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NEW AT JHAMILTON:
 Holocaust Learning
 Centre – a first for
 the city – opens
 May 2 in a newly
 designed space

Innovative renovations fully integrate Holocaust-related exhibits into a new and expansive multi-functional space

STORY BY **WENDY SCHNEIDER**
HAMILTON JEWISH NEWS

A PRECIOUS family photograph, a teenager’s passport, a yellow star, a grandfather’s concentration camp uniform—mementos from a painful past, previously tucked away in a drawer, a closet or a basement, have been entrusted by their owners to the Margaret’s Legacy Holocaust Learning and Jewish Advocacy Centre, which opens its doors on May 2. Fully integrated into a new multi-functional space at JHamilton, the Centre will soon host Hamilton area students, teachers, politicians and representatives from different religious communities to learn, reflect and talk about the ultimate consequences of antisemitism, hate and intolerance.

HOLOCAUST LEARNING CENTRE CONTINUES ON P4

“It’s important that young people learn their history.”

JANET WEISZ ASA, COMMUNITY MEMBER



PHOTO: WENDY SCHNEIDER, HAMILTON JEWISH NEWS

Holocaust artifacts on display: Nadia Rosa (seated) with her yellow star and Yolanda Czyzewski-Bragues with her grandfather’s concentration camp uniform, items they donated to Federation’s new Holocaust Learning Centre.

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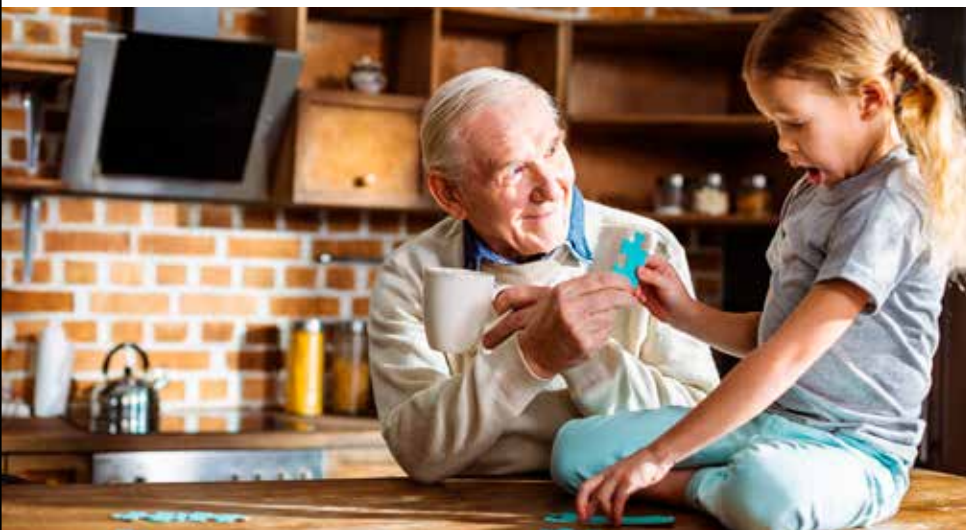
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EDITORIAL

Standing up against antisemitism is a victory for unity and resilience



Gustavo Rymberg

CEO
HAMILTON JEWISH FEDERATION

IN THE FACE of adversity, the resilience of a community shines brightest. The recent cancellation of the Jewish Film Festival by the Playhouse Theatre in Hamilton was a distressing blow, but the response from the community has been nothing short of inspiring. In a powerful demonstration of solidarity and determination, individuals from all walks of life rallied together to ensure that this celebration of Jewish culture and cinema would not be silenced. This triumph over bigotry serves as a reminder that when we refuse to be bystanders and instead stand up against hatred, we can achieve remarkable feats.

Antisemitism is an ugly stain on our society, one that must be confronted head-on. It rears its head in various forms, from subtle discrimination to overt acts of violence. The cancellation of the Hamilton Jewish Film Festival initially appeared to be just another manifestation of this insidious prejudice. However, what could have been a moment of despair quickly transformed into a testament to the strength of community bonds.

Through concerted efforts and unwavering support, a new location for the festival was secured. This victory was not merely about relocating an event; it was about sending a clear message that hate will not dictate our actions, and discrimination will not silence our voices. It was a declaration that in Hamilton, inclusivity and diversity are not just ideals but fundamental principles that guide our collective actions.

The outpouring of support from the City of Hamilton, Mayor Andrea Horwath, and countless individuals, local theatres and businesses is a testament to the inclusive spirit that defines our community. Their swift and resolute response played a pivotal role in ensuring that the Hamilton Jewish Film Festival could continue to thrive. By standing with us in our time of need, they demonstrated that in the face of intolerance, unity is our most potent weapon.

At its core, the Jewish Film Festival is more than just a cinematic showcase; it is a celebration of Jewish heritage, culture, and identity. It serves as a platform for fostering understanding and appreciation, bridging divides, and fostering dialogue. Its cancellation would have deprived not only the Jewish community but the entire Hamilton community of an opportunity to engage with diverse perspectives and narratives.

As we come together to celebrate the resilience of the human spirit and the triumph of unity over hatred, let us also recognize that our work is far from over. Antisemitism persists, lurking in the shadows, waiting for moments of weakness to rear its ugly head. We must remain vigilant and steadfast in our commitment to combating bigotry wherever it may be found.

Furthermore, let us use this victory as a catalyst for broader change. Let us redouble our efforts to create a more inclusive and tolerant society, one where discrimination of any kind is met with swift condemnation and decisive action. Let us strive to build bridges of understanding and empathy, recognizing that our differences are a source of strength rather than division.

In the end, the success of the Jewish Film Festival is not just a victory for the Jewish community or for Hamilton; it is a victory for all who believe in the power of unity, resilience, and standing up against injustice. It is a reminder that when we refuse to be bystanders and instead choose to act, we can overcome even the greatest of challenges.

Fighting antisemitism is an essential battle that transcends the scale of its manifestation, whether it's in the form of overt acts of violence or subtle systemic biases. Every instance, no matter how seemingly small, chips away at the fabric of inclusivity and tolerance in society. It requires a multi-faceted approach, including education, legislation, and advocacy, to challenge stereotypes, dismantle hate groups, and promote understanding and empathy. Each individual effort, whether it's speaking out against derogatory remarks or supporting initiatives for Holocaust education, contributes to a collective resistance against antisemitism. In this ongoing struggle, the power lies not just in confronting the overt manifestations of hate, but also in addressing the underlying prejudices and ignorance that fuel it. Only through unified action and unwavering commitment can we hope to create a world where antisemitism has no place.

As we look to the future, let us carry forward the spirit of solidarity that has brought us to this moment. Let us continue to stand together, shoulder to shoulder, in the fight against antisemitism and all forms of hatred. And let us never forget that it is through our collective efforts that we can truly make a difference in the world.

The HJN welcomes letters to the editor. To submit a letter for publication, email wschneider@jewishhamilton.org.

International Women's Day



PHOTO: WENDY SCHNEIDER, HAMILTON JEWISH NEWS

Hamilton Jewish Federation hosted a panel discussion on women's rights in the aftermath of Oct. 7 at Beth Jacob Synagogue on March 7, in honour of International Women's Day. Moderated by Federation program coordinator Maggie Norris (far left), speakers included Rivka Campbell, executive director of Toronto's Beth Tikvah Synagogue and founder of Jews of Colour Canada (second from left), Erin Griver, director of Inasmuch House and Women's Services (third from left), and Shani Azulai, Deputy Consul General of Israel in Toronto.

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Publication date: **July 2, 2024**

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HJN

The Hamilton Jewish News is published four times a year by the Hamilton Jewish Federation

EDITORIAL POLICY

The Hamilton Jewish News invites members of the community to contribute letters, articles or guest editorials.

Written submissions:

All submissions must be forwarded by the deadline indicated in each issue. The editor reserves the right to edit, condense or reject any contribution for brevity or legal purposes.

CIRCULATION
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EDITOR

Wendy Schneider
wschneider@
jewishhamilton.org
905-628-0058

ASSISTANT EDITOR

Abigail Cukier

DIGITAL EDITOR

Ben Shragge

HJN CONTRIBUTORS

Moishe Chaimovitz,
Lisa Mahalu, Helaine Ortman,
Kaye Prince-Hollenberg,
Ben Shragge, Phyllis Shragge

CONSULTING ART DIRECTOR

John Bullock

PUBLISHER

Hamilton Jewish Federation

ADVERTISING

Wendy Schneider

HAMILTON JEWISH FEDERATION PRESIDENT

Jason Waxman

CEO

Gustavo Rymberg

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“Margaret’s Legacy will be a place people can go and learn ...”

TOM WEISZ

Holocaust Learning Centre

CONTINUED FROM THE FRONT PAGE

A place of honour has been created for the Delaware Avenue JCC Holocaust memorial sculpture

THE MARGARET’S Legacy Holocaust Learning and Jewish Advocacy Centre is a joint project of the Hamilton Jewish Federation and Margaret’s Legacy, a Holocaust education initiative founded in 2008 by Danna Horwood rooted in the wartime experiences of her grandparents, Arthur and Margaret Weisz.

The Centre’s core exhibit interweaves Nazi propaganda material from the Harriet Smiley Memorial Holocaust Collection, donated to Federation last year by former community member Madeleine Levy, with the wartime stories of Horwood’s grandparents, Hungarian Holocaust survivors Arthur and Margaret Weisz. Also on display will be Second World War artifacts donated by local survivors and a memorial area that honours those survivors and their family members who perished, as well as victims of the Oct. 7 massacre.

Occupying a place of honour in the new space is the Delaware Avenue JCC Holocaust memorial sculpture by Irish Canadian artist George Wallace, commissioned in the mid-1960s by a group of Hamilton Holocaust survivors. Subsequently moved to the Lower Lions Club Rd. JCC in Ancaster, the sculpture was lying nearly forgotten in a storage facility when Hamilton Jewish Federation CEO Gustavo Rymberg first discovered it in 2017. Ever since, he’s been determined to see the sculpture, along with other Second World War memorabilia, and local archives related to



PHOTOS: BLAKE BARKWELL

this city’s rich Jewish history find a new home.

