

Jewish Observer

of Central New York

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THE SEVEN USHPIZIN

Honored guests in our sukkah

 ABRAHAM Chesed — Lovingkindness  The patriarch of boundless hospitality and love, who welcomed strangers into his tent.	 ISAAC Gevurah — Strength, Restraint  Associated with discipline, awe, and self-limitation, reflected in his role in the Akedah.	 JACOB Tiferet — Beauty, Harmony  The balance of love and restraint, blending his forebears' qualities into harmony and truth.	 MOSES Netzach — Endurance, Eternity  The enduring teacher and leader who brought the Torah and sustained Israel in the wilderness.	 AARON Hod — Splendor, Humility  The High Priest, associated with glory, gratitude, and the gracious service of others.	 JOSEPH Yesod — Foundation  The righteous one (tzaddik) who kept his integrity and bound the generations together.	 DAVID Malchut — Kingship, Sovereignty  The king who represents the indwelling divine presence, drawing all the attributes into the world.
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Each night of Sukkot, one of these honored guests is welcomed into our sukkah, accompanied by the other six, filling our home with blessing and inspiration.



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October 2026

From the Editor



Barbara Davis

Sukkot is one of the oldest and most joyful holidays on the Jewish calendar and, for most American Jews, one of the least observed. Surveys find that only 20-30% of American Jews build or spend time in a sukkah, the temporary outdoor booth at the center of the holiday, compared to the 70% who attend a Passover seder or fast on Yom Kippur.

The reasons are many: Sukkot requires building a structure, eating in it for seven days, and ideally sleeping under its open-air roof, a significant undertaking for those living in apartments or colder climates. Some people just don't see contemporary significance in an ancient agricultural holiday. And while Passover and Hanukkah resonate even with secular or non-practicing Jews because of family traditions and historical memory, Sukkot is more of an observant holiday. As a result, it is mostly celebrated in Orthodox and traditional Conservative communities and in Israel, where it is a weeklong holiday of joyful celebration.

Yet Sukkot carries ideas that are worth appreciating regardless of one's level of observance: the value of impermanence, the practice of gratitude for the harvest of one's life, the importance of hospitality, and the strange comfort that comes from being a little exposed to the elements. Sukkot also seems to inspire creativity. Sukkah design competitions have become a surprisingly serious arena for architectural experimentation. The most famous is Sukkah City, launched in 2010 by writer Joshua Foer and the nonprofit Reboot, which drew over 600 entries from architects in 43 countries and installed 12 winning designs in New York's Union Square. Toronto's Sukkahville, held annually in front of City Hall, uses the competition to raise funds for affordable housing, connecting the sukkah's themes of temporary shelter to real-world urban housing issues.

The Chicago Sukkah Design Festival pairs architects with community organizations with the built sukkahs remaining as public installations after the holiday. Harvard's Graduate School of Design has run its own design-build competition, with one winning team using parametric software and a Swiss structural engineer. 16 Cubits, held in 2024 at Urban Adamah in Berkeley and described as "a remix of Burning Man, Sukkah City, and Boisbuchet," challenged teams to build biophilic sukkahs from local, bio-based materials in under three days. What unites all of these contests is the realization that the ancient halachic rules governing the sukkah—specific wall counts, schach roofing, mandatory star-visibility at night—function almost like a modernist design brief, an irresistible challenge for architects.

When it comes to Sukkot nomenclature, the formula for fun is Food/Drink + Alliteration + Sukkah Setting. To wit: Pizza in the Hut, Scotch in the Sukkah, Sushi Under the Stars, Fondue in the Fronds, Brisket in the Booth, Ramen Under the Roof, Shawarma Under the Schach and Bourbon Under the Branches. Syracuse has its own nomenclature:

And there is another serious side to Sukkot: of all the structures Judaism asks us to build, the sukkah is the most improbable. We are told to construct it badly—walls that wobble, a roof loose enough to let the rain fall in and the stars shine through. We invest all year in securing our homes against weather, and then, for one week, we move into a hut that any

strong wind could knock down. And we are commanded to be joyful there. Sukkot is Z'man simchateinu, the season of our rejoicing.

The sukkah's strange genius is its openness. Tradition fills it with guests. The kabbalists gave us the ushpizin, the seven shepherds of our people who appear on our cover page. Many also welcome the ushpizot as well: Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, Leah, Miriam, Abigail, and Esther. Perhaps in 5787, we might invite other guests as well

There are several guests I would like to set a place for. The first is Ruth, who came to us as a stranger and chose to stay: "Your people shall be my people." In a year when so many feel the walls going up, Ruth reminds us that the Jewish people has always been a people one could join, and that the great-grandmother of King David was once a foreigner gleaning at the edges of the field. My second guest would be Emma Lazarus, who looked at the Statue of Liberty in the New York harbor and wrote a welcome to the tired and the poor, the huddled masses yearning to be free, the wretched refuse of teeming shores to an America that promised hope and freedom. My third guest would be a surprise: Regina Jonas, the first woman ordained as a rabbi, who served her dwindling Berlin congregation, taught and comforted in Theresienstadt, and was murdered at Auschwitz. Jonas was then nearly erased a second time, her ordination forgotten for half a century, until her papers surfaced in an archive. To set her a place is to rebut that second erasure, and to keep faith with every woman whose contributions were almost lost to history. I would also be honored if Hillel, Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks and Syracuse native, attorney Louis Marshall, accepted my invitation.

And I would leave one chair empty, for a stranger or a person in need. The kabbalists taught that the exalted guests would not enter a sukkah unless the poor were welcomed there also. That is a lesson I think we increasingly need to remember. In the years since October 7th, an old hatred has stepped back into the open. It has fallen to our generation to deal with it and there is increasingly a tendency to step back and circle the wagons. But those who hate us have never understood that Jews, despite being a people who have been the strangers in every land they inhabited, still do not claim the right to be hard toward the stranger. On the contrary, the same Torah that commands us to defend our own also commands us, thirty-six times, to love the stranger. Leviticus is very clear: the foreigner who lives among you shall be to you as one of your citizens, and you shall love him as yourself. Our sages made it law. We sustain the poor of every people alongside our own, visit their sick alongside our sick, and comfort their mourners alongside ours—mipnei darchei shalom, for the sake of peace, and because every human being is created in the image of God, without exception. As hard as it may be, we must remember Hillel's question: If I am only for myself, what am I?

The JO invited community members to tell us whom they would invite as guests to their sukkahs this year. We were delighted by the responses and the intriguing guest lists appear on page 6. It is clear that these Sukkot conversations and interactions would be fascinating.

Sukkot has been called "The Jewish Holiday Most American Jews Don't Observe." Yet perhaps in 5787, it is one of the most meaningful for our time. Think about it. *Chag sameach.*

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Board Chair.....**Nan Fechtner**
Interim President/CEO**Barbara Davis**
Editor.....**Barbara Davis**



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MESSAGE FROM the FEDERATION



People often wonder how the Jewish Federation of Central New York connects with our homeland. The answer runs through a single partner organization: The Jewish Agency for Israel. Federation funding for Israel goes through this century-old organization and its support goes to people—immigrants, survivors, students, families, small business owners. The money does not go to the government or to the military. The Jewish Agency’s recent 2025 Impact Report shows exactly how the funds are used. We thought it important to share this information with our community.

The Jewish Agency predates the State of Israel and is funded by a partnership of the Jewish Federations of North America and the United Israel Appeal, Keren Hayesod and donors from around the world. The organization describes 2025 as a year of “rebuilding, resilience, and renewal,” coming after the trauma of October 7, 2023, and the further shock of the Iran-Israel conflict known as Operation Rising Lion.

The Jewish Agency’s oldest and most visible mission is *aliyah*, helping Jews around the world immigrate to Israel. In 2025, the Agency assisted 22,270 immigrants from 105 countries in making that move, ranging from infants to a 100-year-old woman from Uruguay who said that events since October 7 confirmed for her that her place was in Israel. Close to 9,350 newcomers received Hebrew-language instruction and settling-in support through ulpan programs designed to ease the transition to a new country and a new language.

Some of those immigrants arrive on their own and choose to serve in the Israeli military as “lone soldiers”—men and women without family already in the country. Here, too, the Jewish Agency’s Wings program does not fund or arm anyone. It provides personal support such as hospital visits, phone calls during difficult stretches and help navigating benefits to these young immigrants as individuals. In 2025, about 2,800 lone soldiers took part in Wings, and roughly 2,200 needed ongoing support because of the war.

The report’s most sobering numbers appear under “Strengthening Israel,” which describes assistance to civilians affected by terror and war. The Fund for Victims of Terror has, since October 7, 2023, distributed tens of millions of dollars to survivors, family members of victims, and returned hostages,

funding therapy, rehabilitation, and long-term support—again, aid to individuals and families, not government or military expenditure. A survivor of the Nova Festival massacre described the assistance as more than financial: it was proof that people in Israel and around the world had not forgotten him.

When Iran began striking Israel in June 2025, The Jewish Agency opened a round-the-clock Situation Room in Jerusalem and created the Rising Lion Emergency Fund, which sent grants to bereaved families, hospitalized victims, and households whose homes had been destroyed. The fund also helped foreign program participants get home safely when flights were restricted. Economic hardship among reservist families received attention too. Roughly 4,000 Israeli businesses—many run by spouses left to manage alone while a partner served in the reserves—received loans or grants in 2025, reaching about 11,000 reservist households. A new \$18 million grant program launched with the Class Action Foundation specifically supports the spouses of reservists whose businesses suffered.

