

» NATIONAL CANDY MONTH

Jewish Observer of Central New York

A publication of the Jewish Federation of Central New York

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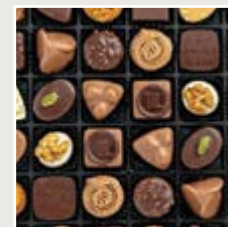
JUNE 2026 | SIVAN-TAMMUZ 5786



JEWS AND CANDY



LOOK:
JEWS
AND CANDY
(8)



INSIDE:
JEWS AND
CHOCOLATE
(10)



DON'T MISS:
ENTREPRENEURIAL
SUCCESS
(15)

From the Editor



Barbara Davis

June is National Candy Month. For a person with a sweet tooth (me) who is also a chocoholic, putting this issue of the *Jewish Observer* together was a joy. Not only did I learn how Jewish it is to be a candy lover, but I was able to revisit the treats of my childhood, many of which have been replaced in the affections of children today by skittles, gummy worms, and whatever TikTok tells them to try.

And then, amazingly, as I was strolling down the Memory Lane of Bonomo's Turkish Taffy and Bazooka gum, I received an email from someone I had not been in touch with for many years, telling me the wonderful story of Jay Klein, whom I last saw when he was seven, who is the founder and CEO of The PUR Company, the World's #1 Aspartame-Free Gum Brand. The timing could not have been better. This issue of the *JO* gets to trace its theme of **Jews and Candy** from the earliest immigrants who made candy history to the most up-to-the-minute (and local) candy magnate.

If there is one theme that runs through the Jewish immigrant experience in America, it is their astonishing ability to build something from nothing. And somehow, the candy industry became one of the most remarkable arenas for that story to unfold. Men and women who arrived at Ellis Island with barely a suitcase to their name ended up making candy in their kitchens, selling it from pushcarts and then, a generation later, running companies that supplied sweets to the entire country. The story never gets less amazing, no matter how many times you encounter it.

One of the quiet pleasures of putting the *Jewish Observer* together is discovering, as we always seem to, that Syracuse is never far from the center of any story worth telling. There is almost always a Syracuse connection waiting to be found, no matter the issue theme. The June *JO* is no exception. In researching the history of Barricini candy—those beautiful chocolate confections that felt like a genuine luxury to a generation of New Yorkers—we discovered that the exquisite decorative boxes that gave Barricini its air of sophistication and made their gifts so memorable were produced right here in Syracuse, by Syroco, the ingenious company founded by Adolph Holstein, the woodcarver who created the beautiful interior of Temple Concord. That a Jewish Syracuse enterprise should find its way into one of the great Jewish candy stories of the twentieth century should surprise no one who knows this city. Syracuse has a way of turning up at the heart of things.

Another sweet treat that originated from this issue is the People of Book review. I asked Rabbi Vicki Lieberman, a very talented baker, to review *Babka, Boulu & Blintzes, Jewish Chocolate Recipes from around the World*, a new book which fit in nicely with our theme. Rather than just try out the recipes herself, Vicki asked six community members to each follow a recipe from the book to the letter and convene for a taste-test in her home. The

resulting delicacies were varied but the bakers and guest evaluators had the best time getting to know each other and learning a lot about baking.

The *JO* is also proud to present photos and reportage from several significant Jewish community events this year: our first-ever tri-synagogue Scholar in Residence program, a moving Yom haShoah commemoration, a monumental performance of *Defiant Requiem: Verdi at Terezin*, and our annual Yom haAtzmaut celebration.

Taken together, these events offered a timely reminder: Israel is only 78 years old. Anyone 78 or younger has never known a world without it—and that describes the overwhelming majority of Jews alive today. Roughly 95% of Israeli Jews were born after independence. More than 90% of American Jews came of age in a world where Israel already existed. For an entire generation, Israel is not a hard-won miracle but simply a fact of life, as permanent and unremarkable as any other country on the map.

This year, we were reminded that Israel's permanence was never inevitable. What so many take for granted today was, not long ago, a profound and fragile uncertainty. That is why much of the Jewish world experienced the October 7th massacre not merely as a horrific terrorist attack, but as an existential crisis—and why so many others failed to understand that reaction.

To those with no living memory of a world without Israel—which is most people alive today—the idea that a single attack could threaten an established nation with a powerful military can seem disproportionate, even irrational. But for those steeped in Jewish history, or old enough to remember when Israel's survival genuinely hung in the balance, October 7th cracked open something deeper: the unsettling reminder that what was built can be destroyed, that the unthinkable has happened before, and that the permanence the world takes for granted was never guaranteed.

The grief, fear, and fury that followed were not only about the lives lost. They reflected the sudden, visceral return of a vulnerability that a fortunate generation had never been forced to feel. And with that vulnerability came a sobering thought: that Israel's centennial in 2048—which most of the world simply assumes will arrive—is something previous generations would never have taken for granted.

October 7th reminded a complacent world that the question of whether Israel will endure as a Jewish homeland is not a closed chapter of history, but an open one. The messages of our *Yom haShoah*, *Defiant Requiem*, and *Yom haAtzmaut* programming felt especially urgent this year: that evil must be confronted, that defiance is a moral obligation, and that the only way to assure "never again" is to refuse, in every generation, to become a victim.

The juxtaposition of themes in this issue reminds us that Jews have always worked to create something from nothing, whether it was candy empires from pushcarts or a nation from a dream. We hope you find reading about them informative and meaningful.

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MESSAGE FROM MARK SEGEL
Federation President & CEO

Sweetness and Strength: Navigating a Changing World



In this edition of the *Jewish Observer*, we find ourselves exploring a theme that, at first glance, feels wonderfully lighthearted: the history of candy and the remarkable, often overlooked role that Jewish innovators played in building the global confectionery industry. From the iconic, beautifully-designed boxes of Barton's Bonbonniere to the creation of the Tootsie Roll and the establishment of Joyva, our people have always had a hand in making the world a little sweeter.

But as I sit down to write this, I am acutely aware of the contrast between the "sweetness" of our history and the "bitterness" of our current reality. We are living through a period of profound transformation. Since the events of recent years, the world feels

fundamentally different. The Jewish community in Central New York, much like our brothers and sisters across the globe, is navigating a landscape defined by a sharp rise in antisemitism and a global climate of hostility toward Israel.

The war, which Israel has been forced to lead for its very survival, remains a flashpoint of international debate. We see it on our social media feeds, in the news, and even in the corridors of our local institutions. The "unpopularity" of Israel's position in the global court of public opinion has led to a sense of isolation that many of us haven't felt in generations. It is a weight that sits heavy on our hearts.

However, if we look back at the candy makers we celebrate in this issue, we find more than just recipes for chocolate; we find a blueprint for resilience. Consider Stephen Klein, who fled Nazi-occupied Austria and arrived in New York in 1938 with nothing but his expertise. He didn't just make candy; he revolutionized the industry with Barton's, refusing to open his shops on Shabbat and proving that Jewish identity and professional excellence could thrive hand-in-hand. Or think of Leo Hirschfield, who created the Tootsie Roll, or Nathan Radutzky, who turned a pushcart on the Lower East Side into the Joyva empire.

These pioneers didn't succeed because the world was "sweet" to them. They succeeded because they adapted. They took the raw, often harsh ingredients of their lives and, through heat and pressure, tempered them into something enduring.

Today, the Jewish Federation of Central New York is called to that same spirit of adaptation. We cannot simply wait for the world to return to a previous "normal." Instead, our community must adapt to meet this new era.

First, we are prioritizing Community Security. In a world where antisemitism has moved from the fringes to the mainstream, the safety of our synagogues, schools, and community meeting spaces is non-negotiable. We are investing more than ever in technology, training, and partnerships with all levels of law enforcement to ensure our spaces remain sanctuaries of peace.

Second, we are focusing on Engagement and Education. The narrative regarding Israel has become increasingly distorted. Our role is to provide our youth and our neighbors with the tools to understand the complexity of the situation and the historical truth of our connection to the land. We must be as innovative in our communication as the creators of the Topps Bazooka bubblegum were in their marketing.