“All these archives were in basements, in houses, who knows where. Suddenly they’re going to be here telling a story,” he says. “I think it’s important for Hamilton to keep these archives alive. I hope that after the opening we’ll have more people coming, ready to share their artifacts with us.”

Rymberg is particularly proud of the multi-functionality of the new space, which can be opened to include a 240-seat auditorium or divided into smaller areas for workshops, programs or small community events or rented to other community organizations.

Education is at the heart of the new centre, and Rymberg proudly notes that Yad Vashem, the World Holocaust Remembrance Centre assisted in the development of its core exhibit and associated curriculum. “This is not going to be a museum, where you

come, see and leave,” said Rymberg. Instead, he sees it as offering an entry point towards understanding what precipitated the largest and most deadly genocide in human history. “Our Centre is going to be a place to learn and have conversations based on personal histories, artifacts and documentation.”

Included in the exhibit is a panel that highlights the wartime experiences of other local Holocaust survivors, Ernie Mason, Nadia Rosa, the late Sam and Anna Szpirglas, and Stanislaw Przedborski, grandfather of local real estate agent Yolanda Czyzewski-Brague, who was incarcerated at Auschwitz and Dachau as a Polish political prisoner.

Ernie Mason, together with his mother and a younger brother, were saved by Swedish diplomat and humanitarian Raoul Wallenberg. “I believe what is happening here is a wonderful thing,” he told the HJN. “It’s something that is needed and

Tom Weisz examines memorabilia from his parents, Margaret and Arthur Weisz alongside his daughter, Danna Horwood, who was the driving force behind the creation of the Margaret’s Legacy Holocaust Learning and Jewish Advocacy Centre.

people like Wallenberg have to be put on display.”

Sam and Anna Szpirglas, both sole survivors of their immediate families, gained entry into Canada under the Tailor Project, an immigration program that brought more than 2,000 displaced people, more than half Jewish, from Europe to Canada in 1948 and 1949 to work in the clothing industry. Speaking on behalf of his siblings, Abe Szpirglas and Carol Burke, Larry Szpirglas said, “What really was important to us was that this it was going to be a learning centre ... Especially in our current situation we can see that a lot of education has to happen.”

Nadia Rosa, a child survivor of the Holocaust, spent the war years in hiding with her mother and grandparents until being discovered by the Gestapo and sent to Theresienstadt. “The effect on children my age was very strong and we never got over it ... We never expect a good outcome for anything,” she told the HJN. Rosa, a co-founder of Federation’s Holocaust education committee who has dedicated much of her life to educating others about the Holocaust, donated her yellow Star of David to the centre.

Yolanda Czyzewski-Bragues was raised by her grandparents in a home that was often filled with both Jewish and non-Jewish survivors of the Holocaust. “I didn’t grow up with stories like Cinderella or Little Red Riding Hood,” she told the HJN. “They were my grandfather’s stories of survival.”

Czyzewski-Bragues’ donation to the new centre was the Dachau prison uniform her grandfather was wearing upon liberation. “We share a common history. It’s important that young people learn their history,” she said. “They’re facing a lot of propaganda right now and a learning centre where historical facts have come together is

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“I think it’s important for Hamilton to keep these archives alive . . .” **GUSTAVO RYMBERG** CEO, Hamilton Jewish Federation

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probably the best way to educate the next generation.”

Arthur and Margaret Weisz’s daughter Janet, born after her parents’ arrival in Canada in 1956, says her niece has done something very important in supporting this Holocaust Learning Centre in her parents’ memory. “I have to give great kudos to Danna for making this happen. This is an absolutely wonderful tribute to my parents. We need to educate our youth because there are far too many people out there who don’t believe what happened,” she said.

Weisz says she feels fortunate that her parents were forthcoming about their wartime experiences and that they never lost hope “that one day they’d find family and friends and get back to some sort of normal life.”

“It’s remarkable what these survivors who came out of the camps did for their kids, their families, and for our world. It wasn’t accidental in my mind that they survived. There was something inside of these people that drove them to stay alive.”

Tom Weisz said that lies told enough times become the truth. “If somebody repeats something negative about somebody, that’s what they know, even though they don’t know these people at all. Hopefully, Margaret’s Legacy will be a place where people can go and learn about these things and that will result in some positive things in the future.”

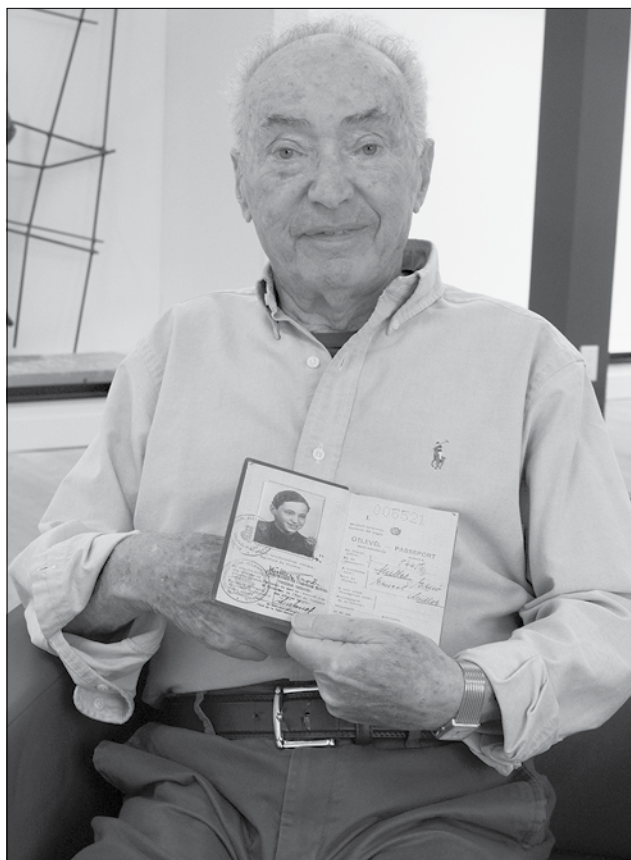
The Margaret’s Legacy Holocaust Learning and Jewish Advocacy Centre opening will take place on May 2—a morning event that will include a dedication and mezuzah hanging by local survivors, and an evening gathering, to which donors and dignitaries will be invited. A larger community event will take place on May 6 in commemoration of Yom HaShoah.



PHOTOS BY WENDY SCHNEIDER, HAMILTON JEWISH NEWS

“We need to educate our community as to who we are as Jews and survivors, and why it’s important to remember what happened.”

JANET WEISZ ASA
Daughter of Margaret and Arthur Weisz



“We have to reach the educators and the students. Let them know the truth. I would say don’t believe everything you hear. Hate is an awful thing. I believe what is happening here is a wonderful thing. It’s something that is needed.”

ERNIE MASON
Saved by Raoul Wallenberg

“Margaret’s legacy is also the legacy of many other Hungarian Jews who came to Hamilton. They are all gone.”

NADIA ROSA Child survivor of the Holocaust

“It’s important that young people learn their history. ... a learning centre where things have been gathered, where historical facts have come together is probably the best way to educate the next generation.”

YOLANDA CZYZEWSKI-BRAGUES
Granddaughter of Holocaust survivor

“We hope this centre really blows apart what it means to hate someone based on who they are ... we have to really learn to live with one another and be accepting of all people of all backgrounds.”

CAROL SZPIRGLAS BURKE
Daughter of Holocaust survivors



Above and left: Janet Weisz Asa, Ernie Mason, and Szpirglas siblings Abe and Larry Szpirglas and Carol Burke pose with Second World War family memorabilia, at JHamilton’s new Margaret’s Legacy Holocaust and Jewish Advocacy Centre.



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Jewish Film Fest finds unequivocal support

Hamilton Jewish Film Festival overcomes an onslaught of antisemitism with the support of our community

BY JAZMIN RYMBERG
COMMUNICATIONS COORDINATOR, HJF

THE CANCELLATION of the Hamilton Jewish Film Festival due to allegations of “Zionist propaganda” is a sobering reminder of the persistent echoes of antisemitism that reverberate through our communities. While the decision to cancel the event by the original venue may have been attributed to ‘security concerns,’ it cannot be ignored that the underlying issue speaks to a deeper prejudice that continues to linger.

Across the globe, cultural events with Jewish themes or participants often face unjust scrutiny and opposition, labeled as “Zionist propaganda.” This recurring narrative draws distressing parallels to darker chapters in history, mirroring sentiments of intolerance and discrimination.

Amidst this disheartening backdrop, it’s imperative to heed the words of Mr. Rogers: “When I was a boy and I would see scary things in the news, my mother would say to me, ‘Look for the helpers.’”

In the face of adversity, it’s heartening to see the outpouring of support from the community. Businesses such as Film.ca Cinemas in Oakville, Planted in Hamilton, The Cotton Factory, the Prosserman and Miles Nadal JCCs in Toronto, along with numerous individuals have offered their spaces and homes, demonstrating solidarity and resilience.

“We don’t want to hide, we want to be prepared”, expressed the owners

of Film.ca, which exemplifies a spirit of defiance against bigotry. Moreover, the unequivocal support from Mayor Andrea Horwath and city staff underscores a commitment to inclusivity and diversity.

While the festival found a new home at the Ancaster Memorial Theatre, the lingering sadness remains that such prejudice persists in our society. Helaine Ortmann, a film festival committee member, aptly captures this sentiment of disappointment and disbelief. As a proud Hamiltonian, she reflects on the distressing reality that such intolerance exists in a city she holds dear.

Moving forward, it’s essential to confront antisemitism head-on and reaffirm our commitment to building a community that embraces diversity and celebrates cultural heritage. As friends and partners, we must continue to stand together, rejecting prejudice and creating an environment where we all feel welcomed and valued.

Victoria Mancinelli, director of communications at LiUNA, has emerged as a staunch advocate for the Jewish community. In an article penned for the Toronto Sun, she emphasized the significance of the cancellation of the Jewish Film Festival in Hamilton, stating, “This is a cancellation of the Jewish people — a targeted campaign of harassment and intimidation met with irresponsible silence by our elected representatives and other equity groups. It is the total collapse of the moral norms and



PHOTO: COREY NUSCA

values that are meant to protect our diverse and free society.”

