

THE REPORTER

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JFS pandemic update

By Rabbi Rachel Esserman

Rose Shea, director of Jewish Family Service, noted an increase in two types of phone calls during the past year. There were calls from people asking for financial or emotional support due to the COVID pandemic. The other calls? They were from people asking how they could help JFS, not just financially, but by offering services for those in need.

"The Jewish community has been very generous with its time and resources," Shea said. She noted even though this time has produced "unforeseen difficulties," it hasn't damped "our spirits" since the community has come together to help each other.

The past year has been a very busy one for JFS. Since Shea began working outside the office in March 2020, she's received 25-30 phone calls a month, which she calls "a big increase." Shea said that many of the people JFS helped this past year have no family in the area. Their out-of-town relatives are often frustrated by their inability to help or visit, which means there is an increased

need for emotional support and referrals – for both out-of-town family members and those living in this area.

According to Shea, the pandemic has created a great deal of insecurity and fear. She has worked with clients on how to maintain a positive perspective and manage their emotions. The first group to call were seniors, who needed help with everything from where to find masks to how to arrange for food deliveries. More recently, calls have been coming from those who were formerly employed by the hospitality industry (restaurants, nail salons, small businesses that have closed, etc.) and who are now facing permanent job loss.

Shea said she did a great deal of research to find low cost solutions to problems, as well as collaborating with other local community organizations to find financial resources. Not only has she worked with local rabbis and synagogues, but JFS agencies outside the area (including Ithaca, Albany and New York City) have been exchanging ideas on how best

to serve those in need. Shea believes the collaboration will help them find new avenues to supply help and reach more people. A local agency that is also helping is Catholic Charities: Shea noted that some members of the Jewish community feel uncomfortable asking JFS for help, so the two organizations are collaborating to offer them resources.

Shea noted how community members stepped up to help meet people's needs. According to Shea, people called to ask about how they could help and then called back months later to see if she needed more help. This was in addition to the regular holiday

giving that occurs every year. Volunteers did everything from grocery deliveries to making phone calls to those who felt isolated due to the pandemic.

Shea said she misses being in the Federation office at the JCC and seeing the people who used to stop by, either with questions or just to say hello. Even though the past year has left many people feeling anxious, she is aware of a sense of unity in the community, which has been shown in the way people are supporting each other. Shea said she is very grateful for all the help she's received and wanted to thank everyone who has stepped up to help.

Federation to hold Tot Shabbat in the Park

By Reporter staff

The Jewish Federation of Greater Binghamton will hold a Tot Shabbat in the Park on Friday, June 11, at 4 pm. The event will take place at pavilion number two in Arnold Park in Vestal. It will take place outdoors and all COVID protocols will be followed.

On offer will be Shabbat snacks of grape juice and challah. Rabbi Benny Kellman and Josh Hubal will perform children's Shabbat songs. There will also be readings from books published by Kalanot Books, a Jewish publishing house located in Susquehanna, PA. (For information on books published by the press, visit KalanotBooks.com. To read an interview of one of the publishers, visit <https://www.thereporter.org/archives/feature/introducing-children-to-different-flavors-of-judaism>.)

"The Federation has received requests for more programming for families with young children, so I'm pleased to announce we will be holding our first ever Tot Shabbat in the Park," said Shelley Hubal, executive director of the Federation. "I'm

looking forward to families from across the Jewish community having the opportunity to get to know each other – both parents and children – and to celebrate an outdoor Shabbat-themed event."

RSVPs are not required, but are appreciated in order to make certain there is enough food for everyone. To make a reservation, e-mail Hubal at director@jfgb.org.

Federation to hold annual meeting on June 16

By Reporter staff

The Jewish Federation of Greater Binghamton will hold its 2021 Annual Meeting on Wednesday, June 16, at 7 pm. The meeting will be held on Zoom and anyone interested in attending should contact Shelley Hubal, executive director of the Federation, at director@jfgb.org for the link.

"I didn't expect that we would be having a second Zoom annual meeting," Hubal said. "Despite the challenges of COVID-19, I am incredibly proud that we have been able to come together as a community and remain connected. We welcome community members to join our annual meeting where we will share our vision for the year to come."

The Federation's Annual Report will be available for viewing on the Federation website, www.jfgb.org, and will also appear

in the June 18 issue of *The Reporter*.

Board of Directors

Slate of Officers 2021-2022: President Suzanne Holwitt; Immediate Past President Howard Warner; Vice President Mark Walker; Treasurer Jeff Shapiro; Assistant Treasurer Lee Schechter; Secretary Eileen Miller; Assistant Secretary Brendan Byrnes; Campaign Chairwoman Marilyn Bell; Endowment Chairman Michael Wright; and CRC Chairman Randy Friedman.

Board members to 2022: Rita Bleier, Steve Gilbert, Jeff Platsky, Rose Shapiro, Susan Walker and Arieh Ullmann.

Board members to 2023: Al Berk, Nancy Dorfman, Mark Epstein, Dennis Foreman and Cathy Velenchik.

Board members to 2024: Sondra Foreman and Charles Gilinsky.

Esserman wins two Syracuse Press Club Awards

By Reporter staff

When the Syracuse Press Club sends out a list of its finalists, it always notes that the list is scrambled and that the first, second and third place winners will be announced at the annual awards banquet. This year, however, Rabbi Rachel Esserman, executive editor of *The Reporter*, will not have to wait until September to know which awards she'll receive. That's because she's the only

finalist in the Critique category for two of her book reviews.

The two reviews Esserman will receive awards for are "Hollywood and Jewish refugees" and "Family and finding a home." (The reviews can be found on *The Reporter* website at www.thereporter.org/streams/executive-editor/executive-editor-stream/off-the-shelf-hollywood-and-jewish-refugees and www.thereporter.org/)

past-articles/feature-book-review/feature-book-review-stream/book-review-stream/off-the-shelf-family-and-finding-a-home-by-rachel-esserman.)

"It's exciting to win two awards in one category," Esserman said. "Both reviews are nonfiction, which I enjoy reading because it gives me a chance to learn something new."

That's true of her review of "The Sun and Her Stars: Salka Viertel and Hitler's Exiles in the Golden Age of Hollywood" by Donna Rifkind. Esserman noted in her review that "before I read the press release for [Rifkind's book], I'd never heard of Salka Viertel. While I knew that many Jewish and non-Jewish refugees who were actors, writers and directors worked in Hollywood or New York, her name was completely unfamiliar." In the end, Esserman wrote, "Rifkind does an excellent job not only bringing Viertel's accomplishments to light and proving she was a remarkable woman, but portraying the lives of those refugees who felt lost in the New World and those who found success."

The "Family" review features two memoirs, which Esserman thought offered different sides of an interesting issue. See "Awards" on page 2

Federation hosted pre-Shavuot celebration



At left: More than 40 people attended the Jewish Federation of Greater Binghamton's pre-Shavuot gathering on May 16 in the Temple Israel parking lot. The event included readings from local rabbis, music and ice cream. (For more photos of the event, see page 7.)

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