interested? Please contact hwc@hadassah.org.

The Toledo Jewish Community Foundation through its Gerald Getz Fund for Impoverished Israeli Children and Families Fund granted nearly \$8,000 in 2025 to Leket, Israel's National Food Bank, where Nina volunteered.

Nina Markowicz Friedman is a Toledo native and Chicago-North Shore Hadassah 2026 Executive Vice President.

DREIDELS | CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

project, I keep envisioning large sculptures in clay or glass — maybe a window display. I'd like to expand in dimension and create a room installation or integrate abstraction within local public spaces. When I think of the kinds of interventions that I'd like to introduce, I transport back to this blissful moment of when I was a kid, tracing tar lines in the JCC parking lot and turning it into choreography. Lately, I'm scaling down and mocking up dollhouses.

TJN: Your work spans painting, book arts, and teaching. How does this series fit into what you normally do?

CG: In 2023, I went on a residency fellowship to Penland School of Craft in North Carolina, and there, in the bookmaking studio, I started to draft a new body of work (which was exhibited this year in both Nebraska and Toledo). I see my dreidels as

extensions of conceptual books, since these small sculptures also contribute to a cultural history and narrative of resistance and resilience. The conceptual significance of the game of dreidel in today's day and age is not lost, as the game's origins center on maintaining and furthering educational and cultural studies during oppressive times. When I teach expressive arts workshops, I gather up lessons learned from personal experiences and help students to create their own touchstones that may function as confidence-building teaching tools for the self. Dreidels in Bagels is an approachable reminder of our own uniqueness, which comes through in each hand-painted design and is brought to life by the people who engage with these functional objects and give vitality a spin.

TJN: What is the best way for readers to view and/or purchase your art?



▲ Cyd Goldberg's Dreidels in Bagels | submitted photo

CG: Dreidels in Bagels and some of my 2D works are carried by the Toledo Museum of Art Store, and their catalog is accessible both online and in person. I'll also be set up at a holiday bazaar downtown on Huron Street on December 6th. Regarding

commissions or custom work, people can contact me directly. Additionally, I have many artworks available for sale through online platforms (Artsy, ArtClvb, Artwork Archive), as well as what's available through my website or hanging around my studio.



MARY BILYEU
mary@jewishtoledo.org

Read for Literacy – Changing lives, one student at a time

“In Lucas County, 40,000 adults read at the Below Basic level” – reading, at best, at a 4th grade level – “and are therefore functionally illiterate.” Another 100,000 read at only a Basic level; they’re able to perform daily tasks, but only ones that involve minimal reading.

These statistics come from the website of Read for Literacy (RfL), which has dedicated nearly 40 years to providing reading education services in northwest Ohio.

Read for Literacy – created in 1986 with the merger of the Toledo Area Literacy Council and the Junior League’s Project: READ – serves Lucas, Defiance, Fulton, Henry, and Wood Counties. It offers a variety of programs targeted to meet specific needs, with volunteer tutors assisting those who are striving to improve their reading skills.

Adult Basic Education: Imagine not being able to read this newspaper, fill out a job application independently, understand a bus schedule, or help your kids or grandchildren with their homework. These are just a few of the limitations that grownups who read at the Basic or Below Basic level contend with each day.

“There are so many life goals that

they want to accomplish,” said Cheryl Rothschild, Adult and Family Literacy Director for Read for Literacy. “Make change and count money, read a calendar, read grocery ads, get their driver’s license, write their name” – tasks that most people simply take for granted.

“We’re trying to help those individuals have the opportunity to break that cycle of low literacy,” Cheryl offered.

RfL’s Adult Literacy Education tutors work with their partner students on everything from learning the alphabet to studying for the GED or just improving general reading skills, whatever the individual’s goals are.

No prior teaching experience is required – patience coupled with a desire to help others is all that’s needed. RfL provides the necessary training, which generally takes up to two hours; a six-month minimum



▲ (L to R) Liz, Stacy, Jodi, and Hannah represented JFGT at the 37th Annual Corporate and Community Spelling Bee, sponsored by The Blade

commitment of weekly tutoring sessions is expected, and scheduling can be flexible. Two Jewish Toledo members – Jeff Bauer and Tom Kasle – are volunteer tutors for Read for Literacy. (See sidebar to learn about Tom’s experiences.)

“A lot of times, our students have not had anyone believe in them,” Cheryl continued. Read for Literacy, on the other hand, offers an abundance of support and

encouragement ... and often fun. “If a student is particularly interested in cooking,” Cheryl noted, “they can incorporate learning how to read a cookbook and measure ingredients.”