In a similar vein, Dana Robbins, former editor-in-chief of the Hamilton Spectator, delved into the theatre’s decision to cancel the festival. Robbins contended in an editorial on March 24 that the decision was not based on fears of violence during a sensitive period, but rather capitulation to voices inflamed by the conflict in the Middle East. According to Robbins, “the theatre’s decision to pull the plug was not due to fears of violence ‘at this particularly sensitive time,’ rather it was caving to voices angry about the conflict in the Middle East: the slaughter of Israeli citizens by Hamas on Oct. 7 and the resulting Israeli military response in Gaza that has claimed so many civilian lives.”

In response to these events, the Hamilton Jewish Federation emphasizes the gravity of any antisemitic act, regardless of its scale. We liken the cancellation of the Jewish Film

Festival to a canary in the coal mine that Jewish advocates constantly warn us about, a harbinger of greater dangers to come. It prompts the question: at what point do we withhold our response?

As we reflect on this incident, let us also acknowledge the contributions of the Jewish community to Hamilton’s rich culture and heritage. From business to arts, science to philanthropy, Jewish individuals have played a vital role in shaping our city’s identity.

To those who offered their support, whether through words or actions, we extend our heartfelt gratitude. In the words of Helaine Ortmann, “We want to move forward. We want the best for our community.” It is through our collective efforts that we can build a brighter more inclusive Hamilton for generations to come.

Moreover, Ortmann’s admiration for the Federation’s leadership amidst

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Polish-Canadian historian Piotr Wrobel (far right) makes a point to fellow panelist Kalman Weiser (centre), the Silber Family Professor of Modern Jewish Studies at York University and moderator Wade Hemsworth, during a Q&A session that took place at the Hamilton Jewish Film Festival at the Ancaster Memorial Arts Centre from April 7 to 9.

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Federation responds to rise in antisemitism

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the cancellation of the Hamilton Jewish Film Festival highlights the importance of steadfast guidance in challenging times. She commends the Federation for taking a stand against antisemitism, emphasizing that fighting such discrimination falls under the Federation's strategic priorities. Ortmann's affirmation that the Federation's response is "the right thing to do" encapsulates the profound sense of duty and conviction driving their actions. She noted that it would have been easier to lay low and remain quiet and "to wait and see," however, Federation was more determined to stand up against antisemitism.

Ortmann's reference to Israel as a "North Star" underscores its profound significance to Jewish identity, serving as a symbol of resilience and cultural heritage. Despite the festival's setback, the curated films aimed to foster understanding and connection, emphasizing the committee's unwavering dedication to promoting cultural exchange.

Moreover, the cancellation of the festival underscores the chilling effect of antisemitism on freedom of expression and cultural exchange. When cultural events are met with such opposition, it not only stifles artistic creativity, but also deprives communities of opportunities for dialogue and mutual understanding.

In conclusion, the cancellation of the Hamilton Jewish Film Festival is a stark reminder of the challenges posed by antisemitism and the importance of standing up against discrimination in all its forms. By rallying together, we can build a more vibrant and equitable community for all.

Federation president Jason Waxman asks Hamilton Police services to cover the cost associated with added protection for the Jewish community

BY **JAZMIN RYMBERG**
COMMUNICATIONS COORDINATOR

IN AN ADDRESS at the Hamilton Police Services meeting on Jan. 25 at City Hall, Jason Waxman, president of the Hamilton Jewish Federation, advocated for enhanced security measures to ensure the safety and well-being of the Jewish community in Hamilton. Addressing the officials, Waxman underscored the imperative of collective responsibility in safeguarding citizens, regardless of their religious or ethnic background.

The crux of his presentation revolved around the financial challenges the Jewish community faces in shouldering the costs of off-duty police protection. Despite the support from the Hamilton Community Foundation and responsive actions from the police force, concerns persist regarding the sustainability of current security arrangements. Highlighting the economic strains on non-profit organizations and religious institutions



Jason Waxman, president, Hamilton Jewish Federation

within the Jewish community, Waxman emphasized the diversion of essential resources away from core missions when burdened with security expenses. With a staggering \$206,743.85 spent on police protection since Oct. 7, the Hamilton Jewish Federation faces a looming budget deficit, jeopardizing vital community services and outreach programs.

Waxman urged Hamilton Police Services to acknowledge the disproportionate targeting of the Jewish community, as evidenced by the police's own hate and bias report, and to recognize the community's vulnerability in various spheres, including education, employment and public spaces. Reports of harassment and vandalism against Jewish individuals underscored the pervasive nature of the threat, with staff members of the Hamilton Jewish Federation receiving alarming death threats. Against a backdrop of escalating hate crimes—26 incidents logged between Oct. 7 and Jan. 12, 2024, with 21 targeting

the Jewish community—the urgency of proactive security measures becomes apparent.

Beyond immediate security concerns, Waxman stressed the importance of fostering a sense of security and trust. By providing protection at no extra cost, the city would reinforce its commitment to inclusivity, diversity and the protection of fundamental rights. He urged city council to explore collaborative solutions that ensure the safety and security of the Jewish community without imposing undue financial burdens. As other Canadian cities have embraced similar models, Hamilton has an opportunity to lead by example, strengthening its global reputation and upholding the values of inclusivity and diversity.

Waxman concluded his remarks by urging a united effort towards a future where the protection of diverse communities is a shared investment, where principles of justice and security are upheld by city leaders and law enforcement agencies alike. By working collaboratively, Hamilton can pave the way for a safer, stronger, and more harmonious future for all its residents.

HOW TO REPORT AN ANTISEMITIC INCIDENT

In response to the surge in antisemitic incidents in Hamilton, the Hamilton Jewish Federation and the Centre for Israel and Jewish Affairs (CIJA) launched the Legal Task Force Initiative, which aims to provide swift and comprehensive support to victims of antisemitism.

If you or someone you know have been the victim of an antisemitic incident, please do the following:

1. Identity the incident: Speak to relevant authorities such as school principals, HR representatives at workplaces.
2. Fill out the online forms at jewishhamilton.org/report-hate.

Once the necessary forms have been submitted, Federation will follow up with the Board of Education and the Hamilton Police

Services Hate Crime Unit. A lawyer from CIJA's Legal Task Force will reach out to the individual affected to provide legal support and guidance. Collaboratively, a plan of action will be devised to address the incident effectively. The plan will be put into action, or if necessary, legal proceedings will commence.

In light of recent events, CIJA's Legal Task Force has expanded into a national pro bono "law firm" with more than 200 volunteer lawyers across Canada, including Hamilton. The initiative serves as a complement to the efforts of the Hamilton Jewish Federation in combating antisemitism. Because of the growing demand for support, the Legal Task Force has structured its operations into nine areas of concern, ensuring that volunteer lawyers can provide specialized assistance to those in need.

JNF HAMILTON PROUDLY PRESENTS

NEGEV DINNER 2024 | SUPPORTING ISRAEL

HONOURING

DONNA AND GARY WAXMAN

THURSDAY | 09 | MAY

LIUNA Station in Hamilton



FEATURING
KEYNOTE
SPEAKER
NOA TISHBY

Proceeds will be directed toward the construction of the Family Therapy Centre in Ofakim to assist with resilience and recovery in the community.

Cocktail Reception - 5:30PM
Dinner - 6:30pm

Greetings by Victoria Mancinelli
Music by the Moe Koffman Tribute Band



For more information:

jnfhamilton.ca | [905.527.5516](tel:905.527.5516) | hamilton@jnf.ca



Noa Tishby headlines Negev Dinner of 2024

Highly-regarded Israel activist, author, actress and producer is the keynote speaker at JNF Hamilton's prestigious event

BY **SUZY POLGAR**
JEWISH NATIONAL FUND HAMILTON

THE NEGEV DINNER, a longstanding marquee event of Jewish National Fund Hamilton, has been around since 1953. The buzz this year, in addition to honouring a much beloved couple, is the addition of the incomparable, inimitable Noa Tishby as our keynote speaker.

After years of speaking and writing about Israel, Tishby has deciphered how to explain the complexities of Israel in a relatable way through the publication of her first book, *Israel: A Simple Guide to the Most Misunderstood Country on Earth*, which was published in 2021. Tishby's second book, *Uncomfortable Conversations with a Jew*, cowritten with Emmanuel Acho, is scheduled to be released by the end of April.

A lot of people in the community will want to hear from her, as rising antisemitism, as well as the delegitimization of Israel are issues that are forefront in our lives. Tishby is

one of the best spokespeople for the state of Israel and for the Jewish community at large.

The Hamilton Negev Dinner of 2024 stands as a source of support for Israel, while also commemorating the outstanding contributions of Donna and Gary Waxman to both the Jewish and broader Hamilton communities. Donna and Gary, esteemed champions of community service and volunteerism, embody a legacy deeply rooted in values cultivated through Jewish day schools and camp experiences.

Their commitment to various causes is profound and far-reaching. Their influence spans the Jewish community, supporting events like

B'nai Brith Sports Celebrity dinners, JNF Negev dinners, the Larger Than Life Gala, as well as playing vital roles at local synagogues, the Jewish Federation and Shalom Village, where Gary serves on the Foundation Board. Venturing beyond the Jewish community, their commitment extends to organizations such as the West End Home Builders' Association, the Mark Preece Family House, the Art Gallery of Hamilton, United Way and the Dr. Bob Kemp Hospice.

Despite their significant contributions, Donna and Gary operate humbly behind the scenes, focusing on the cause at hand. Their decision to lend their names to the event underscores their commitment to sup-

The Hamilton Negev Dinner will commemorate the contributions of Donna and Gary Waxman to both the Jewish and broader Hamilton communities.

porting those affected by the devastating events of Oct. 7, when Israel faced an unprecedented assault in the southern city of Ofakim, which bore the brunt of a vicious attack orchestrated by Hamas.