Finally, we must lean into Unity. In the candy-making process, "tempering" chocolate involves heating and cooling it to just the right temperature to ensure it comes out strong and glossy. Our community is currently in the "heat." But if we stick together, if we support one another despite our internal differences, we will emerge stronger.

The world has changed, but our mission remains the same. We will continue to build a vibrant Jewish life here in Central New York—a life that is resilient, secure, and yes, even sweet.



Jewish Federation of Central New York Adopts IHRA Working Definition of Antisemitism

On January 15, 2026 the Board of Directors of the Jewish Federation of Central New York adopted, by unanimous vote, the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) non-legally binding Working Definition of Antisemitism ("the IHRA definition"). Following is a link to the official working definition: www.tinyurl.com/IHRADefinition.

The IHRA Definition provides a clear and comprehensive framework for understanding the nature of antisemitism and identifying its various manifestations. The IHRA Definition is an important tool for assessing how certain expressions may play on longstanding and deeply offensive anti-Jewish tropes and canards. It is primarily used to determine if unlawful conduct, such as harassment and discrimination, is motivated by such anti-Jewish animus.

The IHRA Definition has been readily endorsed as a helpful educational tool for understanding the Jewish lived experience. Building on the knowledge of experts from over 30 countries, the IHRA Definition provides guidance for recognizing the types of hatred that Jews have experienced both historically and in contemporary times.

Adopted in 2016 by the IHRA's member states, the IHRA Definition is today widely regarded as a consensus definition and has garnered bipartisan support. More than 1,200 entities around the world have adopted, endorsed, and promoted the IHRA Definition, including over 160 Jewish communities and organizations from over sixty-five countries. The Jewish Federations of North America (JFNA) and the Conference of Presidents of Major Jewish Organizations have also adopted the IHRA Definition.

To date, the IHRA Definition has been formally adopted by the U.S. federal government and all its agencies, 37 U.S. states, and nearly 100 U.S. cities and municipalities. Through a 2022 proclamation, the State of New York has embraced the IHRA Definition. Additionally, hundreds of educational institutions, business enterprises, sports associations, and civil society organizations have adopted it. The IHRA Definition thus represents a significant milestone in the effort to counter and combat antisemitism.

The Jewish Federation of Central New York's decision to adopt the IHRA Definition is both timely and necessary. Following the October 7th massacre and the ensuing Israel-Hamas war, incidents of discrimination, harassment, and violence directed against Jewish communities in the United States and around the world have dramatically increased.

The vast majority of American Jews have felt less safe since October 7, and most have altered their behavior in some way out of fear of antisemitism. In New York State, antisemitism has surged to alarming record-high levels. Pursuant to the most recent data from New York State and the FBI, 88% of all religious-based hate crime in our State has targeted Jews (which is 44% of all reported hate crimes throughout the State, which rises to over 50% in New York City). Antisemitic incidents continue to rise nationally, with 70% of all religious-based hate crimes nationally targeting Jews despite Jewish people comprising approximately 2% of the U.S. population. Especially over the past 2½ years, college campuses, synagogues, and Jewish institutions throughout New York State have been targeted and victimized by antisemitism.

In its commitment to educate and inform the Syracuse community about antisemitism, the Jewish Federation of Central New York proudly stands behind its decision to adopt the IHRA Definition. We thank our local Jewish community for its ongoing support.

Yom HaShoah



Defiant Requiem



Yom Ha'atzmaut



Building Safer Schools Through Collaboration

As concerns about antisemitism in educational settings rise nationwide, a coordinated effort in Central New York is emerging as a pragmatic model for local engagement. The Antisemitism in Education Working Group, formed through a partnership among the Jewish Federation of Central New York, the Jewish Community Center of Syracuse, and End Antisemitism Now is working directly with school districts to address incidents and strengthen institutional understanding. Members of the volunteer working group are Miriam Elman, chair of the Federation's Community Relations Committee, Marci Erlebacher, executive director of the Jewish Community Center of Syracuse, Todd Pinsky, chair of the board of the Jewish Federation of Central New York, Brian Raphael, founder of End Antisemitism Now and Mark Segel, president & CEO of the Federation.

The group operates with a dual focus: responding to individual reports of antisemitism while helping schools address broader cultural and policy gaps. The work spans public and private K-12 systems as well as higher education, with an emphasis on direct collaboration with administrators. In practice, the group intervenes when incidents arise and provides educators with tools to better recognize contemporary antisemitism. Historically, administrators are more familiar with its historical forms than its modern expressions.

The educational mission has driven early progress. In the Jamesville-DeWitt Central School District, the group coordinated a session with a

representative from the Anti-Defamation League to help administrators identify antisemitic behavior, understand implicit bias, and implement effective responses. The district also became the site of a pilot initiative placing menorahs in each school alongside other seasonal decorations. Branded "Light Up Learning: The Menorah Inclusion Initiative," the program was designed to ensure Jewish students see their traditions represented in shared spaces. It was met with strong support from administrators and the broader school community. The working group now aims to expand the initiative across all school districts in Onondaga County for next year. In the Fayetteville-Manlius School District, the

group arranged for Fuel for Truth's Ron Wasserman, a graduate of FM, to present the history of antisemitism, helping administrators place current issues within a broader historical context.

"We've been encouraged by the level of engagement and openness from our local school districts," said Mark Segel. "There is a genuine willingness to learn and to partner with us, and that gives us real optimism for what we can accomplish together." "What we have experienced is that many administrators are less familiar with modern antisemitism but are genuinely open to learning more," said Marci Erlebacher. "That openness creates an important opportunity for education and lasting change."

A central priority is encouraging reporting. Incidents often go unreported due to fear of repercussions, so the working group emphasizes that all reports will remain strictly anonymous. Students, parents, and educators can raise concerns with confidence that their identities will be protected. Reports can be directed to the Jewish Federation of CNY, the JCC of Syracuse, or End Antisemitism Now, which coordinate closely to address each case and identify broader trends.

Those interested in supporting "Light Up Learning: The Menorah Inclusion Initiative" and helping deliver menorahs to every school district in the county are encouraged to contact the Jewish Federation of Central New York at info@jewishfederationcny.org to learn more about donation opportunities. Any antisemitic or hate-driven threats or concerns should always be reported to local authorities via 9-1-1, to the Jewish Federation, and to the school districts themselves.

The Jewish Federation
OF CENTRAL NEW YORK

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The Sweetness of Torah

By Rabbi Evan Shore, Shaarei Torah Orthodox Congregation of Syracuse

“Just a spoonful of sugar helps the medicine go down.” In many ways, this idea has long been woven into the fabric of Jewish life and learning.

Sweet delicacies, candy, honey, and other treats have always played a meaningful role in our tradition. A contemporary rabbi once noted that the secret to successfully transmitting Torah is to help others taste its sweetness, demonstrating that Torah study and observance are not burdens, but sources of joy, meaning, and spiritual delight.

It is, therefore, no coincidence that sweets so often accompany our rituals and educational moments. From the classroom to the synagogue, and from childhood to adulthood, we quite literally associate Torah with sweetness. This teaches us, in the most tangible way, that a life of Torah is meant to be savored.

Additionally, in his discussion in the *Mishneh Torah (Hilchot Chametz u'Matzah 7:3)*, the Rambam notes that on the night of the Seder, we distribute nuts and sweets to children to keep them awake and engaged in the story of *Yetziat Mitzrayim* (the Exodus). The goal is not merely for them to stay up late, but to ensure they feel involved, curious, and excited.

The message is clear and timeless: if we want to transmit Torah from one generation to the next, it must be experienced as sweet. We begin with candy, but we are truly teaching our children that Torah itself is the greatest sweetness they will ever taste.

As a youngster, I vividly remember the “Candy Man” in shul. He always had a small bag filled with various hard candies and chocolates, ready to hand out to all the children and even some adults at the end of the service.