English Language Learners: Daily life for those who don’t speak English can be extremely challenging – just consider if you were trying to shop

LITERACY | CONTINUED ON PAGE 27

Read for Literacy Tutor Profile: Tom Kasle

“It was my dream after retirement” to become a Read for Literacy volunteer tutor, said Tom Kasle, president of Congregation B’nai Israel.

“I wanted to use my skills, because I read a lot.” He felt it was important to share that passion with others who, for one reason or another, have difficulty with literacy.

Tom noted that RfL clients’ “lack of reading skills comes from something abnormal in their early lives” – undiagnosed disabilities, poverty-related lack of access to books, dropping out of school, and other reasons – that can be overcome with patience and compassionate support.

Tom has been with Read for Literacy since 2022 and has tutored three adult students. “The third one was the charm,” he said of his current partner, Tim, whom he works with on a weekly basis. (Sometimes it can take a couple of tries to find the right fit, between personalities, schedules, etc.)

Tim is 49 and has dyslexia. “They didn’t know what to do with him in school,” Tom laments, so “he was slotted off into different classes.” He can do math, and “he’s got a good intellect – he’s above average,” but reading has remained a significant challenge.

After studying auto mechanics at Owens Community College, Tim was able to secure a job; then he lost two fingers in an accident and has since been on-and-off disability while trying to piece together full-time employment. Despite an ability to adapt and to learn new diagnostic and repair technologies, Tim’s poor literacy skills have proven to be a huge impediment to success, unsurprisingly. Tom noted that when one supervisor found out Tim couldn’t read, “he was out the door.”

Additionally, Tom added, “his [partner’s] dyslexia has closed him off because he’s been teased about it. He’s lost friends because of it.” Thankfully, Tim reached out to Read for Literacy, where he’s found himself a truly dedicated, nonjudgmental tutor.

When Tom found out he’d be partnered with someone who has dyslexia, he took the initiative to talk with a specialist to get more information. He also did a Google search to find a specially designed workbook.

“It starts out with one-syllable words and moves on to multi-syllable words. We’re on chapter 30, now,” Tom said with great pride in Tim’s efforts.

Tom has also created his own

assignments for his student, which includes four to five pages of review words; “I call it his ‘bible.’” The pair has found that “flash cards don’t work as well as [Tim] taking home a piece of paper with words on it,” noted the tutor.

Another learning tool is a list of sight words, including ones like “fought” and “learn” and “citizen,” that don’t sound like they look,” Tom added. “About half of them, he’s memorized” while using phonetics to decipher the others.

And Tom has given Tim a subscription to Ranger Rick magazine. “Any word he doesn’t know, he underlines it, and we go over it when we meet.”

Tom never underestimates his partner, with whom he’s now covering three- and four-syllable words. “You know, I’ll never use that,” Tim will sometimes say about terms he doesn’t often encounter. Maybe, his tutor will respond, but it’s still good to practice them and learn them.

Tim and Tom have not only developed the former’s literacy skills, but have also developed a friendship. “I’m extremely supportive of him,” Tom said of his RfL partner. “I always ask him what’s going on in his life.”

Tom commented that “it’s nice to



▲ Kasle | Submitted photo

know [his partner] reads so much better now than when we started. I have the word ‘persistence’ in his bible,” as that’s what Tim has utilized by working so hard to develop his reading skills.

Working one-on-one with a Read for Literacy student is tremendously rewarding, said Tom, who wants to encourage other Jewish Toledo community members to sign up as tutors.

“I’m helping change somebody’s life,” he said. “I like saving the world, one person at a time.”



LITERACY | CONTINUED FROM PAGE 26

for groceries or make a doctor’s appointment in, say, Greek or Tagalog.

But Read for Literacy volunteers don’t need to be fluent in another language to partner with non-native English speakers who’d like to improve their English reading skills. “Google Translate is used as needed,” Cheryl said reassuringly.

All that’s required of a tutor, she continued, is “the desire to help others and to work one-on-one” toward the student’s goals.

Creating Young Readers: Volunteers in this program for kindergarteners through 2nd graders are known as “Reader Friends,” and they work one-on-one throughout the school year to help improve children’s early reading skills before the students get too far behind in school and, later, life.

“We send books home” via this venture, Cheryl said, to help build personal libraries. Kids get to take home books they’ve read and are familiar with for practice, and this helps to encourage a family engagement component, too.

Three, four, and five-year-old preschoolers have their own reading program, which runs year-round.

Volunteers working with children are required to be fingerprinted and have background checks done, which Read for Literacy will coordinate and pay for.