Two trucks packed with 14 terrorists and their arsenal descended upon Ofakim, resulting in a tragic loss of 48 lives including 18 brave individuals who died while defending their community. In the aftermath, the town resembled a ghost town, with half of its residents evacuated and the remainder gripped by fear. However, amidst the chaos and despair, a community emergency team emerged, determined to address the needs of Ofakim and its surrounding areas.

The Hamilton Negev Dinner will support the recovery and rebuilding efforts by funding the construction of a Family Therapy Centre at the local community centre. This facility will provide crucial services for the people of Ofakim who have suffered



PHOTO BY ALON SHAFRANSKI

significant trauma, providing counselling and support to work through these difficult times. It serves as an offer of hope to those, young and old alike, grappling with trauma and loss.

Victoria Mancinelli, a staunch supporter of the Jewish community, will be representing LiUNA, Ontario Provincial District Council of Central and Eastern Canada. In addition to extending greetings, she will also conduct an interview with the keynote speaker, Noa Tishby. The Moe Koffman Tribute Band, joined by Jake Koffman, the grandson of the late Moe Koffman, Donna's uncle, will provide musical accompaniment. Their melodies will enrich the evening with tunes of unity and solidarity.

The event will take place on Thursday, May 9. For more information, please contact our office at hamilton@jnf.ca or 905-527-5516. Our love will rebuild.

Noa Tishby, author, producer and Israel's first Special Envoy for Combating Antisemitism and the Delegitimization of Israel will be speaking in Hamilton May 9 at the Negev Dinner.

JUST FOR KIDS

The Imagine in the Park Festival

JUDY MENDELSON

If you have kids ages three to 12, you will want to mark your calendars for Friday, May 31 and Saturday, June 1 for Hamilton's free children's festival Imagine in the Park Arts Festival, in Gage Park.

Now in its 13th year, the festival was created by Sharon Levy Cohen due to cutbacks to the arts in the public school system back in the early 2000s. The festival kicks off with three children's performers on Friday night at 6 p.m. On Saturday, starting at 10:30 a.m., 25 artists will lead 30-minute interactive and hands-on workshops. All workshops are free and each child will receive a free book of their choice. In the past, there have been puppetry, jewellery making, dance, pottery, and painting workshops, among many more.

Food trucks are available for lunch or snacks. Parents and children will also have the opportunity to participate with the Hamilton Bookmobile, the Burlington library, the Art Gallery of Burlington, Project Concern, the Dolly Parton Imagination Library and more.

Our festival is sponsored by the Rotary Club of Hamilton AM along with many other generous donors and supporters. We depend on volunteers to keep the festival running smoothly. In the last couple of years, we have also created a working relationship with Hamilton's other children's literary festival, "Telling Tales." So don't forget to mark your calendar for this fantastic festival! Your child will spend an amazing couple of days learning how to use their imagination through the arts. Find out more at imagineinthepark.com. See you there!



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On behalf of KMB Law, we wish you a **Happy Passover!**

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Award-winning Israeli writer will be the keynote speaker at Na'amat

Na'amat celebrity author event will feature Ayelet Tsabari in conversation with Hamilton Poet in Place Lishai Peel

BY **PHYLLIS SHRAGGE**
SPECIAL TO HAMILTON JEWISH NEWS

NA'AMAT HAMILTON'S 38th annual celebrity author event will showcase writer Ayelet Tsabari, author of a memoir in essays, *The Art of Leaving*. The event will be in conversation format on Zoom at noon ET on Wednesday, June 19.

Tsabari's memoir is the winner of the Canadian Jewish Literary Awards and was a finalist for the Hilary Weston Writers' Trust Prize for Non-fiction and the Vine Awards for Canadian Jewish Literature. It was also an Apple Books, CBC Books and Kirkus Reviews Best Book of 2019.

The Art of Leaving tells of the Israeli-Canadian writer's travels from New York to India, searching for love and belonging and an escape from grief following the death of her father when she was a young girl. With fierce, emotional prose, she crafts a beautiful meditation about the lengths we will travel to try to escape our grief, the universal search to find a place where we belong and the sense of home we eventually find within ourselves.

This searching collection opens with the death of Tsabari's father when she was just nine years old. His passing left her feeling rootless, devastated and driven to question her complex identity as an Israeli of Yemeni descent in a country that suppressed and devalued her ancestors' traditions.



PHOTO: OUMA STUDIO

Lishai Peel, Hamilton's Poet in Place will interview Israeli writer Ayelet Tsabari at the Na'amat Author Event.

Tsabari details her early love of writing and her rebellion during her mandatory service in the Israeli army. She travels from Israel to New York, Canada, Thailand and India, falling in and out of love with countries, men and women, drugs and alcohol, running away from responsibilities and refusing to settle in one place. She recounts her first marriage; her struggle to define herself as a writer in a new language; her decision to become a mother; and finally, her rediscovery of her family history—a history marked by generations of headstrong women who struggled to choose between their hearts and their homes. Eventually, she realizes that she must reconcile the sadness of her past if she is ever going to come to terms with herself.

Of the book, the *New York Times* Book Review said, "Stunning...The self she portrays is complicatedly flawed, human and aware...Tsabari's intense prose gave me pause." Allison Pick, author of *Between Gods*, praised the book, saying, "...nuanced, complex, and beautiful. These essays are timely and urgent, and they've been polished 'til they shine." While author Cynthia Gibbs, whose work includes *This is Happy*, wrote, "...a passionate account of the pain, fire and fury of adolescence and young adulthood."

Tsabari's first book, *The Best Place on Earth*, won the Sami Rohr Prize for Jewish Literature and the Edward Lewis Wallant Award for Jewish fiction. The book was a *New York Times* Book Review Editors' Choice, Kirkus Review's Best Debut Fiction of 2016, was nominated for The Frank O'Connor International Short Story Award and has been published internationally to great acclaim. Her first novel, *Songs for the Brokenhearted*, will be published by HarperCollins in September.

Tsabari studied film and photography in Capilano University's media program in Vancouver, where she directed two documentary films, one of which won an award at the Palm Springs International Short Film Festival. She wrote her first story in English in 2006.

A graduate of Simon Fraser University's writer's studio and the MFA program in creative writing at the University of Guelph, Tsabari teaches creative writing at the University of Guelph, at University of King's



PHOTO: VICKIY KROSHKO

Ayelet Tsabari, author of a memoir in essays, *The Art of Leaving*.

College and the Shaindy Rudoff graduate track in creative writing in Bar Ilan University. She currently lives in Israel.

The June 19 event will feature Tsabari in conversation with Lishai Peel, a Na'amat member and Hamilton's Poet in Place. Na'amat Hamilton is encouraging people to consider "watch parties" to make this virtual event a social experience.

Na'amat is a non-profit charitable organization whose mission is to enhance and safeguard the status of women, children and families in Israel and Canada. Na'amat programs in Israel provide shelters for abused women and children, legal counseling, retraining programs, and a countrywide network of daycare centres.

Tickets for the virtual author event are \$28 and tax receipts will be provided. Tickets will be available at naamat.com/home/cities/hamilton.

Tsabari details her early love of writing and words and her rebellion during her mandatory service in the Israeli army.



As we gather with family and loved ones around the Seder table to celebrate the eternal and unyielding strength of the Jewish People, we pay tribute to those Israelis who are being kept away from their Seders, their families, and their lives.

Here at home, Jewish Canadians are facing extraordinary challenges. Now more than ever, for the sake of our collective future, we must work together to confront them.

Head to www.cija.ca/4morequestions to include Canadian Jewish Advocacy as part of your Seder.



Canadian Jewish Advocacy.

The Centre for Israel and Jewish Affairs is the advocacy agent of Jewish Federations of Canada - UJA, representing Jewish Federations across Canada.

“Let’s pause and reflect”

We do not have to wait until death’s door to evaluate our lives



Ben Shragge

MY DAD’S favorite expression, “Let’s pause and reflect,” was a running joke in our family. We knew it as a cliché, a stock phrase emptied of meaning by overuse, rather than a thought-provoking insight. But here I am—on the *yahrzeit* of his death 12 years ago, still celebrating the arrival of my infant son—pausing and reflecting on what it means to actually pause and reflect.

It’s easy to run on autopilot through days that turn to months that turn to years. You can be working for the wrong company, in a relationship with the wrong person or prioritizing the wrong values because of inertia, not because of any conscious decision. Only when time—our most finite resource—has passed, might the realization slowly dawn that we are not where we want to be in life. And by then, it might seem too late for us to change course.

In one of my dad’s favourite works of literature, *The Death of Ivan Ilyich*, Leo Tolstoy describes a conventionally successful man whose “life had been most simple and most ordinary and therefore most terrible.” Only on his deathbed, while reflecting on his loveless marriage and obsession with status and money, does he think, “It is as if I had been going downhill while I imagined I was going up.” Only while suffering physical torment does he realize that “the whole arrangement of his life and of his family, and all his social and official interest, might all have been false.” He had been too busy, too unreflective, to consider the possibility earlier.

We do not need to wait until death’s door, or to be prodded by suffering, to evaluate our lives. That’s what frequent pausing and reflecting is for: to consider who we are and where we’re headed before we’ve arrived at our final destination. An example comes from a friend of mine whose elderly parents live in China. He makes a point of visiting them once a year because he’s reflected that, based on

their age, a limited number of such opportunities are left. He does not want to be at his parents’ deathbeds, or visiting their graves, wishing he had spent more time with them while he still could.

Many of us, myself included, have stumbled into big decisions rather than making them. Sometimes that’s because they didn’t seem like big decisions at the time. In the above example, not visiting your aging parents for a year doesn’t seem like a big decision. But cumulatively, a series of such small decisions can result in a big one: not seeing your parents again before they die. My friend reflected on this possibility and implemented a plan to prevent it. He did so after appraising both the facts—older people have a shorter remaining life expectancy—and his values—which place time with loved ones above the expense and inconvenience of international travel.

But our decisions are not always made after weighing evidence, looking inward and then forming a plan. Being childless, out of touch with your family, in grad school or constantly at work could all be deliberate choices, the outcomes of deep reflection. But they could also be the result of waiting too long, reluctance to reach out, comfort with the familiar or pressure from others. To pause and reflect is both to question our decisions and to be aware that we are always making decisions, even if it doesn’t seem that way at the time. We may then, after unpauseing, have the insight to decide differently.