Writing in the *Times of Israel*, Baila Brackman notes: “What began as a delightful surprise for a few restless youngsters became a weekly tradition, infusing the shul with a spirit of joy, friendship, and positivity. This simple act of kindness, initiated by the Candy Man, demonstrated the profound impact of small gestures on a community, filling it with a sense of joy and hope.”

In *Shir HaShirim* (Song of Songs), composed by King Solomon, we read: “...honey and milk are under your tongue.” This beautiful imagery became the basis for a cherished custom dating back to the Middle Ages. When a young child would begin learning the Aleph-Bet (Hebrew Alphabet) or start studying Chumash (Bible) the teacher would place a bit of honey on the letters or offer it to the child at the end of the lesson.

In this way, the very first encounter with Torah was accompanied by sweetness literally and symbolically instilling the message that Torah study is not only meaningful, but deeply sweet and satisfying.

The tradition of sweet candy or treats still holds true; whether it is a physical treat or a kind word, the goal is to ensure that every person who enters the synagogue or is engaged in Torah study, leaves with a sweet taste of Torah in their mouth and a sense of belonging in their heart.

And perhaps that is the enduring lesson.

Whether it is a piece of candy, a warm smile, or a kind word, our mission is the same: that every person who encounters Torah should walk away with a sense of its sweetness.

Because in the end, if Torah does not taste sweet, it will not last. But when it does, its sweetness stays with us for a lifetime.



Check that your kids
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LOVE
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Babka, Boulou & Blintzes, compiled by Michael Leventhal

Reviewed by Rabbi Vicki Lieberman

Our Syracuse Jewish Community is fortunate to have many expert bakers, and several of them agreed to bake and evaluate a selection of recipes from *Babka, Boulou & Blintzes*, a book subtitled *Jewish Chocolate Recipes from around the World*. Laura Lavine, Gwen Kay, Suzanne Shapero, Rabbi Daniel Jezer, Anick Sinclair, Debbie Field and I were the bakers; additional taste testers were Cantor Robert Lieberman, Rhea Jezer, and Jef Sneider. The bakers were professionals, serious hobbyists, and students of Le Cordon Bleu. This review is an amalgam of impressions gathered from sharing the book, making and discussing the recipes made and incorporating everyone's suggestions.



Despite the book's alliterative title, there is only one recipe each for babka, boulou (a sweet Tunisian bread), and blintzes. The book features many Sephardic recipes, some noted to be decades, if not hundreds of years, old. Since the book originated in the United Kingdom, American home bakers may need to reacquire themselves with certain ingredient terminology—castor sugar, for example. Many of the recipes call for self-rising flour. Measurements are helpfully given in both grams and volume and most recipes are accompanied by beautiful full-page photographs of the finished products. Since each recipe was submitted by a different contributor, variables such as ease of preparation, accuracy of timings, and availability of ingredients naturally differed.

In general, the bakers found the recipes easy to follow, though they noted the importance of reading each recipe through a few times before starting. Most recipes were true to their stated oven timings, but as always, bakers know their own ovens best. The recipes were not overly sweet, perhaps reflective of European or older traditions, although they are easy to modify. The rugelach, for instance, rated low on our sweetness scale but could easily take an apricot glaze or a roll in turbinado sugar. The one Boulou recipe instructs you to add flour slowly, and this proved important, as not all of the flour was ultimately needed. By contrast, the White Chocolate Cheesecake was quite sweet and might have benefited from a raspberry glaze to cut through the richness and balance the flavors, rather than simply serving raspberries on the side as the recipe suggests.



There are ample opportunities to make these recipes your own. If you are interested in Jewish baking from around the world, with recipes dating back centuries, you will find a great deal of inspiration here. Also included are a few no-bake recipes and recipes that could easily be adapted for Passover.

Of the recipes tested, our hands-down favorites, in order, were the White Chocolate Cheesecake, Delicias Chocolate Almond Delights, Chocolate Rugelach, and the Baroque Chocolate Cake.

JEWISH KIDS AND CANDY

Making Learning SWEET

In an amusing article entitled “Jewish Candy: A Necessity for Jewish Education from Shul to School,” David Kilimnick asserts that “candy is the backbone of the Jewish child’s experience. Without it, the tradition will not be passed down from generation to generation. A bold statement, but no child is doing anything Jewish without sweets.” He goes on to say that “Jewish education is only as good as the candies you have” and advocates for dunking lollipops into sugar saying, “I would go back to elementary school if the teachers were giving out candy to stick in candy. I would learn Torah all day for that.”



Few cultures have as deep and intertwined a relationship with sweetness as the Jewish people. Sweetness is literally written into the Jewish calendar. On Rosh Hashanah, apples are dipped in honey as a symbol of hope for a sweet year ahead. At Sukkot, children go “Sukkah hopping,” moving from booth to booth collecting candy (think Halloween on steroids). Chanukah brings chocolate gelt and Purim brings *mishloach manot*. Even Passover, a holiday defined by restrictions on food, carves out space for candy, since sugar and chocolate are perfectly *kosher l’pesach*.

Perhaps the oldest and most tender of all Jewish sweet traditions is the way children were first introduced to learning. During the Middle Ages, there developed a ceremony of introducing a child to Jewish studies that included writing the letters of the *alef bet* on a tablet and covering them with honey, which the child then licked so that the words of Scripture might be as sweet as honey. The tradition is rooted in a passage from the book of Ezekiel: “I ate it, and in my mouth, it was as sweet as honey.” A young boy (it was only a boy back then) would be brought to

the synagogue or to the teacher’s house, where the tablet. The teacher would recite each letter and the child would repeat it, and then the teacher would put a little honey on the tablet for the child to lick off. Then the child was given cake with honey and an egg upon which a verse from Ezekiel was written. They would feed the boy the cake and the egg because it was good “for the opening of the heart.”

Note: There was a sweet ceremony for girls also, but it was not connected to learning. *Hollekreisch* was a medieval German Jewish naming ceremony that was practiced more for girls than boys. When the baby was about a month old, the mother brought her to synagogue on Shabbat. The baby was welcomed with song and her father was called to the Torah. After services, family and friends went home to celebrate. Children surrounded the decorated cradle of the baby, raising the cradle three times with cries of “Holle, Holle, what shall this child’s name be?” The children then called out the secular name of the girl and received sweets from the parents. The ceremony is no longer observed, replaced by the contemporary naming ceremony, *simchat bat* or *brit bat*, at which sweets are also definitely present.

SUNKIST FRUIT GEMS

How a Los Angeles Candy Became a Bar/t Mitzvah Tradition

For many Jewish Americans, the sound of cellophane-wrapped candies rattling in fidgety hands is as much a part of a bar/t mitzvah as the haftarah chanting. Sunkist Fruit Gems, brightly colored, individually wrapped citrus candies, are so embedded in Jewish coming-of-age ceremonies that they’ve earned the status of an “honorary Jewish product,” a product made by a non-Jewish company that has been completely adopted by the Jewish community.

Sunkist Fruit Gems trace their origins to 1930s Los Angeles, where confectioner Ben Myerson worked in the candy scene and partnered with Sunkist Growers to experiment with pectin, a plant-based gelling agent. In 1937, Myerson founded the Ben Myerson Candy Company, establishing himself in Los Angeles’s thriving Jewish-owned candy manufacturing community. Eighteen years after founding his company, Myerson made a pivotal acquisition: he purchased the Christopher Candy Company, the oldest sweet shop in Southern California. Through this deal, he obtained two signature products, including Christopher’s Fruit Gems. The defining moment came in 1966 when Myerson signed a licensing agreement with Sunkist Growers, officially renaming the product Sunkist Fruit Gems.

The candies were a mass-produced version of the French *pâte de fruit*—a pectin-based confection featuring citrus flavors. The product’s formulation made kosher certification straightforward. Sunkist Fruit Gems were made with pectin derived from fruit rather than gelatin, which is typically made from animal bones. The candies were naturally free of dairy and meat products, making them pareve. They also check virtually every dietary restriction box. They are fat-free, peanut-free, gluten-free, vegan, and made with non-GMO ingredients and thus can be safely enjoyed by all.