The Agency’s youth and education programs also expanded: the Eshkol leadership program now reaches more than 60 schools, roughly

400 young people studied at the Nitzana Campus in the Negev, and 1,300 children facing behavioral or family difficulties were housed and supported at Youth Villages. The Youth Futures mentoring program, pairing at-risk children with trained mentors, grew through a \$13 million expansion to serve more than 17,000 children and families in 2025.

Much of The Jewish Agency’s worldwide work is designed to keep communities like ours in Central New York tied to Israel through people, not just donations. Roughly 3,000 *shlichim* (emissaries) served in nearly 500 communities globally in 2025, including 68 communities receiving one for the first time. *Shlichim* are young Israelis who show up in synagogues, on college campuses, and at summer camps to talk about Israel and build relationships. Our JCC has two *shlichim* at its summer camp.

Campers2Gether, launched after October 7 to give Israeli teens from affected communities a summer respite, brought teenagers from 107 Israeli communities to camps across 16 states and provinces in 2025, supported by counselors and mental health professionals. And Masa Israel Journey, which offers young adults immersive volunteer, internship, and teaching placements lasting two to ten months, welcomed 6,850 participants last year.

A newer initiative, Campus Ready, was created to prepare North American Jewish high schoolers for the polarized atmosphere many now

encounter at college over Israel-related issues; it is set to expand significantly in the next two years.

The Jewish Agency also underwrites physical security for diaspora Jewish institutions like synagogues, schools, and community centers through its Security Assistance Fund, which distributed tens of millions of dollars across 49 countries in 2025 amid a sharp rise in demand. Its JReady program trains community leaders in emergency preparedness; when a terror attack struck a Chanukah event at Bondi Beach in Sydney in December 2025, JReady had a delegation of Israeli trauma specialists on the ground within 48 hours.

None of this reaches Israel or communities abroad without the annual campaigns run by federations like ours. When a Central New York family gives to the Jewish Federation of Central New York, a portion of that gift becomes part of the shared national and international allocation that funds *aliyah* absorption, terror-victim support, youth mentoring, emissaries in our own community, and security grants for institutions much like our own. There is a direct, traceable line from a gift made in Syracuse to a hand extended to a Nova Festival survivor, a Bnei Menashe family preparing to make *aliyah* from India, or a *shlich* greeting students on a local college campus.

We hope this information helps you understand that your gift to the Federation annual campaign is not just about money. The bigger picture is that, through the Jewish Agency, you are helping members of our large extended Jewish family who are in need and your gift makes a meaningful difference.

The Challenge of Sukkot

by Rabbi Irvin S. Beigel,
retired healthcare chaplain



Although the three Pilgrimage Festivals are joyous celebrations, it is curious that the Torah does not obligate us to rejoice on Passover. Only once does it command rejoicing on Shavuot. The Torah, however, reminds us three times to rejoice on Sukkot. Our prayerbook calls Sukkot the “season of our rejoicing”. The tradition may emphasize joy on Sukkot because, paradoxically, the outstanding symbol of the holiday is the sukka, a temporary hut which provides some protection to us from the elements, but which leaves us vulnerable to rain and to strong winds. The sukka symbolizes the frailty of our lives and our vulnerability to nature and to human brutality.

Humanity has achieved many things. We have built skyscrapers, we have flown faster and higher than the birds, and we have built the internet. The sukka reminds us that, in spite of all that men and women have achieved, the forces of nature and the machinations of our enemies can overpower us. The sukka teaches humility and reminds us of how small and powerless we are. Israel protects its people, but on October 7, 2023, we became painfully aware that its protection was not sufficient.

The injunctions of the Torah remind us that, even in the face of danger and uncertainty, we can find joy. In the midst of overwhelming tragedy, Israelis found joy in drawing closer to community, in celebrating weddings, in a renewed connection to God, the One who can protect us when humans can not. We, in the Diaspora, feel the increasingly strong winds of anti-Semitism. The Jew hatred from both the right and the left threaten to overwhelm our defenses. We are worried and afraid.

On Shemini Atzeret, the eighth day of Sukkot, many synagogues read Kohelet, the Book of Ecclesiastes. Almost the entire book describes the impermanence of all human achievement. “Everything is [like] a fleeting breath.” (Ecclesiastes 1:2, my translation) All is predestined. We are powerless to affect the course of human history. “Only that occur Which has occurred; There is nothing new Beneath the sun.” (JPS Tanakh, Ecclesiastes 1:9)

Just as the obligation to rejoice is a remedy for the insecurity and fear that the sukka may arouse, so the last verse in the text of Kohelet, as the book has come to us, suggests a remedy for the paralysis and hopelessness that Kohelet might engender. “The sum of the matter when all is said and done: Revere God and observe His commandments!” (JPS Tanakh, Ecclesiastes 12:13)

Recognizing our vulnerabilities, our limitations, and the unpredictability of our lives is to accept reality. To condemn ourselves to despair, helplessness, and paralysis is another matter. Sukkot teaches us that we can find joy even amidst unspeakable tragedy and turmoil. We need not be immobilized by the storms that assail us on every side. Our brothers and sisters in Israel have set an example for us. Following the daily regimen prescribed by God’s commandments helps us connect to community and to our history. It leads us to action. It obligates us to act for our people’s well-being. It commands us to bring justice and kindness to the world.

Kohelet tells us that there is “A time for silence and a time for speaking”. (JPS Tanakh, Ecclesiastes 3:7) If there ever was a time to speak out in defense of Israel, in opposing anti-Semitism, and in defense of American democracy, it is now.

“May the Lord give His people peace; may the Lord bless His people with peace.” (Psalm 29:11)

When We See You Again

by Rachel Goldberg-Polin

Reviewed by Rabbi Vicki Lieberman

Is there a book that you know you must read but have not found the right time? For me, it was Rachel Goldberg-Polin’s book, *When We See You Again*. Over the last two plus years, every article I read that she penned in tribute to her son, Hersh Polin, kidnapped and murdered by Hamas, was beautifully written, Judaically anchored, and literarily astute. I had to hold her book in my hands—an e-book would not suffice. Her writing would be so skillful, every word chosen for its exactness, the typesetting, the format a conscious choice. I had to purchase a copy.

I flew down to Brooklyn to visit my mom—and there was the book! My brother had sent it to her. I picked it up, sat in my dad’s (z”l) recliner and read the book in one sitting. When I finished it, I knew it had changed me and before I laid it down on the table, I had an overwhelming sense to kiss it gently as if it were a *sefer kodesh*—a holy book, a prayerbook.

This is a book to experience. To share Goldberg-Polin’s stories, her creating interconnectedness between people, time and events. For me to share specifics of her book would be a disservice to all those who will read it. It is best read in as few sittings as possible. Come to this book prepared to understand one person’s truth when horror invaded her peace. Do not be surprised if, in her humanity, you learn what it is to have hope.

You may know the story of Hersh Polin. You may know more than I did when I picked up the book. You will know more. You will know his WHY and you will know his path to his WHY and you will know how his WHY sustained him and others during their captivity. You will know more than any stranger should know, much less his mother, his father, his sisters, and family and friends in his Israeli and American (Chicago) communities.

Rachel Goldberg-Polin’s writing vibrates with nuances that reflect her emotions. Short chapters. Short sentences. Repetitive words. Blank spaces. Poetry. This is a mother who cannot catch her breath. This is a writer who knows how to use language. This is a woman of tremendous faith. This is a humble person who writes of yearning for a boring evening at home with her husband and children.

I was drawn in by that writing. I felt out of breath. I appreciated her sharing Judaic teachings that helped her. Stories from the Torah, lessons from The Talmud, sayings from notable rabbis, wisdom from her own rabbis and Jewish community. She knew her one and only son was surviving until he wasn’t. To grapple with the unimaginable horror, she turned to her faith, her Judaic foundation. Isn’t that what many of us do? In times of crises, we turn to our faith. If you are broken, how will you continue to live?

This book unapologetically allows us to scream, to grieve, not to lie when asked, “How are you?” I think of the recent *shiva* for my father, and the times the *shiva* was about my father and the (thankfully) fewer times that it was about the people visiting with each other in my home. Could I throw them out? Could I have yelled, “This is not comforting!!” Having read this book, I think I can and I think I will. It has changed me.

Goldberg-Polin made me understand that grief is not something to get through. It is a blessing to live with grief because it means there was love. We don’t need to lie and say we’re fine or it’s getting better. Those answers make the questioner feel better. Does anyone want to know that I am still devastated by my father’s death last October? Who do you



mourn? Who do you cry for? Tell someone. Years ago, I saw a fellow congregant at a store looking quite dazed. I inquired if she was okay. She said that her daughter had died. I was confused because I had not heard about that. I later learned her daughter had died over 20 years before we moved to town. Yet, the pain I saw on her face was fresh. I wish I had taken the time to ask her to tell me about her daughter.

No one gets through life unscathed by sorrow, anguish, or pain. We don’t need a book to remind us of that or of the fact that every day we are one day closer to our own deaths. Goldberg-Polin knows she is not the only parent to bury a child. She never claims to be anything more than her husband’s wife and her three (yes, she still counts three) children’s mother. She envelops us in her stories of Hersh and we cannot resist the human response to find similarities in our own lives. You will find them, on every page, in every teaching. Let them wash over you. Experience your memories. Share your stories.

Two months ago, it was Hersh’s *yahrzeit*. This month we observe the *yahrzeit* of all those murdered at the Nova Festival. Yom Kippur and Sukkot will have a *yahrzeit* service. Rachel Goldberg-Polin gently suggests that *yahrzeit* is not for those who mourn; we have not forgotten our loved ones. *Yahrzeit* is to let everyone else know who lived and who is loved. When my father lit *yahrzeit* candles, I saw all the people he loved. He thought the lighting was bereft without a prayer. It was his custom to recite the *Shema*. I will now do that for him.