Even on his deathbed, it’s not too late for Ivan Ilyich. In his final moments, wracked by pain, he changes his outlook on himself and those around him and finds peace. We can take a wrong turn in life, but so long as we’re still alive, there is always another crossroads and a chance to change direction. Upon reflection, we can see that there are other goals to pursue, other people to be with, other principles to live by. Or we can see that we are on exactly the right path and choose, with renewed intent, to carry forward. Holidays and sabbaths, celebrations of birth and commemorations of death: all are opportunities to pause and reflect before putting our reflections into action.

Paper trails, paper roots

Passover is the perfect time to ask questions about family history



Kaye Prince-Hollenberg

WITH PASSOVER almost upon us I’ve been thinking about our cousin Feiga. As a young girl Feiga survived the Holocaust and was the only survivor of her immediate family.

Born in Korolowka about 1933 (she wasn’t sure of her exact birthdate), she was in the Borszczow ghetto for a time but also hid with various families around Korolowka and in the surrounding forest. Her father Hersch, mother Sala, and three younger brothers Chaskel, Bunion, and Mendel were all murdered. Feiga was shot in the foot towards the end of the war by a Ukrainian gang.

Reunited with her maternal uncle Israel and his wife Bertha, the three made their way from Korolowka to the Gabersee Displaced Persons camp in Bavaria. Feiga dreamed of moving to the United States but Israel and Bertha couldn’t go with her due to quota restrictions.

In 1947, Feiga travelled to the US alone aboard the SS *Ernie Pyle* and after a time ended up in Boston. The Jewish Family and Children’s Service found multiple adoptive families for Feiga, but she wouldn’t allow herself to be adopted. Eventually the JF&CS enrolled her at the Windsor Mountain School, an overnight co-ed institution. Feiga said that school saved her soul. She earned a master’s degree from the Boston University School of Social Work, married and had three children.

The town of Korolowka has become well-known in Holocaust research circles because of stories of Jews hiding in surrounding cave systems during the war. It was while researching these stories that I heard about Feiga and discovered that she was family. Feiga had provided oral testimony to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum and I found a couple of references to Feiga and her family in Esther Stermer’s *We Fight to Survive* (Stermer’s memoir about her time hiding in the caves). Stermer relates how the bodies of Feiga’s father and oldest brother

were left outside the entrance to the cave as a warning to those hiding within.

I mentioned Feiga to a family member who had a vague memory of her visiting the family cottage in Manitoba in the late 1940s (I would come to discover that Israel and Bertha had arrived in Canada in 1948 and settled in Winnipeg). I reached out to Chris Nicola, the explorer who brought the Korolowka cave story to light, and he was able to put me in touch with Feiga’s son. Soon, I was on the phone with Feiga in Boston and we continued to exchange letters until her death in 2021. I feel incredibly grateful to know her story and to have had that time with her.

I think about Feiga around Passover especially because of a newspaper article I found. In 1949, a picture of Feiga and a group of fellow orphans appeared in *The Jewish Weekly Times*. Twenty-five orphans, many newly arrived in America, were taking part in Passover festivities at Bradshaw House in Dorchester. Bradshaw House had been set up by the JF&CS as a sort of “home base” for older orphans, teenagers really, many of whom were attending overnight schools like Feiga. In the photo, the orphans (along with their house mother) each hold aloft a small glass of wine while reading the Haggadah. For me, the image and its tie to the Passover story conjures thoughts of escape and liberation and I wonder if these children had similar ideas? Or were they preoccupied with their new lives, always thinking forward? Were they happy to have fellowship amongst others who understood? Or did they dream of something entirely different?

Sometimes when doing my genealogy research, I think of a question I’d like to ask Feiga—something about the town or about her father’s sisters (somehow it appears I never found out their names) — and I kick myself a little for not writing those questions down in one of my letters. So, this Passover, as you connect with family ask questions about your relatives and ask to hear those family stories. You never know what small detail might help you with your research.

To submit a question or if you have some Hamilton Jewish history to share, please email wshneider@jewishhamilton.org.

Wishing our Jewish clients

Happy Passover

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It was Hamilton's "Mayberry"

Fond memories of our family's "hood" in Ainslie Wood



Helaine Ortmann

IT IS PART OF family folklore that when, in the mid-1950s, our mother told her mother that she, her husband and their two pitzels were moving to west Hamilton, our Bubba, still ensconced in what was left of the downtown Jewish community, cried, fearing she might never see her daughter again.

To Bessie, a Yiddish-speaking urbanite, once surrounded by Jewish delis, butchers, stores, shuls and community, the west end of the city, past McMaster at the junction of Dundas and Ancaster, must have looked bleak; not exactly "wild" but mostly open field around this Ainslie Wood neighbourhood, yet to be fully developed.

Whenever my siblings and I reminisce about our formative years on Elizabeth Court, it is with affectionate nostalgia for what seemed to be our very own Mayberry; the safe and close-knit fictional community of the 1960s Andy Griffith sitcom.

My best times growing up were spent on Elizabeth Court. Five houses down lived the venerable Abeles couple. Two doors away, Mrs. Cohen, who produced fresh sugar cookies on a two-tiered silver plate every time I dropped in. Her daughter, Lee worked full time and golfed on weekends. I knew no other woman who played golf except for Lee and her best friend Gloria, both regulars in our mom's Mah-jong group. The Blooms, who owned a clothing store on York Street, lived next door.

A small family living in a small house, we swelled in size and volume when our cousins, aunts and uncles arrived at holiday times and simchas like the Sunday "bash" after our brother's bar mitzvah. Or special occasions like when our Rochester cousins came to town or the much-anticipated annual visits of our dad's eldest sister Mary from Brooklyn. This aunt of ours sported a different wig each time she returned home and could be counted on to bring gifts that were the "latest" in terms of US technology and know-how.

Family get-togethers at our dining room table and in our living room were legendary, evocative of the energy and activity of the subjects in a Bruegel painting.

Our mother, Ethel put out quite a spread, blending Sephardic and Ashkenazi traditions. As a new wife, she watched her mother-in-law Vinucha in the kitchen, measured each ingredient before our grandmother threw it into the pot or dish, and wrote down the recipes to preserve them.

Our table was the best of the Levy-Kessler union: from hot stuffed peppers, roasted rice, frijalda (a coil of pastry filled with creamy cheese), pastel (ground meat pie), miringena (eggplant spread), and oil and vinegar peppers blackened on the grill to gefilte fish, chicken soup with knaidlach and lokshen, breaded chicken, brisket, kugel and vegetables. Seasonally, to appease our father's middle sister Rae, there was corn on the cob; an à la carte dish sometimes left forgotten in its pot on the kitchen stove, so much was there to remember. Desserts, of course, were never left behind.

If one of the ways our mother distinguished herself was at the dining room table, the maple Heintzman upright piano in the corner of the living room was how our father, Syd ascended. Fingers flying across the keys to cover every genre from jazz, boogie-woogie, popular to classical, our father played, and sang in that basso profundo voice of his.

In fact, each relative brought something special to the cabaret at Elizabeth Court, either as patron or performer such as Aunt Mary, a trained opera singer; uncle Joe, warbling his signature O Sole Mio; uncle David, a cantorial singer; and cousin Rosie, coaxed by our father to dazzle us with her sultry rendition of Ain't Misbehavin'.

In his late teen years/early twenties, cousin Eugene brought his guitar to play folk songs, duetted ever so sweetly with our dad on Plaisir d'amour, and regaled us with hilarious bits that had us in stitches; this long before he became the internationally-recognized comic actor, writer, performer and producer he is today.

And so it was on Elizabeth Court, this venue of hospitality, fun and music, where we were always glad our family came.

What's in a name?

When I think of the alternatives, I may have dodged a bullet



Phyllis Shragge

WHAT'S IN a name? Would my life have been much different if my parents had called me by middle name, Claire, instead of by my first name, Phyllis?

For one thing, if I were Claire, I wouldn't have to deal with dreadful misspellings of my name. If I were called Claire, that's C-l-a-i-r-e, my name occasionally might be spelled without the letter i, but that's not so bad.

The spelling of my name, Phyllis, though, generally is botched. It should be P-h-y-l-l-i-s. It is routinely spelled F-i-l-l-i-s or F-y-l-l-i-s or P-h-i-l-l-y-s or P-h-i-l-l-i-s. Because I anticipate inevitable spelling mistakes, each time I need to provide my name for a form of some sort, I automatically spell it. I don't wait to be asked.

But the spelling issue is a relatively minor annoyance. Sometimes I wonder if my name contributed to my development as I was growing up. Did my name mold my personality? When I look back to my youth, especially to my preteen years, I remember wanting a name that was popular at the time, like Barbara, Susan, or Linda. I wanted an easy name, easy to say and easy to spell. My name seemed prim and proper. How could I be cool with the name Phyllis? I wonder how different I would have been as Claire. Would I have had more confidence? Would I have minded the braces on my teeth? Would I have seen myself as lighthearted? If I were Claire instead of Phyllis, would I still have been shy?

And if I had been Claire as a teenager, would I have been certain about who I was and who I wanted to be? If I had been Claire instead of Phyllis, would I have been less impulsive? Would I have made better decisions? Would I have worked harder at school? If I had been Claire in the 1960s, would I have been busy studying instead of identifying with hippies?

As Phyllis, I came through it all relatively unscathed. But as Claire, maybe there wouldn't have been so many bumps in the road.

And now as an adult, when I consider my name, I still see it as ungainly. It's a cumbersome name, old fashioned and decidedly outdated. But it's not old fashioned enough to be making a comeback, like Sophie or Emma, currently popular names for baby girls. No, it's just an old-lady name. It certainly has no hope of ever being trendy. But I do feel better in one regard: The cool Barbaras, Susans and Lindas of my generation have equally outdated names.

So here I am, with a name people can't spell, a name I don't really like. But when I consider what I might have been named, I'm relieved.