The tradition of throwing candy at bar and bat mitzvahs has deep Jewish roots. The custom evolved from throwing nuts and sweets at grooms during an *aufbruch*, the ceremony before a wedding,



symbolizing wishes for a sweet and fruitful life. This practice eventually extended to bar and bat mitzvah ceremonies. As nut allergies became a serious concern, Sunkist Fruit Gems became the candy of choice for most ceremonies. Their soft texture made them safe to throw without causing physical harm or disrupting the service and their individual wrapping made them hygienic.

When Jelly Belly acquired the product in 2006, they made one significant change: they updated the candy’s flavor profile, swapping out cherry in favor of blueberry. However, in 2023, the original lineup of orange, lemon, pink grapefruit, raspberry, and lime was restored—a testament to consumer loyalty and nostalgia. The debate over which flavor is superior has become part of bar mitzvah culture itself, with passionate advocates for orange, lemon, and pink grapefruit creating impromptu Talmudic-style debates at receptions. In Jewish life, where every ritual object carries centuries of meaning, Sunkist Fruit Gems have managed to write themselves into the script in less than a lifetime.

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Jewish immigrants played a pivotal role in shaping the American candy industry in the late 19th and 20th centuries, turning candy-making into entrepreneurship, founding iconic brands and helping transform candy into an indulgent niche in America’s eating habits,

JEWIS AND CANDY

Joyva

Nathan Radutzky, a Ukrainian immigrant, arrived on the Lower East Side in the early 1900s. He made his products in a garage and peddled them from a pushcart. He produced a variety of chocolate covered candies including Passover ring jells and marshmallow twists as well as quality halvah. In Arabic, *halvah* means sweet, and it was the darling of appetizing stores at the time. Radutzky named his company, Joyva, “Joy” from the name of his daughter, Roslyn Joy, and “va” from the word *halvah*. Joyva became known as “The House that Sesame Built.” Tahini flows through a pipeline running under the street in Brooklyn where the factory constantly pumps out the treat.



Bonomo Turkish Taffy

Austrian Herman Herer created a unique candy in 1912 on Coney Island while working for candy maker M. Schwartz & Sons. Whipping up a batch of marshmallow, he mistakenly added too many egg whites. Instead of throwing it out, he experimented and came up with something he called “Turkish Taffy.” In 1936 the Bonomo family of Coney Island bought M. Schwartz & Sons, including Herman’s taffy. The Bonomos first sold Turkish Taffy out of baskets on the boardwalk. Then they made a deal with the F. W. Woolworth Company to display Turkish Taffy in large blocks, from which pieces were broken off with a ball-peen hammer. Soon individual servings were wrapped in wax paper with advice for customers to “crack it up” themselves. Banana, chocolate and strawberry flavors were added to the original vanilla and Bonomo Turkish Taffy became a national brand. The company was sold in 1972 and the new owners reformulated the taffy to be soft and chewy. It failed miserably. But passionate memories of the original remained and in 2002 a New Yorker named Kenny Wiesen acquired the Bonomo Turkish Taffy brand, resurrected Herman’s formula, and reintroduced it. Enthusiasts were able “crack up” their Bonomo Turkish Taffy once again, as they still do today.



Now and Later

The story behind Now and Later candies goes back to 1919, and a little confectionery business in Brooklyn where father-and-son team Harry and Joseph Klein manufactured saltwater taffy for Atlantic City. Taffy-making was a seasonal business, requiring open-fire kettles and time-consuming “pulling” and cooling. The Kleins streamlined the process by installing vacuum cookers to replace the kettles and other equipment which could turn out taffies like crazy. They called their new product Now and Later, since each pack contained individually-wrapped taffies—some for now, more for later. A big hit in New York City, Now and Later became a national brand, producing 700 million candy bars annually.

Goldenberg’s Peanut Chews

When Romanian immigrant David Seltzer arrived in Philadelphia, he changed his name to Goldenberg, which he heard was a good name to have in America. He began making carnival treats, eventually transitioning into the candy business. One of Goldenberg’s most popular creations was a chewy walnut and molasses candy. He swapped walnuts for more cost-effective peanuts, and Goldenberg’s Peanut Chews were born. During the first and second World

Wars, Goldenberg won numerous government contracts to produce Peanut Chews as a “nutritious” non-ration bar for American soldiers. The family business was passed on to his children, Sylvia and Harry; the latter passed it onto his sons, Ed and Carl, the latter of whom passed it on to his son David. The great-grandson of the original founder sold the Peanut Chew empire to Just Born, which still produces the candy under the Goldenberg name.



Tootsie Rolls

Leo Hirshfield emigrated to the United States from Austria in the 1890s. He came from a Jewish family and brought with him experience in candy making. Arriving in America, he worked in his father’s candy shop and then opened a small candy factory in New York City where he created what would become the iconic Tootsie Roll—a chocolate-flavored taffy that had a unique texture somewhere between hard candy and soft chocolate. The candy was revolutionary for its time because it didn’t melt easily and could withstand temperature changes better than pure chocolate. The name “Tootsie” came from Hirshfield’s daughter, Clara, whose nickname was Tootsie. The penny candy became enormously popular, and the business grew rapidly. Tootsie Rolls were certified kosher by the Orthodox Union in 2009. This was as significant a moment in the confectionary world as when Oreos went kosher in 1997. What is particularly interesting is that there were no ingredient changes required to make Tootsie Rolls kosher. The only change was adding OU supervision to the production process.



Topps and Bazooka Gum

Topps was founded by four brothers: Abram, Ira, Philip and Joseph Shorin. Their first product in 1938 was Topps Gum. They introduced Bazooka Bubble Gum in 1947. The gum was named after the bazooka weapon used during the WWII, capitalizing on the cultural familiarity Americans had with military equipment at the time. The original formulation was designed to be an affordable, long-lasting bubble gum that could compete in the post-war market. At its launch, Bazooka sold for a penny, making it accessible to kids across America.



In 1953, Topps introduced what would become Bazooka's most distinctive feature: the Bazooka Joe comic strips. These small comics wrapped around each piece of gum featured a boy named Bazooka Joe, his eye-patch-wearing friend Mort, and other characters in short, joke-filled adventures.

Topps hit it big when they packaged baseball cards with their gum. In 1951 Topps issued two 52-card sets designed to be played with as a game. By the next year, the now-standard format featured the player photo with stats on the back. Topps signed deals with Major League Baseball, then the NFL, NHL and NBA. By the 1960s, bubble gum trading cards were ingrained in American culture, and despite the fact that many customers tossed the gum, sales grew. Sports cards soon attracted professional investors; the cards' skyrocketing values outperformed the stock market. Mickey Mantle's 1952 Topps card recently sold for \$12,600,000.

Candy Cigarettes

Candy cigarettes peaked in popularity from the 1920s through the early 1960s, driven by children's desire to imitate adults at a time when smoking was glamorous and socially acceptable. Candy cigarette sticks had a very Jewish origin. Brothers Sam and Leon Cohen built the World Confections factory in 1952 in Brooklyn. Both had served in World War II and were proud Jewish men and first-generation Americans. World Confections became the vendor responsible for nearly every box of candy cigarette sticks on the market, sold under brand names like "Lucky Lights," "Victory's," and "Kings." Drew Cohen, Sam's grandson, summed up his family's candy business: "Everything about this is Jewish—from the work ethic, to the way that they were raised, to the families that they raised."



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JEWS AND CHOCOLATE



The connection between Jews and chocolate dates to Columbus. On his fourth voyage to the Bay of Honduras in 1502, Columbus and his crew discovered cacao beans and brought them back to Spain. Chocolate became a big business there and in Bayonne, a port city on the coast of France, which became the center of French chocolate-making. About 60 *converso* Jewish families from Spain lived there at the time, pretending to be Christians. Because the Inquisition wasn't as strong in France, they gradually became more open about their Judaism. By the end of the century there were about 800 Jews in Bayonne, with 13 synagogues. The Jews became expert chocolate makers and were active in the shipping and smuggling of cacao beans from South America to Spain and Amsterdam. Non-Jewish chocolate makers tried to push the Jews out of the business. Jews had to leave the city by sundown every evening and were not allowed to sell chocolate on Sundays or Christian holidays. Nevertheless, after legal battles, the Jews won the right to continue making chocolate. Today Bayonne brags of its chocolate history and claims that Jews introduced chocolate to France.