The Jewish Holiday Most American Jews Don't Observe

Sukkot is one of the oldest and most joyful holidays on the Jewish calendar—and, for most American Jews, one of the least observed. Surveys consistently find that only around 20 to 30% of American Jews build or spend time in a sukkah, the temporary outdoor booth at the center of the holiday. Compare that to the 70 percent who attend a Passover seder or fast on Yom Kippur, and the gap is striking.

The reasons are practical as much as anything. Sukkot requires building a structure, eating in it for seven days, and ideally sleeping under its open-air roof—a significant undertaking, especially for those who live in apartments or colder climates like Syracuse.

There is a cultural dimension as well. Holidays like Passover and Hanukkah have developed strong resonance even among secular or non-practicing Jews, and represent family traditions, historical memory, and a foothold in the broader American calendar. Sukkot, by contrast, is more distinctly observant in character, and its practice has remained concentrated in Orthodox and traditional Conservative communities.

A new book, *Nobody Knows Why We*

Celebrate Sukkot: Unraveling the Secrets of the Torah's Most Enigmatic Holidays by Reuben Ben Quesus, confronts the issue head on. Drawing on the Torah text itself, the rituals of the festival, and the teachings of the sages, Quesus pursues a web of unexpected connections—between Sukkot and Yom Kippur, the *cherubim*, the commandment to “see the face of God” on the festivals, and even the prohibition against cooking a kid in its mother’s milk—ultimately inviting readers to see the holiday in an entirely new light.

In communities where Sukkot is observed, the holiday is vivid and communal. Sukkahs appear on balconies, in parking lots, in synagogue courtyards; the smell of pine and citrus fills the



air. Sukkah hopping is a special Sukkot custom. People visit several sukkahs over the course of the holiday rather than spending all their time in their own. They move from one family’s, friend’s, or institution’s sukkah to the next, sometimes for a full meal at each, sometimes just for a snack, a *l’chaim*, a blessing, and some conversation before moving on.

The sukkah hop derived naturally out of the holiday’s spirit. Sukkot emphasizes hospitality—the tradition of *ushpizin*, the symbolic welcoming of honored guests like Abraham, Sarah, and the other patriarchs and matriarchs into the sukkah each night, sets a tone of opening one’s temporary dwelling to others. Inviting real guests, and being invited in turn, is considered part of celebrating well. In larger Jewish communities, synagogues, day schools and Federations often organize it formally, publishing a map or schedule of participating households so members can travel a route on a given afternoon or evening, with different stops offering different foods or activities. Some communities build it around families with young children, making it a way for kids to see many sukkahs and meet many neighbors in one outing. It’s also become a popular way to strengthen community ties and to welcome newcomers, interfaith families, or unaffiliated folks into Jewish ritual life in a low-pressure, festive setting.

The Search for the Perfect Etrog

Every fall, in the weeks before Sukkot, in Jewish communities from Brooklyn to Buenos Aires to Tel Aviv, people crowd into pop-up markets, lean over folding tables, and examine wrinkled fruits with the intensity of a jeweler examining diamonds. They are looking for a perfect etrog.

The etrog (*Citrus medica*), also called a citron, is one of the Four Species — the *arba minim*—that Jews are commanded to hold and wave on the festival of Sukkot. The Torah instructs: “Take for yourselves on the first day the fruit of a beautiful tree.” The rabbis, parsing every word, determined that the “beautiful tree” was the citron. But what, exactly, makes a citron beautiful? That question has fueled argument, scholarship, commerce, and genuine heartbreak for more than two thousand years. It is still unresolved.

The etrog trade is a multimillion-dollar global industry, centered largely in Israel with significant production in Calabria in southern Italy, Morocco, and parts of the United States. Prices for a single fruit range from a few dollars to several hundred — even thousands — for one of exceptional lineage and form. The



stakes, for observant buyers, are not merely aesthetic. A blemished etrog, depending on the nature of the flaw, may render the mitzvah invalid. No pressure.

The requirements for a kosher etrog are formidable and, to the uninitiated, bewildering. The fruit must be whole and unblemished—no spots, no cuts, no soft patches. The *pitom*, the small protrusion at the top, must be intact, though some varieties grow without one, which raises its own disputations. The color should be a clear, luminous yellow, not greenish. The shape should be elongated, tapering toward the top. The skin should be bumpy and fragrant.

Then there is the question of grafting. An etrog grafted onto lemon rootstock, a common agricultural practice that produces a hardier plant, is considered by most halachic authorities to be not a true citron but a hybrid and therefore disqualified. Today, buyers seeking the most stringently kosher etrog look for fruit from orchards

that can document generations of ungrafted cultivation and have the paperwork to prove it.

Among Ashkenazi Jews, the most prized etrog variety is the Yanover etrog, originally from Genoa and cultivated in Calabria for centuries. Yemenite Jews favor a different type that is rounder, with a thicker rind.

Once Sukkot ends, the etrog must be dealt with. Some people make jam. Others stud it with cloves and let it dry into a fragrant decoration. Still others save it until Havdalah at the end of Shabbat, when its scent mingles with the spice box. There is a custom of giving a piece to a pregnant woman, in the hope that it will bring an easy delivery and a healthy child.

Making the jam is a cottage industry in itself. The pith is thick and must be prepared carefully to remove bitterness—boiled, drained, boiled again, sweetened slowly. People who make it describe the result as intensely fragrant, unlike anything you can buy in a store. One cook said, “It tastes like you’re eating a prayer.”



Sukkot and the Practice of Restraint

by Dennis S. Lerner

Years ago, I built a sukkah. In truth, it was more pergola than sukkah, but it served. I liked the idea of eating outside under the stars. In practice, between the rain and the Syracuse cold, its use was more often honored in thought than in fact. Still, I was drawn to it. I just didn't understand why.

So I tried to find out.

Sukkot is a Jewish holiday, which means it carries layers—historical, agricultural, halachic. At its surface, it is a harvest festival, and in that, it predates the Jewish people. Autumn ingathering celebrations were common across the ancient world. The Israelites inherited that pattern and reshaped it within a framework of law and covenant.

But Sukkot is not simply a celebration of abundance. It is a system designed to regulate how we behave in the face of abundance. The agricultural laws surrounding Sukkot—*Pe'ah*, *Leket*, *Shikh'chah*, *Peret*, *Hefker*, *Shmita*—are not acts of charity. They are structural constraints. They force inefficiency into production. They prevent total extraction. They ensure that the field is never fully harvested and that ownership is never absolute. The poor, the stranger, and even animals have a built-in claim. This isn't generosity. It's design. These laws



exist because systems drift toward imbalance. Soil depletes. Wealth concentrates. People overreach. The Torah's response is not to assume restraint, but to impose it—embedding limits directly into the act of production.

Sukkot sits at the center of this logic. It arrives at the moment of completion and interrupts it. The harvest is in. The storehouses are full. And we leave our homes. The sukkah is deliberately fragile: incomplete walls, a roof that exposes us to the elements, open to wind,

rain, and cold. At the very moment we might feel most secure, we are made vulnerable again. This is not symbolic. It is experiential.

Sukkot reintroduces fragility after success. It refuses to allow comfort to harden into assumption. Stability is revealed as conditional, not guaranteed. The same tension appears in the water libation of the Temple, which centers attention on rain: too early, and the current harvest is threatened; too late, and the next one fails. Even at the moment of abundance, uncertainty governs.

Taken together, these elements suggest that Sukkot is not primarily about thanksgiving, though gratitude is present. It is about restraint -- about rebalancing after accumulation and re-situating ourselves within systems that do not belong to us. We no longer live in an agricultural world. Most of us do not harvest what we eat. The Temple is gone, and many of the original practices no longer operate in their original form. But the underlying problem has not changed. If anything, it has intensified. We extract more completely, accumulate more efficiently, and distribute more unevenly than any society before us. The need for constraint is no longer local. It is global. Sukkot offers a framework. Not a return to the past, but a way of thinking: that abundance is the moment of greatest risk; that systems require built-in limits; that what we leave unclaimed matters as much as what we take. To take Sukkot seriously now may mean reversing the logic of harvest—not celebrating what we gather, but consciously releasing what we do not need.

What do we keep that we could let go of? What do we consume that we could leave unconsumed? These are not only moral questions. They are conditions for survival. We are not separate from the systems we exploit. To the extent that we destabilize them, we destabilize ourselves. Sukkot encodes the conditions of Jewish survival—not as symbolism, but as a system of restraint, redistribution, and limits that we are obligated to carry forward.

Dennis is a retired attorney and a forever Lerner just trying hard to understand.

Mitzpe Ronel - A Shelter of Peace



Eli Klein is several years removed from his time as a student at Syracuse Hebrew Day School, but the Jewish values instilled during those years remain with him today and inspired him to enlist in the Israel Defense Forces. He completed his military service in the 605th Battalion of the Combat Engineering Corps, where he served as a combat medic in both Gaza and Lebanon alongside the group of soldiers with home he trained.

Among them was Ronel Ben Moshe. "Ronel was a person of connection—faith, joy, and an open heart for everyone he met," Eli says. On June 24th, 2025, Ronel was killed in Gaza, along with 6 others from his platoon, in what became known in Israel as the Puma Disaster. He was 21 years old.