In Ashkenazi Jewish tradition, babies are named after deceased relatives. I'm named after my great-grandmother on my mother's side. I share her Hebrew name, Zipporah, meaning bird. The name has been described as fitting for a free-spirited little one who can't wait to spread her wings and fly.

Although it's customary for Jewish babies to carry on a loved one's Hebrew name, often the namesake's English name isn't identical. Sometimes, the baby's name will begin with the same letter, or be similar in sound to the ancestor's name.

My great-grandmother's English name was Fanny. From that, came Phyllis. As far as the name Fanny is concerned, I feel lucky I dodged that bullet.

I wonder if it's too late to begin using my middle name. Likely it is. People would be confused if I became Claire Phyllis instead of Phyllis Claire. I think I would be confused as well.

And I wonder if the babies of this generation—the ones named after cities, the ones with oddly spelled names, and the ones with names that aren't really names at all and are just plain weird—eventually will resent their parents for the names they saddled them with. I can guarantee they will. Big time. And likely when they grow up, they'll seek out traditional names for their babies. Maybe they'll even name their little girls Barbara, Susan, or Linda. Not Phyllis, though. For sure not Phyllis.

Canadian Magen David Adom Canadian

Happy Passover

ISRAEL'S LIFELINE DEPENDS ON YOU

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YOM HASHOAH COMMUNITY COMMEMORATION

and Official Opening of the new Margaret's Legacy Centre

MONDAY, MAY 6, 2024

CEREMONY AND CANDLELIGHTING | 6.30 PM

KEYNOTE SPEAKERS:

VICTORIA MANCINELLI, Director of Public Relations, Communications,
Marketing and Strategic Partnerships, LiUNA OPDC, LiUNA C&E Canada

YONI BERROUS, Head, Educational Programs, Canada Overseas Education & Training Department

"IRENA'S VOWS" EXCLUSIVE MOVIE PREMIERE FOR HAMILTON | 8.00 pm

Caught in a German roundup to be used as a slave labourer, Polish nurse Irena Gut becomes a German army major's housekeeper during World War II. Irena risks her life to conceal a dozen Jews within the major's home.

Release date: April 15, 2024 (Canada) | Director: Louise Archambault

LIMITED SEATING | Please RSVP by Wednesday, May 1, 2024

mnorris@jewishhamilton.org | 905.648.0605

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SAVE THE DATE!

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 5, 2024

ANNUAL COMMUNITY CAMPAIGN 2025 LAUNCH

Pay tribute to our beloved homeland in a show full of emotion, laughter and the most beautiful songs that we all know and love!

YOM HA'ATZMAUT Community Concert

A Tribute to Israel featuring award-winning Israeli pianist and composer **Hila Kulik** and Broadway Israeli singer and actor **Omer Shaish**.

TUESDAY, MAY 14 | 7.00 PM

Location to be announced after registration



Reserve your seat by Wednesday, May 8
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For more information, please contact
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Reflections by a Hamilton mother of two lone IDF soldiers

Rebecca Shapiro writes that having sons serving in the IDF has made her stronger than she thought possible

BY **REBECCA SHAPIRO**
SPECIAL TO HAMILTON JEWISH NEWS

HOW AM I feeling? The word “OK” has become a relative term for all of us since Oct. 7.

When my two sons decided to join the Israeli army, I was slightly hesitant but optimistically thought that it would be a great experience for them. They would learn discipline, make great friends and protect our homeland. Attending my oldest son’s beret ceremony at the completion of his military training, I marveled at the many different religions and cultures represented in this group of soldiers. There were Druze, Christians, Muslims and Jews, all standing together for the noble cause of protecting the land that has given them each a beautiful life full of hope and peaceful coexistence.

My son told us about some Arab communities who showed gratitude to the soldiers, bringing them warm coffee on cold mornings. I saw glimpses in these stories of a future of lasting peace for our homeland, and I was proud of the role my sons were playing in the unfolding narrative. I never dreamed that an event like Oct. 7 could take place, or that my sons and two of my nephews would become a part of the fortified lines responsible for the continued existence of our homeland.

The first week of the war I had very little contact with my boys. They were on training bases getting ready

for their respective assignments. My mind raced, bombarded by pervasive thoughts of what they would soon be facing. My older son was called up right away as a reservist near the northern border of Syria and Lebanon.

During the first month of the war, when the border was still relatively quiet, we were able to speak somewhat regularly. However, as things started to heat up at the Lebanese border, he had little access to his phone. My second son had not officially finished training yet so I was hopeful that he would be tucked away safely at a fortified base somewhere. He wasn’t. A week after training, my phone rang. My heart dropped as I answered the phone from an unknown Israeli number. When my son’s voice crackled on the other end of the line, I called my husband into the room. The conversation that followed was the most difficult parenting moment in my 22 years of motherhood. My son told us that he “graduated” early, and that in the next 12 hours he would be going into Gaza.

Nobody prepares you for how to respond when your son says, “I wanted to call and say a last goodbye ... just in case.” I reminded myself to give my son whatever strength and courage I could, so I waited for the conversation to end to melt down into inconsolable tears. I did not hear from him (or sleep, for that matter) again for nearly two long agonizing months.

The unknown is a very unsettling state of being. Trying to function, work and parent the children I have under my roof was a huge task, one I could not have done without the shoulders of fellow army families, our supportive community and many



PHOTO: COURTESY REBECCA SHAPIRO

acts of kindness by amazing friends. Every single text that said I’m thinking of you helped me feel less isolated and alone. The incredible kindness shown by friends and family in Israel was also a huge lifeline.

As the weeks passed, my need to be with my boys grew unbearable. Timing aligned perfectly with the launch of Operation Hug by Nefesh B’Nefesh (NBN), an initiative to help parents of lone soldiers get to Israel to hug their kids. Unfortunately, those with kids fighting in Gaza had no idea when to book their flights. There was no scheduled leave for the active military, and NBN had no jurisdiction to organize visitations. We took a leap of faith and booked tickets for the entire family, in the hope that we could celebrate my soon to be 13-year-old’s bar mitzvah in Israel as a complete family.

Avi Shapiro, husband of Rebecca, blesses their oldest son at the bus station before he boards and heads back to the army base he is stationed in.

The second we landed, I got a message from an Israeli army mom whose son is serving with mine, telling me that their unit had an unexpected training day, and if we hurried south from the airport, we could probably see them for an hour or two at the base before they had to go back. It was a miracle. We actually got to hug our son! An hour later we left him to go back into hell and then had no idea if we would see or hear from him again this trip. We got to hug our oldest son a few days later and held on for an entire Shabbat.

When our trip was almost over, our second son miraculously got special permission to leave Gaza for his brother’s bar mitzvah and our oldest son quickly worked to coordinate another weekend off. We threw together a last-minute celebration more meaningful and beautiful than I could have ever imagined. Having all my sons together, with the old city walls fading into the horizon, we celebrated my son putting on t’fillin for the first time.

Leaving Israel was excruciating, but we had children who needed to get back to school and routine. I willed myself into some semblance of normalcy, relying on my body’s natural mechanisms to protect me from too much pain. I began to keep busier than usual and sleep more. I live and appreciate life more and definitely cry more. Sensitivity levels increased alongside resilience. Being a mom of soldiers has taught me that we are all capable of more than we ever dreamed possible—even (or especially) during challenges we don’t get to choose. May God watch over and protect all of our precious sons and daughters fighting for our homeland.







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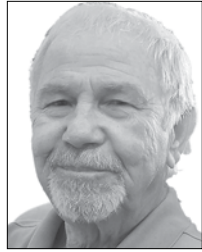

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My father, my silent hero



BY MOISHE CHAIMOVITZ
SPECIAL TO
HAMILTON JEWISH
NEWS

A heartfelt tribute to a remarkable father

MY FATHER, Yom Tov Lipa Chaimovitz was born on Oct. 4, 1922 in a small shtetl called Izza in Czechoslovakia. He grew up in a religious family with four brothers and two sisters, his family enjoying a quiet existence in a Jewish neighbourhood. Their lives were turned inside out when the Nazis invaded Europe and took his family.

My father managed to escape into the forest and became a partisan, surviving through determination, using his knowledge of multiple languages to help him in various situations. He spent the war in Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Poland, going from place to place to avoid being caught. In many places he saw dead bodies and on more than one occasion, he would lie among them to avoid being captured. His stories were filled with details about frightening situations, and it is unfathomable to think about what he went through.

In 1945, hearing that the Russian army was heading towards Theresienstadt, my father decided to turn himself in. He was determined to stay alive and help his fellow prisoners. In Theresienstadt,

he miraculously found his brother, Yechiel, who appeared close to death. My father tended to him, and when the American army marched into Theresienstadt he approached an officer to ask for help. When the soldier took off his cap, my father saw he was wearing a yarmulka and felt an immediate sense of relief. The officer was able to get help and Yechiel survived.

Once liberated, my father and his brother set out to search for other family members. Unfortunately, they didn't find anyone, but my father did find Esther Moskovitz, a woman he had known before the war. Together, they went to Austria to search for her family, where she found her brother Joshua.

Lipa and Esther, now a couple, were trying to decide what would be their next step. Lipa wanted to go to Israel and Joshua wanted to go to Canada. Esther chose to stay with Lipa, and soon after, the couple boarded a ship bound for what was then British Mandate Palestine. Unfortunately, their ship was turned away to Cyprus, where my parents spent the next six months facing life-threatening conditions in a British-run concentration camp. In 1946, they finally disembarked near the village of Atlit, helped by Haganah fighters. Finally



PHOTO: COURTESY MOISHE CHAIMOVITZ

Yom Tov Lipa Chaimovitz in 1991

home in the holy land, my parents were happy, but their feelings of relief didn't last long. They didn't know the language, had no money, nor profession. They settled in a shack in a town near Rehovot, where Lipa worked in an orchard for an English penny a day. Life was hard.

I was born in March 1947, the first "Sabra" of the family. Not long after, Israel was declared a state and my father volunteered and fought in the War of Independence. He was among the group of soldiers who opened a route to Jerusalem, singularly devoted to his family and to his country.