Wherever Jews moved they brought chocolate. A *converso* opened the first coffeehouse serving hot chocolate in Oxford, England, in 1650. On the French Caribbean island of Martinique, a Jew formerly of Bayonne cultivated the first cacao trees and established the first cacao-processing plant in French territory. Chocolate eventually became the most important export from Martinique.

In the 18th and 19th centuries, Jewish people in Europe were integral in sugar production. Jewish beet farmers throughout the Russian empire produced the bulk of the sugar used in the European market. In Denmark, where Jews weren't permitted to work in many professions, coffee, tea, and chocolate became known as the "Jew trades." The expression was abolished when Jews became citizens in 1814. It was a Jew, 16-year-old Franz Sacher, who developed the famous Viennese dessert still known today as the *Sachertorte*: dark chocolate and apricot jam.

Sephardic Jews were active in the manufacture and sale of chocolate during the Revolutionary and Colonial periods of U.S. history, particularly in New York City and Newport, Rhode Island. The first Jewish settlement on the Hudson River was established by Luis Moses Gomez, who escaped the Inquisition to come to America. From the late 17th century through the early 19th century, the Gomez family built a chocolate business. The Gomez Mill House in Newburgh, New York, is the oldest surviving Jewish residence in North America. Rebecca Gomez was the first woman to manufacture chocolate.

In 1925, two Jewish brothers-in-law and their wives started making candy in



the kitchen behind their store on Broadway and West 158th Street. Neither Mac nor Jack was originally a Barricini. They thought Barricini would be a good name for their business, suggesting elegance and quality, and they both adopted it. The Barricinis kept their Jewish identity quiet, though their product was kosher, stayed open seven days a week, and let the European-sounding name appeal to the broadest possible audience. It worked. By 1951 there were forty-five Barricini shops around New York.



Emigrants fleeing antisemitism in Europe were a significant part of the chocolate story. In 1933, Eliyahu Fromenchenko, who owned a chocolate factory in Latvia, emigrated to pre-state Israel, bringing his factory equipment with him. He founded Elite, which became one of Israel's most iconic brands. Its classic chocolate bar, featuring a cow on the red wrapper, became a beloved symbol of the Zionist return to the land.

Stephen Klein, owner of one of Vienna's biggest chocolate companies, fled Austria the day after the 1938 Nazi Anschluss.

Arriving in New York, Klein declared, "I was surprised to see how candy was sold here... I saw a better, tastier, a more different candy had to be made...I know what chocolates to blend, how to control taste...All the pieces should look good—no *chazerei*." He started as a peddler, making candies at night in his apartment kitchen. In 1940 he opened the first Barton's Bonbonniere, which eventually grew to 50 locations. When he opened his Herald Square store, he had a chorus line of dancers and a legendary reputation. The Department of Transportation even awarded him special dispensation to have a concession stand at Grand Central terminal, despite the fact that he would be closed on the Sabbath.



During the Nazi era, the Barton's candy company helped refugees escape to the U.S. Klein aided displaced Jews all over the world. Barton's produced Jewish-themed chocolate, like candy in the shapes of Hebrew letters, chocolate-covered hamentaschen, and chocolate matzah. While Barricini downplayed their Jewish roots and kept their stores open on Shabbat, Barton's proudly advertised their products as kosher. Both companies earned kosher certification, but Barton's was more popular in the Jewish community, partly because the company sponsored fundraising competitions in Jewish schools for selling the most Barton's products.

The Partnership between Syracuse's Syroco and Barricini Candies

The Syracuse Ornamental Company was founded in 1890 by Adolph Holstein, an immigrant woodcarver from Warsaw. He started producing ornate decorative carvings for the interiors of fashionable homes, including fireplace mantelpieces and furniture embellishments popular in the Victorian era.



The company's defining innovation came from a practical problem: hand-carving was slow, and demand was growing. Holstein developed a composite material, wood pulp brought from the Adirondacks combined with flour as a binder, which could be pressed into compression molds made from original carvings in real wood. The result was a product that looked and felt like carved wood but could be reproduced in quantity. He called it SyrocoWood. Syroco employed 400 workers at its factory on South Clinton Street and the company remained in the Holstein family for three generations. In the 1930s, demand for Victorian architectural ornament waned, and Syroco pivoted to trays, picture frames, wall plaques, bookends, and, eventually, candy boxes.

Barricini Candies was a prominent confectioner known for its chocolate creams. Barricini understood that a box of fine chocolates needed packaging that communicated the same care as had gone into what was inside. Syroco's wood-composite boxes were a natural answer. Decorated with molded flowers and scrollwork, the boxes took paint and finish exceptionally well, resulting in deep, rich tones that matched the visual language of luxury confectionery. For Barricini, commissioning Syroco boxes was a statement: these chocolates were worthy of a container this elegant.

KOSHER CANDY COMPANIES

ECONOMY CANDY

Morris “Moishe” Cohen, whose primary trade was shoe and hat repair, ran a sweets cart as a side hustle in New York, but found that during the Depression, candy was bringing in more cash than cobbling. In 1937, he converted his shop to a confectionary selling sweetmeats, dried fruit, nuts, and gift baskets, founding Economy Candy. More than 80 years later, Economy Candy is still run by Cohen’s descendants and has become a landmark for an incredibly vast selection of thousands of current, vintage and hard-to-find candies. Today the reins are held by Mitchell and Skye Cohen. They’ve got every sort of sweet you can imagine, from mountains of penny candies, hard-to-find imported bars, dried fruits and nuts, hand-made chocolate-covered grahams, jells, turtles and barks, all kinds of bubble gum cards from Baseball to Smurfs, Dallas and the Simpsons, a wall of infinitely-flavored jelly beans, as well as Pez dispensers, Necco Wafers and candy buttons on paper strips.



OH! NUTS

Oh! Nuts began as a Brooklyn institution serving a community where kosher observance was a baseline expectation, and it scaled that community-centric model into a national e-commerce brand. Rather than treating kosher certification as an add-on or differentiator, the company was built around it from the ground up—making it not just a candy store that happens to be kosher, but a kosher institution that happens to sell candy.

Oh! Nuts began in Brooklyn in 1992 as a 15×15-foot neighborhood candy shop, founded by the Klein family, who brought a background in the wholesale food industry to their new venture. The Kleins were a well-regarded wholesalers of nut and confectionery products company, sold mainly to caterers and manufacturers. With vision and hard work, the small flagship location was expanded into several stores and eventually



grew into an online megastore of fine candies, nuts, and snacks. Oh! Nuts stocks over 2,000 items and has gained a large following for its custom gift baskets and party favors.

Kosher observance has been central to Oh! Nuts’ identity from the very beginning. Oh! Nuts offers the widest kosher candy selection in America.”The selection caters directly to Jewish religious life and its calendar, with products suited for Shabbat, Passover, Purim, Rosh Hashanah, and other holidays. The company’s gift basket division, for instance, specializes in Purim *mishloach manot*, a major seasonal offering for observant Jewish customers.

PASKESZ CANDY COMPANY

The Paskesz Candy Company originated in Mako, Hungary in the early twentieth century, when Anshel Paskesz opened a store that sold hard candies and citrus fruits. His son Lazar continued in the food business, specializing in candy and chocolates. After opening a successful retail store in Bonyhad, Hungary, he moved to Nyireghaza, where he began selling wholesale products to other stores in the area.