Ronel's family and community are making sure his name keeps building things anyway. They are constructing the Ronel Center for Young Adults and *Mitzpe Ronel* (Ronel's Lookout), a gathering place at the highest point in Rehovot. The Center will offer young people a home for connection and growth—Torah study, community volunteering, discussion circles, and practical life skills—alongside resilience support to help

them move forward with confidence and purpose. The Lookout will be simple and open: benches, swings, and fresh air, for anyone who needs somewhere to land.

"If Ronel's name can be attached to a place where the next generation builds friendships, asks hard questions, and figures out who they're becoming, that feels like the truest way to honor him," Eli says. Given Central New York's role in shaping his own connection to the Jewish people, Eli is hoping this community will help carry that memory forward. Every gift, of any size, becomes part of a place where young Israelis will gather, grow, and heal. **To support the Ronel Center and Mitzpe Ronel, visit www.givesendgo.com/RonelBenMoshe.**



Booths Gone Wild

Most Central New York Jews don't build their own sukkahs, but lots of Jews around the world do and some of them are in the oddest places—on boats, trucks, balconies, canals and even on camels. All are real, documented structures, and all are perfectly kosher. Jewish law cares about a sukkah's structure and size, not its foundation. A sukkah built on a wagon, boat, or even a camel's back is kosher as long as it has the right roofing and enough room inside. According to halachic authorities, a sukkah doesn't even have to be square or rectangular: the Mishnah Berurah holds that round, triangular, and even pentagonal sukkahs are valid, as long as a space roughly 7-by-7 handbreadths (about two feet square) could fit inside the structure.

Artists Danielle Durchslag and Ryan Frank built a sukkah on the back of a truck and drove it through all five boroughs during Sukkot, inspired by the mobile "Mitzvah tanks" Chabad has used for decades. The design borrowed its palette and skyline silhouette from the city itself — proof that a sukkah doesn't have to stay put to count.



Venice's Jewish community built a sukkah that floats—a fitting home for a holiday about impermanence, in a city that's slowly sinking into the sea.

Montreal's Jewish Monklund Centre built The World of Peace sukkah out of roughly 290 cardboard boxes and 24,000 staples, with community members' visions of peace written across it in nineteen languages.



Here are some other unique and original sukkot: a sukkah on a bike, a sukkah in a tree, another on a canoe, a sukkah made of cardboard (a sukkardboard), one made of Lego and one on a camel.



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Whom Would YOU Invite??

The JO asked community members whom they would invite to their sukkah. The Rabbinical Council offered intriguing suggestions.

Rabbi Natan Levy would invite Rabbi Jonathan Sacks. “I would love to hear him teach our Jewish students in the warm embrace of the sukkah. I often wonder how he would respond to October 7 and the rise of antisemitism that has followed in its wake. What text, what idea, what turn of phrase would he bring to comfort us in our present moment?” **Rabbi Irvin Beigel would invite Rabbi David Weiss Halivni of blessed memory,** “a Holocaust survivor, had a deep faith in God, an unwavering commitment to living a life committed to traditional Jewish law, and an unwavering commitment to intellectual honesty and modern scholarship.” **Rabbi Daniel Jezer would invite Elisha Ben Aniya,** “a fascinating brilliant rabbi of the Talmudic era who struggled living with the tensions between western values and Jewish values, having been at times engrossed in each, disillusioned and rebuffed by each.” **Rabbi Moshe Saks would extend an invitation to his hero, Maimonides:** “He was more than simply a rabbi. He was a doctor as well, serving the Vizier of Fostat (near Cairo) and had a free clinic for his own community nearby. He spoke: Hebrew, Arabic, Spanish, Latin and Judeo-Arabic. He was a prolific writer of Jewish Law (the Mishneh Torah) and of Jewish philosophy (A Guide for the Perplexed). He was involved in great debates with Christian and Muslim scholars defending Judaism in the 11th century. He also was fluent in the New Testament (the Greek translation) and the Koran. He, in my opinion, was the perfect “Renaissance

Rabbi,” a scholar of Aristotle in Logic. His books and presence are still felt today.”

Rabbi Oren Steinitz would invite Rabbi Mordecai Kaplan, founder of the Reconstructionist movement, as he is very curious “as to what he thinks about the state of Jews in America these days. Kaplan often talked about Jews living in two civilizations—that we can be fully Jewish and fully American. Does this idea still work, or do we have to pick a side?” **Rabbi Ilan Emanuel would invite “my maternal grandfather, Solomon Amar.** He grew up in Morocco at a time when Jews were not able to get an education there, but became a self-taught, successful winemaker. He raised nine amazing children, including my mother. I have strong memories of him praying in the morning in his apartment in Paris. But he died when I was very young. I would love to know more about his life and experiences that I never got to know because he was taken from us too soon.”

Rabbi Evan Shore said that he will, of course, be inviting the traditional ushpizin into his sukkah, because “these honored spiritual guests connect us with our forefathers and the great leaders who helped shape the destiny of the Jewish people.” But in response to our request, he would extend an additional invitation to welcome the Messiah. He explained that “this invitation is not completely disconnected from the traditional ushpizin. Messiah is a descendant of King David, who is himself one of the honored guests,” so this year as he welcomes David, he will have one additional thought in mind: “May his descendant, the Messiah, soon become not merely a hoped-for guest, but a reality for all of the Jewish People.”



PJ Library® coordinator Miriam Klaben surveyed the PJ Library community and reported that the families below, though representing only a small portion of the PJ Library community, hoped that their responses would inspire other families to think about whom they would invite as their ushpizin:

The Klaben family: “We would invite Golda Meir to our sukkah to learn from her experiences as Israel’s fourth prime minister. We believe she could offer valuable insight into confronting antisemitism, learning from our mistakes, and persevering through life’s greatest challenges.”

The Harmon family: “I would want to invite my maternal grandfather Joel Weinstein. He passed away when I was 10 and I would love to be able to introduce him to my husband and children and for him to see me as an adult.”

The Rothbart family: “The name of our guest is Rita Weitzman (aka GG). We would want her as our ushpiza because, as E said, ‘I only saw her when I was a little baby, but I love her so much. She was strong and Jewish. I miss her so much. I wish she could see that I have her watch that I am going to wear when I’m a little older.’”

The Jakubiak family: “We would invite our Nana (my grandma, Lois Ratner) to our sukkah. The reason is because a fun Sukkot activity is making decorations, and Nana was the best artist we ever knew.”

The Sherman family: “We would invite Sheila and Norman Arons. They were the best grandparents, and we always had so much fun with them growing up. Our girls are named for them, and we know they would have loved nothing more than a night with two of their great-granddaughters.”

The Fischer family: “We would invite Max Fischer, Alex’s grandfather. When Alex was little, Max would take him and include him in his morning prayers. He would show him how to wrap and use tefillin. He was very spiritual and really encouraged Alex to connect with G-d through mind and spirit.”

The Wolhandler family: “Our family would invite Elie Wiesel into our sukkah. His commitment to remembrance, compassion, and speaking out against injustice is something we deeply admire. We hope to raise our children to understand the importance of their Jewish history, to be proud of who they are, and to have the courage to stand up for others.”

The Dedrick family: “We would invite Ignaz Dresner, our great-great-grandfather. We would love to meet him, learn about our family, and learn about his commitment to Ashkenazi life.”



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Inviting *Ushpizin* to the Sukkah

The word *ushpizin* is Aramaic for “guests,” and is one of the loveliest customs of Sukkot. According to a tradition rooted in the Zohar, the foundational text of Jewish mysticism, seven exalted figures from Israel’s past visit the sukkah during the seven days of the festival—one honored guest leading the way each night. The guests are Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Aaron, Joseph, and David. Together they are understood as the spiritual hosts of the holiday, descending from on high to dwell in the fragile booths their descendants have built. Each of the seven is associated in Kabbalistic thought with a particular divine attribute (see chart below) so that across the week the sukkah becomes a gathering place for the full range of qualities a righteous life is meant to embody.

The tradition further teaches that one cannot truly invite these distinguished visitors without also inviting the poor, the stranger, and the hungry to share the table. A sukkah open to Abraham must be open to the neighbor in need. The custom thus binds mysticism to hospitality, reminding celebrants that honoring ancestors also means caring for the living. Many families recite a short formal invitation as they enter the sukkah each evening, naming the guest of the night and the six who accompany him.

The Seven Ushpizin and Their Attributes

Guest	Attribute (Sefirah)	What He Represents
Abraham	<i>Chesed</i> – <i>Lovingkindness</i>	The patriarch of boundless hospitality and love, who welcomed strangers into his tent.
Isaac	<i>Gevurah</i> – <i>Strength, Restraint</i>	Associated with discipline, awe, and self-limitation, reflected in his role in the Akedah.
Jacob	<i>Tiferet</i> – <i>Beauty, Harmony</i>	The balance of love and restraint, blending his forebears’ qualities into harmony and truth.
Moses	<i>Netzach</i> – <i>Endurance, Eternity</i>	The enduring teacher and leader who brought the Torah and sustained Israel in the wilderness.
Aaron	<i>Hod</i> – <i>Splendor, Humility</i>	The High Priest, associated with glory, gratitude, and the gracious service of others.
Joseph	<i>Yesod</i> – <i>Foundation</i>	The righteous one (tzaddik) who kept his integrity and bound the generations together.
David	<i>Malchut</i> – <i>Kingship, Sovereignty</i>	The king who represents the indwelling divine presence, drawing all the attributes into the world.

In contemporary practice, the guest list has grown and broadened. Many communities now also welcome the *ushpizot*: Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, Leah, Miriam, Abigail, and Esther, the matriarchs, prophetesses, and heroines of the Bible. It has also become meaningful to choose additional guests. The *ushpizin* were always meant to remind us that we do not sit alone and that we are heirs to a long line of seekers.