Lipa and Esther moved to Moshav Beit Elazarei in 1950, where they had a small farm, raised cattle and

chickens and grew everything they needed. The army was still a priority and a source of pride for my father. In 1956, at the height of the Suez Canal crisis, his group of artillery fighters fought their way through the desert to the shores of the canal.

As a young boy, it was hard to have my father be away for long periods of time, sometimes for up to four weeks, but I knew that he did it for me, our family and our country. I used to wait for his bus to come home, for him to get off and come to us. When he finally did arrive, I remember asking him why he was gone longer than others, and his response was, "the army needed me." At that moment, I knew he was my hero and a silent hero for so many others.

In 1960, Lipa and Esther decided to join her brother Sam Moskovitz in Hamilton. Paperwork and medical were completed in early 1961 and we were on our way to Canada. It was a sad and tearful night on the back deck of the steam liner SS Atlantic as we watched the lights of Haifa disappear from view. We arrived at Ellis Island 14 days later, transferred to Grand Central Station and continued by train to Fort Erie where my uncle picked us up and took us to his house. I was 14. My brothers Mike, Carl and Jerry were 11, eight and five. In Canada, we made a new life.

My family of many names



BY LISA MAHALU
SPECIAL TO
HAMILTON JEWISH
NEWS

A woman's two-year quest to research and understand her family history

WHEN MY GRANDMOTHER, Henia Ruhla landed in Canada from Romania in 1924, immigration officials cut her long dark hair as she stepped onto the soil of her adopted country.

Awaiting Henia's arrival was her mother's brother—a junk dealer living in Hamilton and a recent immigrant himself—who sponsored her, and her older sister three years earlier. In 1929, another two siblings arrived, and decades later, a brother.

For 31 years, I was fortunate to know my grandmother, an independent-minded woman who was widowed at 52. I formed a close bond with her at a young age, visiting her weekly when I was old enough to take the bus.

When I stepped inside her one-room apartment in Toronto, there was the ever-present smell of freshly cooked European foods. Neatly appointed with limited space, she had made room for a budgie in a cage beside the Singer sewing machine, next to the record player where she listened to the songs of her childhood. Hanging on her wall, pressed under glass, were her former hairlocks—a constant reminder of who she once was. She must have been traumatized, I thought, from the experience of losing part of her identity upon arrival in Saint John, New Brunswick.

I would perch myself on the edge of her bed surrounded by colourful crocheted blankets, in an area

that also served as the living room. We watched her favourite television shows, including wrestling, and I asked questions about her life. "Bubby, would you ever go back to Romania for a visit?" I asked one day. "Never!" was the response, ending the topic for discussion immediately. But I never understood the reason for her abruptness. Until now.

After the death of my father in August 2021, I took a deep dive into the unfamiliar world of family genealogy. What happened to my grandmother's parents? Why had they not immigrated to Canada with all of their children?

When my great-grandfather took the long voyage across the ocean in July 1914 to build a better life for his family in Hamilton, he could not have imagined the loneliness of being detained on Ellis Island in New York, while Canadian immigration authorities, with the flick of a wrist, wrote "Rejected Canada" beside his name.

My grandfather ended up being shipped back to Romania within 48 hours of arrival, only to be pronounced dead two months later. Did he die of a broken heart from the rejection? Was there an underlying health condition that prevented his successful immigration? Was illiteracy a deciding factor in his fate? I will never know.

But I am weighed down by the burden of it all, and the responsibility that comes with knowing. The research roadblocks I encountered felt like a persistent thorn in my side; its stinging remnants lingering long after the source of pain was discovered



PHOTO: COURTESY LISA MAHALU

Henia Ruhla, the author's grandmother, at far right with her siblings.

and extricated. How can I move forward in my grief?

I have come to understand that this moment in time shaped the fate of my extended family. A cousin in my father's generation recalls hearing when she was a child how my newly widowed great-grandmother washed other people's laundry to support her six children—ranging in age from 16 years to six months old.

For Henia, her siblings, and the uncle, I was able to find most of their birth, immigration, marriage, and death records to help me build the story of my paternal grandmother. However, during the time of immigration, each of them assumed a variety of names, randomly selected from their parent's multiple surnames, their own birth names or the names they chose for themselves in their newly adopted country. It made research very challenging.

During the two-year tenure of my exploration, I tried to immerse myself as best I could in the immigrant

experience of my family. With each new find I would lie awake long into the night wondering about their lives. Were they happy? What were their hopes and dreams? How painful it must have been for Henia and her siblings to leave their mother behind in Romania.

My family of many names will continue to intrigue me. Inspire me. Even haunt me. I have this driving need to know how my grandmother felt after she reinvented herself as Annie in the new country. I am determined to touch the soil of her childhood one day and find the grave of my great-grandfather to thank him for his bravery and desire to build a better life for his family.

The family tree is growing. It is my hope that I can tell more relatives about the story of our shared past and deepen the connections that bind us. It is the least that I can do to honour my ancestors. I will always be grateful for the sacrifices they made. It is a debt that I can never repay.

TEMPLE ANSHE SHOLOM RELIGIOUS SCHOOL

Students bring Jewish values to life



Temple Anshe Sholom senior students and Dora-Ann Cohen participated in a JNF telethon along with JNF president Haim Goldstein and Lorraine Cohen.

PHOTO: TEMPLE ANSHE SHOLOM

DORA ANN COHEN ELLISON

EACH YEAR AT Temple Anshe Sholom, our Jewish Learning Program explores and reinforces connections to our community. Weekly, these community opportunities are explored in our post B'nai Mitzvah program *B'Yachad*. Recently, senior students facilitated a very successful JNF telethon, prepared and stuffed envelopes for a Temple mailing, and created a budget and shopped for toiletry/food items for individuals in need.

I am excited for our May sessions with Shalom Village residents titled, *L'Dor V'Dor ~ Games and More*, when our senior students and residents will schmooze and play games together.

This month, all of our Grade K-10 students explored the value of hakarat hatov (gratitude), in connection to the mitzvot of Purim. When we reflect on all we are grateful for, we also take time to notice how we can help others with the blessings we are given. Students created *matanot la-evyonim*—bags of snacks, water,

socks and toiletries, to keep in their cars, ready to give out when they see an individual in need. On March 23, we gathered with excitement and an amazing turnout, hearing the megillah reading and eating delicious carnival treats at a fantastic Purim party. Our drop-in program, *Tot-Shabbat* (ages two to five, plus caregiver) continues Saturday, April 6 from 11 am to noon. (Please note: no program April 27 or May 18)

Looking to meet other families in the area? Join us for Family Shabbat on Friday, May 3, potluck dinner at 6 pm, followed by Family Kabbalat Shabbat at 7 pm. Details at anshesholom.ca. If you have a child entering JK through Grade 12, we invite you to join our Jewish Learning Program, which is open to all in our community. New student registration for September 2024 is being accepted now at anshesholom.ca, or email dacelison@anshesholom.ca for information about our Temple Anshe Sholom Jewish Learning Program.

McMASTER HILLEL

Reflections on the academic year



RABBI BEN SHEFTER
MCMASTER HILLEL
DIRECTOR

THE MISHNA in Passover 10:4 teaches: "One begins the Passover Seder

with disgrace and ends with joy." This idea plays out in numerous ways, such as starting with slavery and ending with redemption. As Jewish people, the lesson of starting with disgrace and ending with joy is essential to our survival as a people. It offers us opportunities to process the past, apply it in the present, and lead us to a promising future.

As I reflect on the academic year of 2023-2024, it is easy to focus on the fear students felt in and outside the classroom, the rage over the misinformation perpetuated by groups online, the frustration over the breakdown of relationships with our campus allies. Many can focus on how Hillel and other Jewish professionals' workload has significantly increased with a larger attention to advocacy and safety than in previous years, stretching staff and volunteers to continue to provide the content, community and other vital services everyone needs.

However, this is only part of the story, and hopefully not what the students will remember years from now. What I hope they remember are the opportunities to grow into leaders, the critical thinking skills garnered to develop lasting relationships with Israel and their Jewish identities, the support and care they received from the community during their darkest hours and the moments they chose to stand up for themselves and declare themselves as proud Jews and supporters of Israel. This is the work of Hillel and we are proud to stand shoulder to shoulder with the next generation.

Hillel McMaster and its many partners have worked diligently with the administration, the students, community leaders and many other stakeholders to ensure there will always be a place for dialogue, respect, accountability and action.

As we approach Passover, the holiday of freedom, may we be surrounded by friends and family who have seen us through the moments of disgrace to joy and understand that while we walk the path of life, it is the support and friendships that can transform our most difficult moments into moments of celebration. *Chag Kasher v'sameach*, a happy, healthy Passover.

BBYO

My personal connection to Judaism



PHOTO: MISHPACHA BBYO

Lana Verzberger (left) being inducted into the International Order of B'nai B'rith Girls.

LANA VERZBERGER

HAVING A sense of community is important, especially when your family is far away. I am alone in Canada with my mother and brother. The rest of my family lives in Israel. My community and having a strong sense of Judaism is extremely important. I love to feel connected to my Jewish roots, culture and community, to be involved with something bigger than myself and that connects everyone. It's like having a home away from home—like one united family.

For eight years I went to the Hamilton Hebrew Academy (HHA), where I had good days and bad. When I graduated, however, I missed it more than I ever thought I would. When I was in the HHA, I took it for granted. I didn't realize how important it is to be with Jewish people who have the same experiences and roots. I am in Grade 9 now, and go to public school. I miss having people who understand the hardships of having your family so far away, especially with this war going on. That is why being a part of BBYO is very important to me, it brings light during dark days.

BBYO is a Jewish group for teens, and this is my first term serving as chapter Mishpacha's shlichah (vice president of Jewish enrichment) Being a part of BBYO gives a sense of deep friendships, community and family like the one I had at the HHA. Even though it will only be for five years, the memories I make will be with me forever.