Then came World War II and the Holocaust. Lazar survived, but lost most of his family. He returned to Nyireghaza where he was appointed head of the survivors of the Jewish community (*rosh hakohol*) and set about rebuilding his business. Lazar remarried in 1946 and started a new family. In the summer of 1954, he decided to come to the United States. He arrived in New York City with no means of supporting his family. After discussing his dilemma with Grand Rabbi Teitelbaum of Satmar, he was advised to continue selling confectionery. He persuaded a cookie manufacturer to produce kosher cookies. This entailed driving the supervising rabbi as well as an interpreter, since neither Mr. Paskesz or the rabbi spoke English, from New York to the plant in Philadelphia. Paskesz labels were meticulously applied to every package of the kosher by his family members.

In the 1970s, his children joined the company and advanced it to the next level. Paskesz Candy Company became the industry leader in the rapidly growing kosher market. The company remained devoted to its founder’s dream of bringing kosher consumers new products of the highest quality and kosher standards and is getting ready for the fourth generation to operate and further expand the company.



The Jewish Irony of Peeps



Sam Born, né Samuel Bernstein, grew up in Ukraine, where he studied in rabbinical school before his family fled to Paris. There he learned chocolate-making before emigrating to the United States. He opened a small candy store in Brooklyn and then invented the Born sucker machine, which automated the process of inserting sticks into candy, creating lollipops. He also transformed the

Tootsie Roll into the Tootsie Pop and devised an ingenious method of producing chocolate sprinkles or jimmies. In 1923 he entered the candy manufacturing business, calling his company Just Born, because his store window displayed an evolving line of daily-made candy, declaring them “just born.” He was joined in the business by his brother-in-law Jack Shaffer and Jack’s brother Irv.

In 1953, Just Born acquired the Rodda company, which at the time devoted the majority of its production capacity to churning out jellybeans, in addition to the more labor-intensive marshmallow treats known as Peeps. Sam’s son Robert invented a machine that reduced the production time for Peeps from 27 hours to six minutes. After the machine was invented, the company rapidly became the world’s leading manufacturer of America’s most iconic Easter candy. Just Born also went on to create popular candies such as Mike and Ike and Hot Tamales.

Peeps are just part of Sam Born’s candy empire, which produces sweets for more than 1.5 billion people worldwide. Ironically, the famous neon-colored marshmallow Easter treats, are produced in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania by Jews. The business has a long history of supporting Jewish causes, receiving recognition from the Federation of Jewish Philanthropy, the United Jewish Appeal, and the Israeli government through the Shema Yisrael Award. While Mike and Ike and Hot Tamales are kosher, Peeps—made with gelatin—are not.

3rd Annual Pride Shabbat at CBS-CS

By Yolanda Febles

On June 6, Congregation Beth Sholom-Chevre Shas (CBS-CS) will mark Pride Month with its annual Pride Shabbat. Now in its third year, Pride Shabbat will center on the idea of chosen family, a concept that sits at the heart of LGBTQ+ life and resonates deeply with Jewish understandings of covenant and community. The service will explore how meaningful bonds are formed beyond traditional definitions of family, and how those relationships become sacred through care, responsibility, and presence.



Alongside the core Shabbat liturgy, additional readings and reflections will highlight LGBTQ+ voices and experiences, framing chosen family not only as a response to exclusion, but also as a powerful and generative way of building Jewish life. The result is a Pride Shabbat grounded in tradition and shaped by the lived reality of the community it celebrates. “Pride Shabbat is about making space for people to be fully themselves in a Jewish setting,” said CBS-CS member Eric van der Vort. “This year, we’re focusing on chosen family—something that has long been central to LGBTQ+ life—and exploring how those relationships reflect Jewish ideas of covenant, care, and belonging.”

Following the service, a Kiddush luncheon will be held. Registration is required. Community members, friends, and families are invited to attend. **Registration is available at:** <https://tinyurl.com/prideshabbat-26>

Three Synagogues Unite for Scholar-in-Residence Weekend on Sephardic Jewish History

Three of Syracuse’s Jewish congregations joined forces for a historic Scholar-in-Residence program that drew community members together across two days of worship, learning, and shared meals—all centered on a rich but often overlooked chapter of Jewish history. The weekend was made possible, in part, by a grant from the Philip L. Holstein Community Program Fund of the Jewish Federation of Central New York.



Temple Adath Yeshurun, Temple Concord, and Congregation Beth Sholom-Chevre Shas co-hosted the event on March 13 and 14 at 450 Kimber Road, featuring Dr. Benjamin Gampel, Professor of Jewish History at the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York City. Dr. Gampel, a leading scholar on the Jews of medieval Spain and the broader Sephardic world, delivered three distinct programs over the course of the weekend, each exploring a different facet of Jewish life in the Mediterranean and Iberian Peninsula.

The weekend opened on Friday evening with *Kabbalat Shabbat* services led by Temple Concord, followed by a Shabbat dinner and Dr. Gampel’s lecture titled “Sex, Food and Lush Gardens of Al-Andalus: Religious Piety and Sensual Pleasure,” a talk that examined how medieval Spanish Jews navigated the pleasures and piety of daily life in a thriving multicultural society.

Saturday morning services at Temple Adath Yeshurun were followed by a Junior Congregation program for children and a Lunch and Learn session, “The Golden Age is Over: And Now What Do We Do?,” in which Dr. Gampel explored how Sephardic Jewish communities adapted and survived after the upheaval of expulsion from Spain in 1492. “A particularly enjoyable part of the weekend was the three congregations assembling to pray, to eat, and to learn, and doing it all together. Dr. Gampel’s lessons were especially timely: the Jews of medieval Iberia whom he spoke about lived in a time of shifting political winds that affected their lived reality in ways large and small, and their struggles to accommodate themselves to those shifts illuminate contemporary challenges with fresh perspective,” said Jonathan Levine of CBS-CS.

“The energy Friday night was fantastic, and the dinner conveyed a real warm sense of community. Both Saturday services were inclusive—Temple Adath Yeshurun and CBS-CS welcomed members of each congregation for aliyot and other honors. A great community experience!” said Temple Concord’s Jeff Lefkowitz.

The weekend concluded on Saturday evening with *Mincha* services led by Congregation Beth Sholom-Chevre Shas and a *Seudah Shlishit* dinner and study session on “Gazing into the Countenance of the Divine: Confronting the Riddle of Jewish Apostasy,” examining Jews who converted willingly or under pressure, and what their experiences reveal about faith, identity, and survival.

The collaboration among the three congregations was notable and speaks to a shared investment in Jewish education and communal connection in Central New York, offering a vivid example of what that cooperation can produce: a community coming together, across denominational lines, to learn, eat, and ask big questions together.

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SHDS Students Shine at the 2026 CNY Science and Engineering Fair

The SHDS Science Fair Club brought their projects to the Central New York Science and Engineering Fair at the MOST on March 29. The students set up posters and presented to many judges, explaining their scientific research and conclusions. Fifth graders Davin Moodie, Joey Rosenberg, and Nathan Rosenberg shared their project “Asteroids versus Humanity,” in which they built several models to demonstrate methods for destroying or changing the path of an asteroid to prevent it from crashing into the Earth.



Ophri Goren and Saskia Gaskin Bennett, both in fifth grade, received honors recognition for their project “Protecting our Pools,” which explored how long chlorine lasts—and cleans—pool water. Sixth graders Lyra Shirilan-Howlett, Ava Kanter, and Eliana Adcock received high honors. Lyra and Ava’s project determined that freezing temperatures are an effective way to slow the growth of mold in their experiment “Modifying Mold.” Eliana’s project, which was also awarded a United States Air Force Certificate of Achievement for an Outstanding Science

of Engineering Fair Project, consisted of an experiment in psychology entitled “The Selective Attention Test.” The project demonstrated a tester’s ability to predict how closely someone will pay attention to details when directed to think about something else.

All participants received tote bags and a one-year membership to the MOST. Phyllis Zames, who with Yvonne Fix is an SHDS Science Fair Club advisor, said, “The students choose, design, and execute their experiments according to the scientific method. They learn to measure, observe, and record precisely. Then they present their work and answer questions about their experience to experts in many different fields of science. Ms. Fix and I are so proud of our scientists for their hard work.”