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Review of *I Could Nosh* by Jake Cohen

I Could Nosh is Jake Cohen's follow-up to his bestseller *Jew-ish*, a collection of recipes melding traditional Jewish flavors with modern influences. *I Could Nosh* includes a chapter of bagel schmears, latke tartines, kugel fries, and tzimmes cake with cream cheese frosting, among other reinvented classics for everyday cooking and holidays. The *JO*'s inaugural **Read.Cook.Review.** (RCR)

group selected six recipes to follow exactly. They then presented the results to their highly selective and critical palates so that a meaningful review could be presented to *JO* readers. The RCR group, by common consent, prepared only dairy meals, sensitive to the levels of *kashrut* observance of the participants, several of whom are also vegetarians. The *JO* is pleased to introduce the members and to report on the dishes they prepared and shared:

Rabbi Vicki Lieberman, the originator and organizer of the group, is passionate about baking. She honed her skills at King Arthur Flour's Baking School and has been seriously baking for about ten years and is now striving to improve her cooking repertoire.

Debbie Field traded legal briefs for baking sheets and courtroom arguments for recipes after 46 years of a rewarding legal career. In retirement, she is pursuing her passion for baking, pastries and chocolate, and, of course, sharing the results with friends and family.

Anick Sinclair owned a baking company and a cooking school for kids before moving to Syracuse from London. She loves exploring cookbooks, old and new, and



is always keen to put a new recipe to the test for her three boys, family, and friends.

Rabbi Daniel and Rhea Jezer have enjoyed cooking vegetarian dishes together for decades. From family dinners to parties for sixty in their home, they find cooking a relaxing addition to their busy lives.

Gwen Kay grew up in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania helping her mother, a local caterer. She follows recipes (at least, for the first time she tries a recipe), which makes her mother leave the kitchen. She dreams of having dessert parties as an opportunity to try new recipes (and not have to eat them all.)

Laura Lavine is not only a self-identified terrible cook, she detests the process of slicing, measuring, mixing, or any other *potchke*-ing, and using heat to transform something inedible into anything that meets even the most basic alimentary requirements, unless it involves chocolate and sugar. Where kitchen skills are concerned, if there are dishes to wash, food pantries to reorganize, and plastic container tops and bottoms that need pairing, she's your girl. Laura is grateful to be tolerated in this esteemed group of culinary mavens, and for YouTube videos that demonstrate how to dice celery.

Following are the recipes that participants prepared: Holiday Endive Salad, Kale Tahina Salad, Summer Kasha, Spiced Celery Tuna Salad, Eggplant Parmesan with Vodka Sauce, Super Fudgy Date Brownies. The resulting dishes were tasty and enjoyed by all. There were a few suggested tweaks, but

in general the recipes were considered good, though not especially novel. It was noted that Cohen's goal in general is to make food more Jew-ish, but that these recipes are available in other ways. The absolute favorite recipe was Fudgy Date Brownies, because it was very rich and delicious and low work.



The RCR's next cooking adventure will entail trying out the recipes in *Zahav Home*, by Michael Solomonov and Steven Cook, a cookbook with simple heart-healthy Middle Eastern recipes for busy families. Look for the results in early 2027. **Anyone interested in creating a satellite RCR group is encouraged to email jo@jewishfederationcny.org.** The *JO* will select and provide a recent Jewish cookbook for the group to use.

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An Autumn Stroll through a Jewish Cemetery

by Cheryl Gordon Wolfe

I love cemeteries. I always have. When the Autumn chill is in the air I eagerly push aside the old, rusty iron gates and enter, slowly walking the long, uneven rows of tombstones.

The air is scented with the sweet smell of fallen leaf decay as I stroll along, stopping to study the messages these old granite and stone markers have to impart. And oh, what a lot they have to say.

I feel at home. Indeed, this will be my home one day. My husband and I will be right over there, right next to my beloved brother. And over there—my parents, and my aunts and uncles. And up the hill, near the top—all four of my grandparents. This is truly home to my family, where we will continue to be together in death, as we were together in life. It is a very comforting thought.

As I stroll, I study the headstones. That was the appropriate term for these monuments because they were placed, obviously, at the head of the grave. But over time, as the available space in the cemetery grew less and less, the rows were placed closer together, and finally, in many cases, the burials were situated foot-to-head, rather than the other way around, to make use of small and awkward spaces. The headstone, however, was always placed at the “top,” even if it was situated over the resident’s feet.

How do I know this? I’ve been a student of Jewish cemetery lore for many years. Not only can I read the names, dates, and inscriptions on these tombstones, but I can also interpret the obscure symbols which have sometimes been carved here to share additional information about the dead.

Here, I see carved two hands, palms forward. The second and fourth fingers are splayed apart, forming a “V.” This is the symbol for the *kohanim*, the priestly tribe. The man who is buried here was a *kohen*. As I continue my exploration, I see a tombstone with an image of a water jug, or pitcher. This person was a Levi. It indicates his position of authority in the synagogue, being



the one to wash the hands of the *kohen* (priest).

I have learned that there are many such carvings on Jewish tombstones, each with a special meaning. A lion represents a member of the tribe of Judah. A deer indicates a member of the tribe of Naphtali. A crown and Ark with Torah mark the grave of a rabbi. Broken lilies indicate the grave of a young child. A broken candle shows that the deceased suffered an early death. Two doves on a double tombstone indicate that the residents were husband and wife.

A carving of two hands clasped together also indicates a husband and wife below ground. I think that’s sweet. Holding hands together throughout a lifetime of marital bliss was not enough for these two. They needed to find a way to continue to hold hands, even in death.

Before I leave my wanderings today, I notice for the thousandth time Hebrew letters engraved at the top of most of the tombstones. These are *po nikbar* or *po nitman*, translated as “here lies.” I also see a Hebrew abbreviation of a verse from the Bible, the first book of Samuel, 25:29, which says: *tehei nafsho tzerurah bitzeror hachaim*, or “may his soul be bound up in the bond of eternal life.”

I mouth a silent *Amen*, as I carefully close the rusty gate behind me when I leave.

Cheryl Gordon Wolfe is a local published author who enjoys writing about the Syracuse Jewish community.



HONORABLE MENSCHEN

A column featuring community members who perform acts of lovingkindness with no expectation of reward. Mensch is a Yiddish word that is used as a high compliment to describe an honorable, decent, and deeply good human being—someone with integrity, compassion, and a strong moral compass who can always be counted on.

A Local Guardian of Jewish Memory: Gary J. Lavine’s Decades of Service

For nearly a quarter of a century, Syracuse attorney Gary J. Lavine quietly carried out one of the most solemn responsibilities entrusted to any American Jew: standing watch over the physical remnants of a civilization the Nazis tried to erase.

Lavine served four terms, spanning appointments by Presidents George H.W. Bush, Bill Clinton, and George W. Bush, on the U.S. Commission for the Preservation of America’s Heritage Abroad, a federal agency charged with identifying and protecting cemeteries, synagogues, and historic sites across Eastern and Central Europe. Working with the State Department, the Commission secures formal preservation agreements with foreign governments—25 countries to date, including Poland, Ukraine, Hungary, and Lithuania—ensuring that Jewish burial grounds desecrated by the Holocaust and neglected under decades of Communist rule are not lost to history a second time.



His name appears among the Commissioners on one of the agency’s most significant undertakings: the 2005 survey of Jewish Cemeteries, Synagogues, and Mass Grave Sites in Ukraine, a sweeping documentation effort that drew on the work of researchers at Syracuse’s own Jewish Heritage Research Center, a fitting convergence of local expertise and national mission.

A Syracuse native, Lavine has extended that same sense of stewardship close to home, serving on the board of the Safe Haven Holocaust Refugee Shelter Museum in Oswego and devoting more than three decades to public service, including posts in the New York State Legislature and, most recently, the state’s Commission on Ethics and Lobbying in Government.

It is easy, amid the demands of a busy legal career, to let causes like this one recede. Lavine did not. For nearly twenty-five years, largely without fanfare, he has helped ensure that the graves of Jews murdered or displaced across Europe remain marked, protected, and remembered.

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Epstein School Launches New Name for 5787

The Rabbi Jacob H. Epstein School of Jewish Studies kicked off the 5787 school year with a major announcement: the school will now be known as the Rabbi Evan Shore School for Jewish Teens.

The new name was announced on September 22, as students, families, and community members gathered at 450 Kimber Road for the first night of classes. The timing was especially meaningful because this year marks Rabbi Shore's 36th year teaching at the school.



For more than three decades, Rabbi Shore has helped shape Jewish teen education in Central New York. "No faculty member has done more for the school in its history. Generations of students have learned with him, challenged ideas with him, laughed with him, argued with him, and carried his teaching into college, adulthood, Jewish leadership, and Jewish life," said Anick Sinclair, the school's immediate past president. "Rabbi Shore has been the heart of this school for decades," added Hannah Salomon, the school's new president. "Renaming the school in his honor recognizes not only his years of teaching, but the kind of Jewish learning he has made possible: serious, joyful, questioning, and deeply connected to our teens."

The name change comes with a renewed commitment to honoring the legacy of Rabbi Jacob H. Epstein, for whom the school had long been named. Beginning this year, the school will establish an annual Rabbi Jacob H. Epstein Award, honoring an outstanding educator who has helped shape the lives and Jewish identities of students in Central New York. School leaders agreed that the award will allow Rabbi Epstein's name to remain closely connected with the values he helped build: teaching, service, Jewish commitment, and care for future generations. It will also honor his legacy in a focused and lasting way, connected directly to the work of Jewish education.