Real Men READ-y: Real Men READ-y is a project in which Read for Literacy, The Toledo Lucas County Public Library, United Way of Greater Toledo-African American Leadership Council, and Toledo Public Schools work together for the greater good of improving literacy. This venture pairs African American male tutors with African American male students in kindergarten and 1st grade; the adult partners serve as MENtors to the young boys.

Creating Family Readers: This initiative combines the Adult Literacy and Creating Young Readers

programs, such that volunteer tutors work with a family unit as well as with the individuals in that family.

Claire’s Day: This is northwest Ohio’s largest children’s book festival, held in May at locations in both Toledo and Maumee, which merged with Read for Literacy 10 years ago. It was created in memory of 10-year-old Claire Rubini, a lifelong lover of books, who died of a heart condition in 2000.

One of the day’s highlights is the C.A.R.E. Award ceremonies (Claire’s Award for Reading Excellence), at which area K-8 students who’ve been nominated by their teachers as the most improved readers are given prizes.

“It’s nice,” Cheryl pointed out, because awards go to “students who are not usually recognized for their achievements. [And] it’s just so fun to see the students who are receiving awards all dressed up, and family members coming to support them.”

Jewish Federation of Greater Toledo is a long-time supporter of Read for Literacy and has worked with the organization to not just promote reading skills for students of all ages but also to combat antisemitism. (Cheryl Rothschild of RfL is the wife of JFGT CEO Stephen Rothschild.)

Since 2021, thanks to an anonymous Toledo Jewish Community Foundation donor, Read for Literacy has purchased nearly one thousand books selected from a list curated by the Anti-Defamation League to address issues of hatred and other-ing. The books cover topics such as bullying, diversity, genocide, the Holocaust, racism, and tolerance, and they’re specifically geared toward students from kindergarten through 2nd grade.

“Children who may not own any books are given a permanent gift to call their own,” said Stephen when the donation initiative began, “while learning about topics that are not being taught nearly enough. If these gifts become part of a permanent home library with a reminder of



this small kindness by the Jewish community inscribed inside, a lasting ripple of good may be the result.”

A few weeks ago on October 16, JFGT also supported Read for Literacy in a way that was particularly exciting.

That’s when a four-person team represented Federation at the 37th Annual Corporate and Community Spelling Bee, sponsored by The Blade. 100% of the money raised went to the good cause which, as Cheryl noted, “helps [students of all ages] to be more successful.”

While our MaccaBEES didn’t take home a prize, they had such a great time joining dozens of other community groups and businesses that there’s already buzz about sending a team to next year’s event, too.

Diana Bush, Executive Director of Read for Literacy, thanked JFGT for its support of the Bee, noting that sponsors’ generosity would enable the organization to continue recruiting and training 300 volunteers to work with students of all ages (400 in the pre-K through 2nd grade programs alone); provide gift books for children; celebrate learners’ hard-earned progress; distribute 10,000 books with activity sheets for self-directed study; and much more.

The community can support Read for Literacy’s critically important mission in several ways.

Financial donations, of course, are always appreciated. (See below for information about making a contribution.)

But time is a priceless commodity. Tutors are always needed for each of the organization’s programs, and there is currently a wait list of students seeking help.

“I feel that there’s such a great need in our community,” Cheryl said. “We’d love to get people involved – it’s a fun experience!”

“And you know when we talk about tzedakah and giving back?” she continued. “This is a great way to give back to somebody. It could be the best hour of your week.”

For more information or to make a donation to Read for Literacy, go to readforliteracy.org. To learn more about becoming a volunteer tutor, reach out to Cheryl Rothschild at cheryl.rothschild@toledolibrary.org; she can connect you to the program you’re most interested in serving with.

Mary Bilyeu is Community Relations Programming Specialist at Jewish Federation of Greater Toledo.

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At Hillel419, students like Julia are discovering more than just Jewish traditions, they are discovering themselves. They find friends who celebrate their joys, mentors who guide them through challenges, and a community that encourages them to explore their identity and passions. From Shabbat dinners to service projects, holiday celebrations to leadership opportunities, Hillel419 is a home where Jewish students can grow, connect, and thrive.

Your support makes these experiences possible. It ensures that every student, regardless of background or experience, can participate in programs that strengthen their Jewish identity, foster meaningful connections, and create memories that last a lifetime.

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Give today at www.hillel419.org and help us empower the next generation of Jewish leaders.

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"During my time at BGSU Hillel, I've made lifelong friends, learned more about Judaism, and taken on meaningful leadership roles that have allowed me to give back and shape our campus community. Hillel has been a safe, supportive space to grow and navigate college life-and for that, I'm forever grateful." -Julia Roffman, class of 2025