“Seussical” by SHDS

The talented students of SHDS worked hard at work bringing the colorful world of Dr. Seuss to life in a joyful production of “Seussical the Musical.” From *Horton* to *Cat in the Hat*, this show was full of music, heart, and lots of Seuss-style fun for all ages.



Howard’s House: A Legacy Written in Lead-Free Walls



Syracuse Mayor Sharon Owens and County Executive Ryan McMahon recently came to Syracuse’s South Side to cut the ribbon on a four-unit apartment building sixty years in the making. Howard’s House, named in honor of Upstate pediatric professor emeritus Howard Weinberger, MD, is a joint project of the City

of Syracuse and Onondaga County. It will provide families with a temporary safe environment after their children are treated at SUNY Upstate Medical University for lead poisoning, while their homes are being abated. The grand opening took place on March 24th, a day the county proclaimed “Dr. Howard L. Weinberger Day.”

In 1965, Weinberger collaborated with the County Health Department to investigate lead poisoning in Syracuse. Weinberger established what is now the CNY Poison Center, created the CNY Lead Resource Center, and opened one of the nation’s first continuity clinics. “Children should not be the canaries in the coal mine,” Weinberger declared, explaining that Syracuse is a city with many old houses with lead paint, which is harmless when intact but dangerous when it chips or peels because its sweet taste attracts children. Between 5% and 6% of all Onondaga County children tested show elevated lead levels, and it is ten times more likely to appear in Syracuse children than in those from the rest of the county. Lead poisoning causes brain damage, learning disabilities and behavioral problems in children, and organ failure in adults; no amount of exposure is safe. Weinberger championed routine lead screening for children ages one and two beginning in the early 1970s, a standard now required statewide.

The building at 187-189 Lincoln Avenue is in the area of Syracuse with the highest concentration of lead-hazard homes. Its four apartments—each with two bedrooms, a full kitchen, and a bathroom—are offered free of charge while families wait for the lead in their homes to be abated. “This is a moment of crisis for families,” said Dr. Travis Hobart, director of the Central/Eastern NY Lead Poisoning Resource Center. “Suddenly they’re told their child’s blood level is high, they’re in the hospital for a week, and they’re told they can’t go back to their home. Giving them the space to rest from the crisis will have a big impact.”

Officials said the house should be fully open within 30 days of the ribbon cutting, with early intervention services also available and a waiting list already forming. Weinberger was at the ribbon cutting to see it all come together. “It gives me a feeling of security to know that all that work that we did has come out in a positive way,” he said.

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Klezfest Returns on August 16

by Ashley Schmitz

The JCC of Syracuse's annual Jewish Festival KlezFest will be returning early this year on Sunday, August 16 from 12 - 4 pm. KlezFest is a free, rain or shine outdoor event that celebrates Jewish culture with delicious kosher food, lively music, shopping, and community. Everyone is welcome to attend and there's still time to get involved as a vendor, sponsor, or volunteer.



Individuals and local businesses alike are encouraged to apply as vendors to showcase their products to KlezFest's enthusiastic crowd. "If you have something to sell, whether it be services, goods or homemade crafts, this is a great low-risk opportunity to promote and network for both new and established businesses," says Alec Erlebacher, KlezFest's event coordinator. To guarantee a space, applications and all associated fees must be submitted to the JCC by Friday, July 31 at 5 pm.

Sponsorship and volunteer opportunities are also available for those looking to participate more behind the scenes. From supporting the event as a sponsor to lending a hand on the day of, these contributions are what keep the music playing and the celebration going strong.

To learn more about the festival or to apply as a vendor, sponsor, or volunteer, visit jccsy.org/klezfest. For the most up to date announcements, follow KlezFestCNY on Facebook and @KlezFest on Instagram.

Cooking with Rachel Simons at the JCC

Join the JCC of Syracuse and Temple Concord for a night of food and fun with Rachel Simons, author and founder of Seed + Mill in New York City on Monday, June 1 at 6:30 pm at the JCC. Rachel will discuss her cookbook *Sesame: Global Recipes + Stories of an Ancient Seed* as attendees enjoy a

tasting of recipes from the book along with kosher wine. Participants will then put on their aprons and make a recipe from the book to take home. **Get more details and register today: jccsy.org/cp.**



Monday Night Dinners Return to the JCC

by Ashley Schmitz

The beloved seasonal tradition of Monday Night Dinners returns to the JCC of Syracuse this summer, serving up the perfect recipe of great food and company. The weekly senior dinners provide a welcoming space to gather, connect, and enjoy a delicious meal.



The Monday Night Dinners are so much fun every year," says Raven DiSalvo-Hess, director of senior programming. "It gives community members the chance to have a great meal, see friends (or make new ones) and hear good local music."

The weekly dinners will take place every Monday evening at 5 pm beginning June 22, kicking off with a special Father's Day celebration to start the season. Designed especially for seniors, the program creates a consistent opportunity for community members to socialize and unwind, all while enjoying delicious kosher food in a warm, friendly atmosphere. All meals are certified Va'ad Kosher and are prepared daily by the talented chef, Donna Carullo. Monday Night Dinners will run through August 31, taking the place of the regular senior lunch program during the summer months.

In addition to a satisfying meal, attendees can look forward to a lineup of entertainment throughout the summer, adding an extra layer of fun and engagement to each evening. Whether reconnecting with friends or meeting new ones, Monday Night Dinners provide a relaxed and enjoyable way to spend a summer night.

The program is offered at a recommended donation of \$6 for those 60 and older and \$10 for guests under 60, helping to keep the experience accessible to all. Reservations are required at least one week in advance and can be made by emailing Raven DiSalvo-Hess at rdisalvo-hess@jccsy.org or calling 315-445-2360 ext. 128.

With its blend of food, friendship, and entertainment, Monday Night Dinners continue to be a highlight of the summer season at the JCC. To learn more about Senior Programming, the Senior Meal Program or to view the current menu, visit jccsy.org/seniors.

JCC Receives Donation from Matthews Children's Foundation



The JCC of Syracuse received \$1,000 from the Matthews Children's Foundation. The Foundation awards grants to nonprofit organizations whose purpose is to support children. The JCC's Children's Programming has received continued support for a number of years from the Matthews Children's Foundation. Pictured is the JCC's Executive Director, Marci Erlebacher, President, Phillip Rubenstein and Immediate Past President, Steven Sisskind.



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

The Kid with a Backpack Full of Candy



Every great entrepreneur has an origin story. For Jay Klein, it started in sixth grade. Instead of notebooks and pencils, Klein stuffed his bag with Airheads and lollipops and sold them to classmates at lunchtime for a quarter each.

Jay was a student at the Syracuse Hebrew Day School but then moved to Florida with his mother Rhonda. He went to York University in Toronto and, while still in college, launched an advertising and marketing company called Divertise. He then developed a product called Bonus Gum. “I’ve always loved the candy industry,” Jay says. “Candy just makes people happy.” As part of a creative exercise to develop empathy with clients, he attempted to give the gum to fellow passengers on an airplane flight, but people kept refusing it. When asked why, they repeatedly answered that they didn’t want aspartame.

That single, repeating objection became a founding principle. If many people were actively avoiding aspartame, what if one built an entire gum brand around its absence? Klein turned that lesson into a business. PÜR Gum launched in 2010: aspartame-free, naturally sweetened with xylitol, and positioned directly at the health-conscious consumer who had been overlooked by the mainstream gum market.

In its first month, PÜR appeared in 33 local health food stores in Toronto. Two months later, it was in 174 stores, and three years after launch, PÜR was available in 10,000 stores across 20 countries and had achieved \$10 million in annual sales.

To raise funds to expand his operations, Klein went on Dragon’s Den, a Canadian television series like Shark Tank. PÜR was a proven company, but it had vulnerabilities: a single manufacturer, a single warehouse, and enormous untapped potential in e-commerce and international retail. Klein asked for \$1 million in exchange for a 10% equity stake. The result was remarkable: four of the five Dragons expressed serious interest in his work and three competing deals hit the table. Klein accepted an offer for the full amount—the first million-dollar deal in the history of Dragon’s Den.