For Rabbi Shore, the honor is deeply personal. "For 36 years, I have had the privilege of learning with teenagers who bring honesty, humor, skepticism, and heart into the classroom," Rabbi Shore said. "At its best, Jewish education is *Torah lishma*—learning for its own sake - but it is never learning that stays only on the page. It shapes how young people understand who they are, what they have inherited, and what responsibilities they are ready to take on as Jews. Additionally, the opportunity to share with my students the unique beauty, holiness, and enduring importance of the Land of Israel has been especially meaningful to me. To have my name connected with that sacred work is profoundly humbling. My hope is that this school will continue to be a place of serious learning, joyful argument, Jewish pride, and deep commitment to the future of our people."

The Rabbi Evan Shore School for Jewish Teens will continue to serve students in grades 7-12 from across the Central New York Jewish community on Tuesday evenings at 450 Kimber Road.

Gewirtz Wins Bronze Medal for Team USA at the 2026 Maccabiah Games



Central New Yorker Jeff Gewirtz traded the courtroom for the tennis court this summer, earning a bronze medal while representing Team USA in the Masters Tennis competition at the 2026 Maccabiah Games in Israel.

For Gewirtz, who is married to Fayetteville native Brooke Raphael, the achievement was the culmination of a lifetime in tennis. He played four years of varsity tennis at Tufts University, serving as team captain during his senior year and helping lead the Jumbos to a New England Championship. Competing at the Maccabiah Games

brought his tennis journey full circle, giving him the opportunity to represent the United States on one of the world's most meaningful international athletic stages for Jewish athletes.

Gewirtz was one of 903 members of the Maccabi USA delegation, representing 40 states and ranging in age from 14 to 87. The delegation included 386 Junior athletes, 148 Open athletes, and 156 Masters athletes competing across 25 sports and 75 teams. The team featured former Olympians and Paralympians, multigenerational families competing together, first-time international athletes, and competitors whose lives had been directly affected by the events of October 7, 2023.

Often referred to as the "Jewish Olympics," the Maccabiah Games brought together approximately 5,000 athletes from more than 40 countries in a celebration of Jewish identity, athletic excellence, and international friendship. Participation was significantly lower than at the 2022 Games, when more than 10,000 athletes competed, reflecting the continuing regional conflict. Nevertheless, the 2026 Maccabiah represented the largest gathering of the global Jewish community in Israel since October 7, 2023, highlighting the resilience and determination of thousands of athletes who chose to stand with Israel by participating.

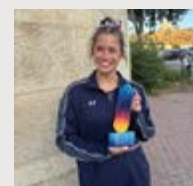
Against that backdrop, Maccabi USA delivered one of its strongest performances in recent memory, winning more than 300 medals across dozens of sports. Gewirtz's bronze medal contributed to that remarkable showing.



For Gewirtz, however, the experience transcended athletic competition. "Winning a medal for Team USA was incredibly meaningful, but simply being in Israel at this moment in history was even more significant," he said. "The Games demonstrated that Jewish athletes from around the world will continue to come together to celebrate our shared heritage, support Israel, and compete with pride."

The presence of more than 900 American Jewish athletes in Israel was itself a powerful statement. At a time when many questioned whether the Games could proceed, Team USA's athletes chose to show up—competing not only for medals, but also as ambassadors of Jewish pride, resilience, and solidarity with Israel.

Gabrielle Nadler, granddaughter of Karen and Steven Metzger and daughter of Marcie and Simon Nadler, both Syracuse natives, is a member of Team USA which won the silver medal in gymnastics at the Maccabiah Games 2026. (Team Israel won the gold medal.) Gabrielle was chosen by her teammates and coach to take home the trophy.



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Myrna Koldin to Receive NCJW's Highest Honor

by Vicki Feldman

On October 25, 2026, the Greater Syracuse Section of the National Council of Jewish Women will present the Hannah G. Solomon Award, the organization's highest honor, to Myrna Koldin, whose work has long anchored Jewish and civic life in Central New York.

The award brunch which will take place at the Sam Pomeranz Jewish Community Center of Syracuse, with registration and social time beginning at 11 am, followed by the program and brunch promptly at 11:30 am.

Named for the founder of the National Council of Jewish Women, the Hannah G. Solomon Award recognizes women who have helped change and expand the role of other women in community life and whose leadership has inspired others to act. Hannah Greenebaum Solomon convened the first national gathering of Jewish women at the 1893 Chicago World's Fair, and from there built the oldest Jewish women's organization in the United States dedicated to improving the lives of women, children, and families. The award that bears her name is given to community builders who quietly make that mission real.

Myrna Koldin has spent her career on behalf of those most easily overlooked. A graduate of the School of Social Work at Syracuse University, she served for many years as Director of Adult Services at the Jewish Community Center of Syracuse before joining the Onondaga County Department of Adult and Long-Term Care Services, where she worked as an Aging Services Specialist, and as coordinator of HIICAP, the county's Health Insurance Information, Counseling and Assistance Program. In that role, she guided countless older residents through the often-confusing landscape of Medicare and long-term care from 2007 until her retirement in 2020.

Before retiring, Myrna also worked as an outreach representative for New York State's EPIC prescription program. She continues to volunteer as a Health Insurance Information, Counseling and Assistance Program (HIICAP) counselor. She currently serves on the Board of Directors for InterFaith Works of Central New York, where she has held several critical executive leadership roles, including Board Chair and Capacity Growth Campaign Chair.

Last year's honoree, Susan DeMari, said "the selection of Myrna Koldin is a tribute to her National NCJW-inspired career." She went on to say that Myrna had read an article about an NCJW meeting and wanted to participate, and became a member shortly thereafter. She attended several events on behalf of the National Council of Jewish Women, including Legislative Days in Albany, to understand what seniors needed most. It was events like these and working with the NCJW that prompted her to obtain her master's degree in social work.

To receive an invitation to the event, contact Marlene Holstein at 315-446-7648.



HADASHOT TOVOT



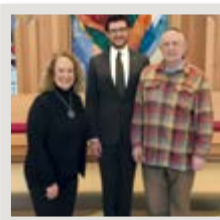
The Lions of Judah Backpack drive set a new record this year. The Jewish Federations' Lions of Judah proudly partnered with the Mary Nelson Annual Backpack Drive. The backpack giveaway is a core outreach that Mary Nelson has been hosting ever since 2002 to ensure that children start school equipped and confident. Thanks to the generosity of our community, this year's drive surpassed last year's record, and more than 300 backpacks were donated. Each backpack was filled with school supplies and a lunchbox, at an August event at the JCC with ice creams for all helpers. A special thank you goes to the children who enthusiastically joined the volunteer effort. Their kindness and excitement were a wonderful reminder that the spirit of giving and repairing the world—*tikun olam*—can begin at any age.

Mark and Steven Wladis received 3GNY's L'Dor V'Dor Award at the organization's annual Evening Under the Stars benefit, held in New York City. The award recognizes a family whose dedication across generations reflects the heart of 3GNY's mission. 3GNY works with grandchildren of Holocaust survivors to bring their families' stories into classrooms and communities. Dave Reckess, 3GNY executive director, noted that "Mark and Steven have believed in this work from the beginning. They have opened doors, brought people together, and continually asked what more they can do to help. Their support—and the support we've received from so many people across our CNY community—has allowed us to reach thousands more young people with these stories at a time when that personal connection to the Holocaust is more important than ever."



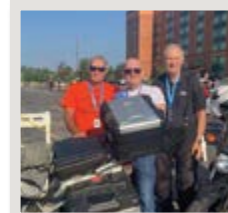
Kol hakavod to Eli Gnacik of the Syracuse Community Hebrew School, who took third place in the Better2Write National Middle School competition of the Legacy Heritage Fund. Eli's win brings a \$5,000 scholarship-fund prize to his school—a wonderful showing for Central New York on the national stage.

Diane Kuppermann was honored as a 2026 ILAD honoree at InterFaith Works of Central New York's InterFaith Leadership Award Dinner as part of the organization's 50th-anniversary celebration. Kuppermann is president & CEO of Make-A-Wish Central New York, a role she has held for well over a decade, leading the organization through more than 40 years of granting wishes to children with critical illnesses across the region.



Rabbi Eitan Bloostein, grandson of Rabbi Daniel and Dr. Rhea Jezer, was recently ordained by the Jewish Theological Seminary and became rabbi of Congregation B'nai Sholom/Fair Lawn Jewish Center. As his first Shabbat service was on the 4th of July, it was titled "The Red, White and Bloostein Shabbat."

230 motorcyclists participated in the July Ride 2 Remember in Cleveland, Ohio. Attending on behalf of Thou Shalt Ride of Central New York were Ken Bell, Dave Feldman, Fred Edelman and Joel Stein. This R2R was in support of The Tribe of Nova, which provides aid to the survivors and bereaved families of the massacre at the Nova Music Festival. Over \$200,000 was raised.



JCC Holds Its 163rd Annual Meeting & Gala

by Erin Hart

The Sam Pomeranz Jewish Community Center of Syracuse celebrated another year of community, connection and commitment at its 163rd Annual Meeting & Gala. Held June 7, 2026, at Palladian Hall, the brunch brought together members, supporters, community leaders, friends and advocates to celebrate the people whose dedication continues to strengthen the JCC and the greater Syracuse Jewish community.

Newly appointed committee chair Robin Sisskind welcomed guests to the celebration, setting the tone for a memorable gathering focused on recognizing the individuals and community partners who help make the JCC's mission possible. The event was made possible in part through the generous support of the Wladis Family, the naming sponsor of the 163rd Annual Meeting & Gala. Their sponsorship reflects the important role that community partners and supporters play in helping the JCC continue its mission to provide meaningful programs, services and opportunities for individuals and families throughout the Syracuse area. "We are so incredibly thankful for the Wladis Family and to all our sponsors, donors and supporters, whose generosity helps ensure that the JCC can continue to be a place where the community comes together, grows and thrives," said Marci Erlebacher, JCC executive director. "The Annual Meeting & Gala is an important tradition for the JCC, providing an opportunity to reflect on the organization's accomplishments while recognizing the individuals whose leadership, service and generosity help make its mission possible. As the JCC's largest fundraiser of the year, the event also plays a vital role in supporting the organization's ongoing work and ensuring that the JCC remains a welcoming and vibrant center of community life."



Guests gathered for a memorable brunch that combined celebration, recognition and a strong sense of community. The breathtaking setting provided a fitting backdrop for an event centered on honoring those who have made meaningful contributions to the JCC and the local Jewish community. The brunch was catered by Essen New York Deli, adding a familiar touch to the annual celebration.

A highlight of the Annual Meeting & Gala is the presentation of the JCC's annual awards, which recognize individuals whose contributions embody the values of service, leadership and community. The Kovod



Award, a distinction that symbolizes honor and importance, was presented to Michael Klein. The award recognizes an individual whose contributions have made a meaningful impact and whose involvement reflects the importance of giving back to the community. The Kovod Gadol Award, which recognizes extraordinary dedication and long-standing service to the JCC and the greater community, was presented to Phillip Rubenstein. The honor reflects the lasting impact of an individual whose commitment and service have helped strengthen the JCC and the community it serves. The Leslie was given to Ross Greenky. Established in memory of Leslie London Neulander, The Leslie recognizes rising and up-and-coming professionals within the local Jewish community for their outstanding commitment and service. The award highlights the importance of cultivating the next generation of community leaders and celebrating those who are already making a difference.

Cheryl Schotz was presented with the Hall of Fame Award, an honor that recognizes her lifelong dedication to the Syracuse Jewish community and the JCC. The award celebrates a lifetime of involvement and service and recognizes the significant role Schotz has played in supporting and strengthening the local Jewish community.



"The Annual Meeting & Gala is a wonderful opportunity to celebrate the people who make the JCC and our greater Jewish community so special," said Erlebacher. "This year's honorees represent an extraordinary range of leadership, service and dedication, and we are grateful for the impact they continue to make within our community."



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In addition to receiving the Kovod Gadol Award, Phillip Rubenstein was recognized and thanked for his three years of dedicated service as board president. Rubenstein passed the leadership role to Sara Temes, who was sworn in as the JCC's new board president. The JCC also recognized and thanked all outgoing committee chairs for their service and welcomed its new leadership by swearing in the incoming officers and directors to the Board. The JCC is proud to welcome Katya Bratslavsky, Ethan Gilbert, Kaye Habib, Ingrida Nappi and Jennifer Shulman as new members of the Board of Directors.

As the JCC looks toward another year, the 163rd Annual Meeting & Gala served as both a celebration of the past and an affirmation of the organization's future. The brunch highlighted the people who have helped build the JCC into the institution it is today while recognizing emerging leaders who will help carry that legacy forward. For more information about this year's Annual Meeting & Gala or to learn more about how you can contribute to next year's event, please visit jccsyr.org/Gala.



Nathan Franz, assistant superintendent of the Jamesville-DeWitt School District, was presented with a special award on behalf of the Antisemitism in Education Working Group, recognizing Franz's leadership and commitment to fostering an inclusive, respectful and welcoming environment for all students within the J-D School District. His work reflects the importance of leadership and advocacy in addressing antisemitism, promoting understanding and creating an educational community where students from all backgrounds feel valued and supported.

NOV. 27 – JAN. 3

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Presented by arrangement with Music Theatre International and Cameron Mackintosh LTD | Co-produced with the Syracuse University Department of Drama

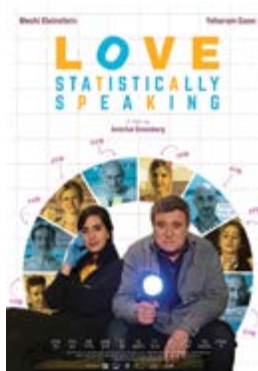


Third Annual Syracuse Jewish Film Festival Kicks Off October 27

by Raven DiSalvo-Hess

The JCC of Syracuse is excited to once again partner with End Antisemitism Now for the Third Annual Syracuse Jewish Film Festival, taking place in October and November 2026.

For more information on the festival, to reserve seats or learn about sponsorship opportunities, please visit jccsyr.org/film-festival or call 315-445-2360.



Tuesday, October 27: *Love, Statistically Speaking*

When Reuben, an 80-year-old actuary who lives by statistics, loses both his wife and her insurance money at the swimming pool, he's forced into a reluctant partnership with his free-spirited artist granddaughter. Their bumbling investigation among eccentric pool regulars turns into a funny, heartfelt journey proving that while you can calculate almost anything, you can't predict love or family.



Sunday, November 1:

Dust Bowls and Jewish Souls

The name Woody Guthrie conjures images of Dust Bowl families from the 1930s fleeing their wind-ravaged farms, along with those famous lyrics "This land is your land, this land is my land/ From California to the New York Island." Woody's horizons extended far beyond the dusty Oklahoma hills of his youth. When his wanderings and ramblings brought him to New York City, in the 1940s, he was introduced into a vibrant Jewish culture that he wholeheartedly embraced. That culture in turn deeply influenced his life and his music. Explore a whole new side of Woody Guthrie that will change your view of one of America's most celebrated songwriters and cultural icons.



Saturday, November 7:

Orna and Ella

Twenty-six years after the iconic "Orna and Ella" restaurant opened in Tel Aviv, having become a celebrated culinary institution, Orna Agmon and Ella Shine decided to close their shared life's work. During the restaurant's final week, director Tomer Heymann, who worked there for six years, documents the intense dynamics of the last days. Farewells to customers, recipes, and staff spark intimate and once-in-a-lifetime conversations. The film reveals the complex relationship between these two groundbreaking women through a spectrum of powerful emotions: love, dependence, conflicting desires, and fears. It boldly raises questions about self-fulfillment, the cost of freedom, and nostalgia for an era that will never return.

Temple Concord Announces 2026-27 Author Series

by Sally Cutler

Temple Concord's Author Series will bring seven authors to the community, either in person or virtually. The line-up includes authors writing about the American toy industry, the Jewish impresario of Buffalo, historic *yahrzeit* books saved from the Holocaust, and Klezmer musicians spying for the US in Russia. Also, TC will host two children's book authors in residence for a weekend, furthering the Temple's commitment to encouraging kids to read.

First up—in collaboration with Temple Adath Yeshurun—in person at 9:30 am, October 18, 2026 is Michael Kimmel, author of *Playmakers: The Jewish Entrepreneurs Who Invented the Toy Industry in America*.

The following months will feature virtual talks by Susan Fenster, author of *Harry Altman: Buffalo's Master Showman* (December 2026); Jan Ziegelman, author of *Once There was a Town: The Memory Books of a Lost Jewish World* (January 2027) in collaboration with The Jewish Genealogical Society of Syracuse; and Merryl Goldberg and Vince Houghton, authors of *Notes of Deception: How a Quartet of American Musicians Outwitted the KGB* (February 2027).

In addition, in residence at TC for community-wide events the weekend of May 1-2, 2027 will be Alison Goldberg, author of *The Remembering Candle* (a primary-grade picture book) and Kathy Kacer, author of *Last Known Address: The Stumbling Stones of Europe* (a middle-grade nonfiction book).

The Temple Concord Author Series is supported by The Jewish Book Council and the Jewish Federation of Central New York.



This column features businesses owned by members of our community, as well as artists and musical programs and is generously sponsored by RAV Properties.

A Symphony's Journey From *Rishon LeZion* to Syracuse

In 1988, when the municipality of Rishon LeZion founded a symphony orchestra, no one could have predicted that this modest civic undertaking, entrusted to a hometown pianist and composer named Shimon Cohen, would grow into one of the most traveled and most trusted orchestras in the State of Israel. Yet within a year, it became the resident orchestra of the Israeli Opera in Tel Aviv and within a decade, it was filling concert halls from Buenos Aires to Helsinki. And this October, musicians from the Israel Symphony Orchestra (ISO) Rishon LeZion String Trio will play a concert here in Central New York.

The Israel Symphony Orchestra Rishon LeZion has performed under the batons of some of the most sought-after conductors of our time and has shared the stage with soloists whose names alone fill houses: the violinist David Garrett, the pianist Daniil Trifonov, the cellist Mischa Maisky. It has toured China twice, filling halls in Shanghai and Beijing. These are not the credentials of a provincial ensemble, but of an orchestra that has, quietly and steadily, become something the country leans on.

And yet for all its international reach, the orchestra has never relinquished the small, human-sized work that first gave it purpose. Each year it performs a concert, at no cost, for the city's senior citizens and Holocaust survivors. It donates subscription series to families who could not otherwise afford them, and to gifted young music students whose talent has outpaced their means. Through a program the musicians call "First Note," members of the orchestra go into preschools and elementary school classrooms across Rishon

LeZion, placing instruments into the hands of children who may never have imagined themselves as musicians. In one of its most quietly moving commitments, the orchestra each year "adopts" a single gifted student, providing a full year of private lessons and mentorship. Since October 7, that same instinct for care has extended to the communities the war has upended, woven into the orchestra's ongoing mission alongside its work of integrating new immigrant musicians into its ranks.