PÜR expanded into mints and better-for-you popcorn, earning shelf space at over 50,000 distribution points across more than 55 countries, with packaging printed in ten languages. PÜR Gum became—and remains—the #1 selling aspartame-free gum in the world. Accolades followed: Canada’s Top 40 Under 40, EY Entrepreneur of the Year, Deloitte’s Best Managed Companies. The company cracked the PROFIT 500, ranking #1 in manufacturing and distribution with a five-year revenue growth of 5,496%.

Jay’s story came full circle when he was announced as a Full Circle Dragon for season 20 of Dragons Den which premiered in February, joining other founders who had previously pitched on the show and were now on the giving side of the table.

The kid with the backpack full of candy turned out to be an incredibly successful businessman. His philosophy: start small, stay patient, know the customer, and never give up on a good idea.

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**DR. ELAINE ROSLYN
MENTER KATZMAN**
March 22, 2026



Dr. Elaine Roslyn Menter Katzman, Mom, Grama Elaine, Bubby, was born on October 10th, 1927. She passed away on March 22, 2026, surrounded by her loving family. She was 98 years young. Elaine was the youngest of six children born to Abe and Anna Menter. A native

of Syracuse, Elaine and her husband Larry moved to Arizona in 1982.

Elaine was the loving wife to Larry, who died in 2019. He called her his "Lainey." She is survived by her three daughters, eight grandchildren and fourteen great grandchildren: Linda and Jerry Tenenbaum, Judy and Marc Isaacs, Joanie Katzman and their fantastic kids and grandkids: Todd and Mary Tenenbaum (Brandon and Jack), Neil and Liza Tenenbaum (Leah, Evan and Noah), Kerri Tenenbaum (Dylan and Cody), Scott and Jennifer Tenenbaum, Adam and Melanie Isaacs (Charlie and Anna), Dena Isaacs and Seth, Paul and Jessica Venesky (Natalie, Lilly, and Paulie), Alan and Shara Venesky (Adelynn and Charlotte).

Elaine was a high achiever, serving as a cadet nurse in the Army in WWII. She was an RN and a school nurse teacher at Tecumseh Elementary School. She was awarded her doctorate in 1980. She was a psychiatric mental health nurse practitioner and retired as assistant professor from the School of Nursing at Arizona State University. Elaine and Larry began "Lar-El" practice in Syracuse

and later in Arizona for marriage and adolescent counseling.

Elaine loved playing the piano from the age of 5 up until her passing. She loved classical music but loved oldies too. She would play the piano, and Larry would whistle alongside her. Both were very active and enjoyed playing tennis, racket ball, hiking, cross-country skiing and swimming. They were members of Temple Adath Yeshurun in Syracuse. In Arizona, they were members of Temple Soliel, where they made their b'nai mitzvah together.

Elaine was loved by her family, friends, and the students she taught throughout her years. In 2008, she wrote a book, *Living Life My Way*. She will be truly missed for her love for family, her sense of kindness, always offering to help others, and her sense of humor. If there was anything new to learn, she was right at it. Later in life, Bubby taught her entire family, including grandchildren and great-grandchildren, the card game, "Kings in the Corner," which they all still play to this day. Mama, you will always be in our hearts.

**NEAL ANDREW
SEIDBERG, MD**
March 27, 2026



Neal Andrew Seidberg, MD, 58, passed away in the comfort of his home on Thursday morning. Neal was born on June 23, 1967 to Dr. Bruce and Judith Seidberg in Boston, MA. The family moved to Syracuse shortly after he was born and he has been a Central New York resident most of his life.

He was a graduate of F-M high school, a cum laude graduate of the University of Rochester, and received his MD from Upstate Medical University. He completed his pediatric residency at Upstate Medical University, where he also served as chief resident. He was a critical care Fellow at Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh where he was also a member of the air transport team transferring critically ill children. He was an attending physician in the Pediatric ICU at Golisano Children's Hospital for the past 23 years, where he was also an associate professor of pediatrics, known for his work as a pediatric critical care physician and pediatric transport team leader. He also served as University Hospital's chief informatics officer, developing and maintaining the hospital's electronic medical records system.

He was a member of Temple Concord, The American Board of Pediatrics, The American Academy of Pediatrics, and The Onondaga County Medical Society.

Known throughout his professional career as Neal, and not Dr. Neal or Dr. Seidberg, he was known for bringing humanity into everything he did. He remembered every detail and every experience and had a unique ability to blend humor into difficult situations. He was a friend to all, and his smile and good nature will be missed. His passions were his daughters, photography, sailing on Skaneateles Lake where he spent his childhood summers, technology, cooking and SU sports.

Neal's family includes his wife Tobey, their daughters Jennie and Hali, his parents Dr. Bruce and Judith Seidberg, brother Daniel (Jenee) Seidberg, sister Allison Seidberg-Pinsky, nieces Meghan Seidberg, Ashley Seidberg and Samantha Miller, nephews Ethan Pinsky, Cody Pinsky and Jonathan Wojcik, his sister-in-law Amy (Scott) Schaefer, his mother-in-law Susan Goldner, his fathers-in-law Peter Kresel and Michael Mierzwa, and his dog Finley.

Contributions to perpetuate Neal's memory may be made to the Pediatric Intensive Care Unit at Golisano Children's Hospital.

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ELLIOT JAY SCORNICK
April 4, 2026



Elliot Jay Scornick passed away at his home. He along with his brother Richard, and sister Ruth were born to Irving and Frieda Shapero Scornick. He was predeceased by his parents, sister, and brother. He was a native of Syracuse and was raised here until career opportunities brought him to the Philadelphia area. He returned to Syracuse in 1990.

He was a graduate of Nottingham High School class of 1965; a graduate of the University of Buffalo class of 1970; and earned his MBA at the University of Pennsylvania class of 1976. During his professional career “Jay” a VP of marketing for CIGNA in Philadelphia, a director of outreach education for Niagara Mohawk in Syracuse, and then a director of advertising communications for Agway. For the past several years he was president of JS Communications and Marketing.

He is survived by his niece Mindy Calderon, nephew Dana Masel, and cousin Ava Raphael.

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DEBORAH WATERMAN ZAUSMER
April 15, 2026



Deborah Waterman Zausmer, 72, passed away gracefully with her husband and son by her side at home on April 15, 2026. Born on January 12, 1954 in New London, CT she had been a resident of Syracuse for more than 50 years.

During her professional career she was an assistant manager for Rite Aid Drugs in Cicero and also was an independent director for Mary Kay Cosmetics.

Debbie was always there to lend a helping hand to anyone in need. She was a trusted and caring friend who will be missed by family and many friends.

Her family includes her husband Gary, children Jennifer (Jeff) Terry, Chad (Kristina) Waterman; grandchildren Caden, Colin, and Jayde; her brother Karl Edgren; and her sister Karen Lumb. She was predeceased by her parents and her sisters Judy, Barbara,

Contributions to perpetuate her memory may be made to the ASPCA or Helping Hounds

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ELIZABETH ANNE SHERMAN
April 14, 2026



Elizabeth Sherman, 44, passed away peacefully on April 14, 2026, leaving behind a legacy of love and cherished memories in the hearts of those who knew her.

Elizabeth was the daughter of Jessie Kerr-Whitt and the late Lawrence Sherman, and the cherished stepdaughter of James Kerr-Whitt. She was a treasured sibling to her brothers Jonathan (Diane) and Daniel (Kristen) Sherman, Benjamin (Heather) and Matthew (Betsy) Whitt, and her sister, Kristi (Kenny) Vega.

Above all, Elizabeth shared an extraordinarily close bond with her mother, Jessie. The deep bonds she shared with each of her siblings and with all her relatives were a defining thread of her life’s story. She always knew the birthdays.

A proud and devoted member of Temple Concord, Liz found great joy in services and being part of the congregation’s choir. She loved her home in Beit Tikvah and being part of the Menorah Park community. She loved playing bingo.

Liz will be missed by all who knew her. Her memory will live on in the lives she touched, the songs she sang, and the family she loved so dearly.



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