But holding on has not been easy. Israel's wartime budget forced deep cuts across nearly every corner of civilian life. Grants, prizes, and subsidies that once sustained Israeli orchestras, theaters, and working artists were cut or suspended outright, and the Israel Symphony Orchestra Rishon LeZion has felt the loss of government support acutely.



The Israel Symphony Orchestra needs friends abroad to sustain it. When three of its musicians take the stage here in October, they will be carrying more than instruments. They will be carrying the sounds of a nation and a community that built something extraordinary out of a municipal orchestra, the memory of every survivor, every student, and every listener who has ever been given a seat because they believe that music belongs to everyone. It is their hope that the American Jewish community and the Central New York Jewish community will help them carry their mission through a difficult time. As Doron Alperin, the violist in the trio, explained, "Supporting the Israel Symphony Orchestra today is an act of solidarity with Israel—not only in defense and recovery, but in preserving the spirit, creativity, and humanity that define us as a people. Hopefully the Jewish community will be willing to help and support a nonpolitical and nonmilitary organization like the Israel Symphony Orchestra."

The community will have an opportunity to answer that call on October 20, 2026, when Congregation Beth Sholom–Chevra Shas, Shaarei Torah Orthodox Congregation of Syracuse, Temple Adath Yeshurun, Temple Concord, and the Rabbi Jacob H. Epstein School of Jewish Studies will come together to host the trio in concert at CBS-CS.

The evening will feature a one-hour program of classical and operatic works, along with music reflecting Jewish history and Israeli culture. The musicians will also share personal stories that illuminate the experiences and traditions behind the music.

Among the evening's selections will be a work by Gideon Klein, the Czech-Jewish composer whose life was cut short during the Holocaust. His music creates a moving connection between Jewish history, artistic resilience, and the continued flourishing of Jewish culture in Israel today.

Following the concert, VIP ticketholders are invited to a reception where they can meet the musicians and continue celebrating this cultural exchange.

Tickets are required, and security will be present. Doors open at 6:30pm and the concert will begin promptly at 7pm. For more information and to purchase tickets, please visit tinyurl.com/ISO-Syr26.

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WAYNE BURKEY JR.
August 6, 2026

Wayne Burkey Jr., 71 passed away suddenly at home on August 6, 2026 as a result of an apparent cardiac episode. Born on September 7, 1954 in Manhattan to Wayne and Martha Beer Burkey. Wayne was a real estate broker in NYC with Sotheby's. He and his wife Marcy purchased a vintage home in Oriskany Falls with a vision for restoration and a place to escape the pace of city life. The pandemic was the catalyst for a permanent move upstate where they have enjoyed a serene life with new found friends and a much more enjoyable life. Wayne and Marcy have two daughters; Hudson, and Astor; and a son, Cooper who passed away at the age of four many years ago.

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SUSAN EDWARDS HARVITH
August 27, 2026

Susan Edwards Harvith, an arts and cultural historian who taught the history of film at Syracuse University from 1992 to 2004 and at Upstate Oasis from 2004 to 2023, died in Syracuse on August 27, 2026 at age 80 from glioblastoma. Her work left an indelible mark on the worlds of art, film, American history, photography, music, and popular culture.

During her years teaching in SU's College of Visual and Performing Arts, Edwards Harvith and her husband, John Harvith, interviewed dozens of television pioneers whose recorded interviews are in the SU Libraries' John and Susan Edwards Harvith Interview Collection. The Harviths helped make possible the SU Art Collection's 1999 Milton Avery Revisited touring exhibition and were among the co-authors of that exhibition's catalog. And in 2005, while teaching at Oasis, she was a historical consultant for the University of Pittsburgh publication "Defeat of an Enemy," observing the 50th anniversary of the Salk polio vaccine. Also, during her Oasis teaching years, both she and John Harvith gave two public presentations at the Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt Institute in Hyde Park, one on the Depression-era film "Gabriel Over the White House" and the other on the award-winning 2010 Pittsburgh



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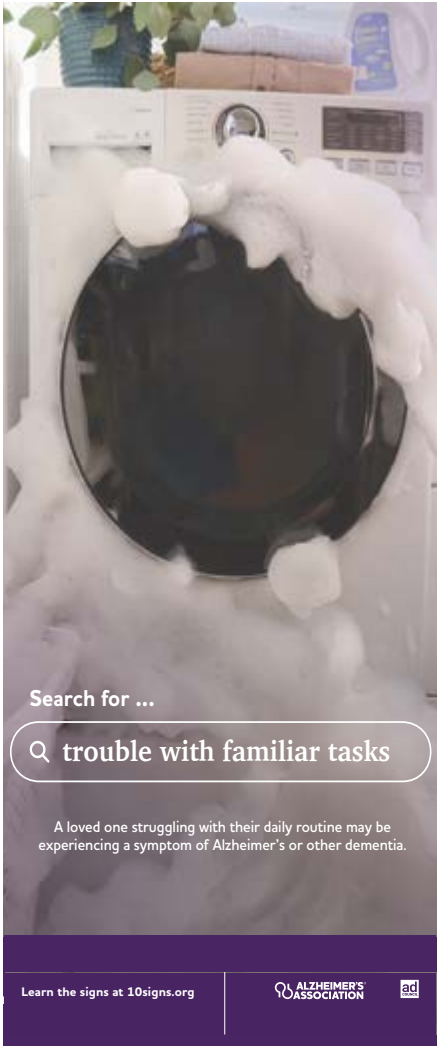
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polio vaccine documentary “The Shot Felt ‘Round the World,” appearing with its producer, Carl Kurlander.

Susan Edwards Harvith was born on January 13, 1946, in Detroit, Michigan, the daughter of Arthur Allan Edwards and Bernice Nelson Edwards. She earned her bachelor of arts degree from Wayne State University and the master of museum practice degree from the University of Michigan following an internship at the Henry Ford Museum in Dearborn and a summer internship at the Winterthur Museum in Delaware. Edwards Harvith was curator of exhibitions at the Cranbrook Academy of Art Museum, from where she launched a nationally touring exhibition of the forgotten art photography of cinematographer Karl Struss and went on to co-curate with John Harvith a University of Michigan exhibition and series of symposia celebrating Edison’s invention of the phonograph that culminated in a book of interviews with major recording figures.

Following the Harviths’ move to Oberlin, Ohio, in 1980, she became the first executive director of the Firelands Association for the Visual Arts and began a year-round series of classic Hollywood films, with all showings featuring historical introductions by the Harviths’ years before the advent of Turner Classic Movies. She also became an administrator in Oberlin College’s Allen Memorial Art Museum. In 1989, Edwards Harvith became executive director of the Santa Cruz, California, Historical Trust, and in 1990, after a move to Syracuse, was named executive director of the Regional Council of Historical Agencies in New York State, before her 31 years of teaching film history at Syracuse University and Oasis.

She is survived by her husband of 54 years, John Harvith, their daughter, Rachel Edwards Harvith, her husband, Chris Cinereski, and a grandson, Maxwell Harvith Cinereski, all of Cranston, R.I.; her sisters-in-law Mary Lou Griffin of Chelsea, Michigan, and Marilyn Griffin of Grand Junction, Colorado, and their children and grandchildren.

Memorial contributions may be made to Sheldrick Wildlife Trust, Upstate Oasis, or an animal welfare organization of your choice.

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SHEILA COELHO August 30, 2026

Sheila Coelho, beloved wife, mother, grandmother, sister, and friend, passed away peacefully after a life filled with family, love, creativity, and adventure.

Sheila was born on April 30, 1941, in New Haven, Connecticut, to Sally and Edward Cole. She attended Hillhouse High School and later the University of Connecticut. After college, she lived briefly in New York City, where she taught.

Through a childhood friend, Sheila was introduced to Stephen Coelho, the love of her life. They married and shared nearly 60 wonderful years together. They moved to Syracuse, New York, where they raised their family. Together they opened and ran The Pizza King, and in the more recent years, The All-Night Eggplant, which has been a staple in Syracuse breakfast for over 5 decades.

Always curious and passionate about helping others, Sheila returned to school to earn her master’s degree in psychology and counseling. She loved her work and continued seeing clients well after her retirement. Sheila had a zest for life and loved fashion, travel, and, perhaps most of all, shopping. She especially enjoyed exploring the shops of New York City and Europe. She was also incredibly creative and loved art, crafts, and finding new ways to express herself.

Above all, Sheila cherished her family. Her six grandchildren were the light of her life, and she took tremendous joy in watching them grow. She also leaves behind many devoted and dear friends, some of whom she had known and loved for many years. Their friendship and companionship were an important part of her life. Sheila is survived by her devoted husband of nearly 60 years, Stephen Coelho; her sons, Dean Coelho (Staci) and Rick Coelho; her brother, Barry Cole (Evelyn); and her six beloved grandchildren, Zoe, Kailey, Zachary, Noah, Alexander, and Benjamin. She was predeceased by her parents, Sally and Edward Cole, and her beloved sister, Marilyn.

Sheila leaves behind a lifetime of beautiful memories and a family and circle of friends who will carry her love.

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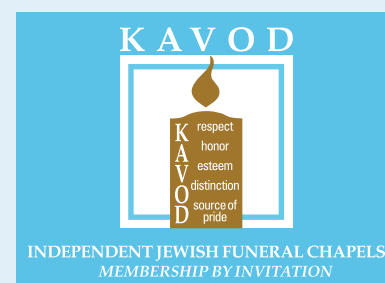
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