When I am involved with the community, it brings happiness and warmth to my heart, like the time I volunteered at the Yom Ha'atzmaut party with the rest of my chapter. It was the most fun celebration we've had since COVID-19, where Jews all over Hamilton gathered and celebrated Israel. That day is very near and dear in my heart and one of the many fun things I have done as a part of Mishpacha BBYO. I am so grateful to be a part of BBYO and the Hamilton Jewish community, as well as for my time as an HHA student. I think that being a part of all these things makes my life that much brighter and richer with joy, happiness and gratitude for my family, friends and community.

Lana Verzberger is a Grade 9 student at Westmount Secondary School, and a member of the Mishpacha

TEMPLE ANSHE SHOLOM

Meet our new executive director

RABBI JORDAN COHEN

TEMPLE ANSHE Sholom welcomes Keana Pakosh as our new executive director. Keana has been an active member of the Temple for a number of years and comes to us with robust management experience, business acumen, creativity and a deep love of Judaism. Her vision and thoughtfulness are evident to everyone she encounters. Stop by the office and welcome Keana to Temple Anshe Sholom!

Following our outstanding Purim celebrations, featuring our outrageous Purim Shpiel, "Megillah on the Roof," and our exciting Purim Carnival, we are now looking ahead to a wonderful and meaningful Pesach. Passover will be celebrated with a community seder on the second night of Pesach, April 23, featuring lots of songs, stories and traditional readings and a wonderful Kosher catered dinner for family members of all ages. Seats are already filling up, so sign up in advance at anshesholom.ca so that your family can be part of this meaningful and



KEANA PAKOSH

fun Passover Seder experience. Everyone is welcome to participate.

We also welcome everyone to join us for Passover Morning services either in person at the Temple or online, on April 23 and April 29, at 10:30

am. Some of our most beautiful liturgy is included, such as the chanting of Hallel Psalms. This is also an opportunity to remember loved ones no longer with us at Yizkor. Each service will be followed by a kosher l'Pesach festive kiddush luncheon.

Do you have a seder to attend? If not, we can link you to a family near you so that you can be included. If you need a little help preparing for Pesach, be sure to join us for our What is Passover? workshop on Sunday, March 31. All are welcome. For more information, contact the Temple office. Spring is flourishing at Temple Anshe Sholom.

SHALOM VILLAGE

Celebrating our Golden Jubilee

Join our celebration June 16



MARIANNE KLEIN
CEO, SHALOM VILLAGE

IN LESS than a year since assuming the role of CEO at Shalom Village, I've embarked on a journey rich with lessons about our history and the individuals who have shaped our beloved community. Each day, I'm filled with pride and gratitude as I witness the remarkable transformation that has brought us to where we stand today.

Fifty years ago, the seeds of Shalom Village were sown when Shalom Village was registered as a Jewish non-profit home for the aged, with a vision to provide a nurturing home where Jewish seniors could find solace, companionship and the dignity they deserve. Like a tender sapling, we carefully nurtured this vision, ensuring that it took root within our core values of respect, dignity and reverence for our elders.

Throughout the decades, Shalom Village has flourished, expanding its reach through diverse programs and services aimed at enhancing the lives of our residents and participants. Milestones like the introduction of long-term care, the establishment of SVToo and the addition of convalescent care beds have propelled our growth and deepened our impact.

Just as a majestic tree extends its branches, we have reached out into the community with initiatives like Goldie's and Goldie's 2 Home programs, the Fitness Club and the welcoming ambiance of Bubbie's Cafe. These endeavours symbolize our unwavering commitment to exceptional care within our walls and

foster connections and support beyond them. Thanks to your steadfast support, Shalom Village has become the Jewish community's gift to all Hamilton area seniors.

I'm humbled by the countless lives we've touched and the enduring impact we've made. Our progress has been fueled by the dedication of volunteers, donors, staff, board members and community members who share our commitment to ensuring our seniors live lives of fulfillment and dignity.

To mark our Jubilee anniversary, we are thrilled to announce a special celebration on Sunday, June 16. We invite you to save the date and join us as we honour our achievements and embrace the promise of the future. Look for more information in your inbox and mailbox in April.

While we have much to celebrate, our work continues. Like the biblical Jubilee, which heralds freedom and renewal, we reaffirm our commitment to human dignity and freedom, especially for our cherished elders. We remain steadfast in our commitment to cultivate an environment where every senior can enjoy moments that matter every day.

Leviticus reminds us: "Sanctify the fiftieth year by proclaiming freedom throughout the land to all its inhabitants." This biblical directive underscores the ever-evolving nature of freedom, dignity, and human rights, reminding us of our duty to uphold and defend them.

As we commemorate Shalom Village's 50th anniversary, let us embrace the call to renew our commitment to the sacred work of caring for our beloved seniors.

Thank you for your unwavering support and dedication to Shalom Village. We look forward to celebrating our Jubilee with you, our community, on June 16 from noon to 3 p.m. at Shalom Village.

BETH JACOB SYNAGOGUE

Hamilton is warm and welcoming

RABBI BENI WAJNBERG

MOST COMMUNITIES in the world call themselves "warm and welcoming." Few truly are. My first few months in Hamilton are living proof that the Hamilton Jewish community indeed is. My family and I have been overwhelmed by the kindness and open-armed embrace that we have received from members of our own special extended-family at Beth Jacob, as well as from the community at large.

I never thought that a visit to the grocery store would be a community event. Yet, every time, a trip to Fortinos proves to be a wonderful opportunity to see familiar faces and make new acquaintances. Yes, it does take a little longer to go through the kosher aisle, but it really is wonderful to live in a community where "office hours" are not only in my own study at the synagogue, but everywhere I go. Hamilton proves that being Jewish is much more than davvening, schmoozing or eating matzo brei—it is the blessing of belonging to a family. We have our issues—who doesn't?—but the unity of our family is unbreakable and the commitment that we have for each other is such a needed light in a time of turmoil.

At Beth Jacob, I have been keeping myself busy getting to know our growing membership. I must be the most well hydrated rabbi in the world—I am proud of having refilled five times my "tea collection," which really is just an excuse to sit down with people 1-1 and getting to know each person. I have also been having par-lour meetings with bigger groups, and hearing people's stories, interests, and wishes for our Jewish community.

From all of these conversations, a few things are clear: the pandemic and everyday life since Oct. 7 have only increased the need for a strong and, yes, warm and



PHOTO: BETH JACOB SYNAGOGUE

Rabbi Beni Wajnberg welcomed to Hamilton and feels the unity of Beth Jacob.

welcoming community. We have been trying to process our personal and collective traumas individually. But we are here so that you don't need to do that alone. A synagogue has always been primarily "Beit HaKnesset," a house of gathering—a place for showing up for one another.

This is what our ancestors did as they navigated their way out of Egypt. They gathered, they showed up for each other. "Showing up" is really what a community truly is about. This is also what is required of each of us, especially at these times: to show up. And let me say this—I am so thrilled to be part of your family, of our Jewish family. May we find indeed a better tomorrow soon, but until then, may we always find each other's presence to rely on—at shul, all around, and especially at Fortinos.



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KEHILA HESCHEL SCHOOL

Kehila Heschel celebrates its 25th year in Hamilton

The alternative Jewish day school many said would never happen or succeed is, today, thriving

JULIA KOLLEK

TWENTY-FIVE YEARS ago, five children began a school year together, taking part in a dream to create a new kind of Jewish day school in our city. Everyone said it would never happen. But it did.

Years in the planning, a group of parents became inspired to seek out the most current and successful models of education for their children. They travelled across North America, visiting schools and attending conferences.

That school evolved again in 2018 when Kehila joined the The Abraham Joshua Heschel school family, which continues to set the benchmark across the continent for high-ranking Jewish day school education.

Over the years, more than 100 students have graduated from the school, many continuing to stay in touch and share a love of learning. One parent expressed gratitude for Kehila. She related how her son was in Grade 1 the year the school opened. He loved the science program and went on to become an astrophysicist and mathematician who was hired by NASA straight out of university. Public school had been a tense place for him, but at Kehila he began to love learning.

A current parent noted how they could clearly picture their child growing intellectually and feeling valued as a person at the school. As in the early days, today's Kehila students can't wait to get to school in the morning. It's where the cross-disciplinary curriculum blends the everyday with Jewish education seamlessly and creatively: and where each child's learning style is respected.

The school takes every opportunity to create a rich and active learning experience, welcoming families from the full spectrum of Jewish life. Students are engaged and eager to absorb our traditions and to apply these concepts beyond the classroom.

The trilingual program includes French as well as Hebrew, and with Churchill Park on the doorstep, the children enjoy an eco/outdoor education. Kehila has reached the top Platinum status as an internationally recognized eco-school.

At Pesach, students help prepare and take part in the school's model seder. Aside from reading together in Hebrew the journey from slavery to freedom, they also discuss the importance of democracy and freedom of speech.



PHOTOS: KEHILA HESCHEL SCHOOL



Above: Students play act, bringing the Purim story to life dressed as medieval jesters. **Left:** 1999 was Kehila Heschel's first year. From the beginning, the school committed to an educational vision that developed the whole child. **Below:** A senior student explains a project she has worked on.

To mark Kehila's 25 years—and to build for the future—the school has launched a celebratory fundraising campaign with the help of past and current parents and staff. With the situation in Israel in mind, the aim is also to contribute support to the rebuilding of the children's playground and youth centre at Kibbutz Kissufim, one of 20 communities attacked on Oct. 7, as a way to strengthen the connection between Kehila's students and those in Israel.

A school reunion is planned for Sunday, June 9, a chance for past, present and future Kehila families, educators, staff and community supporters to get together. Graduates (some from that first pioneering class) will be invited to celebrate the past and usher in our exciting future. Visit kehilaheschel.ca for more information.



HAMILTON JEWISH FEDERATION

PJ Library reaches new heights



PHOTO: MAGGIE NORRIS

"Shlepover" fun at a recent PJ Hamilton event.

MAGGIE NORRIS

PJ LIBRARY has implanted itself in our Hamilton Jewish community. We are thrilled to announce that we have recently added another 50 families to the more than 250 already enrolled, thanks to funding by the Ruth and Lewis Sherman Foundation, Hamilton Lions of Judah, the Hamilton Jewish Federation and the Harold Grinspoon Foundation.

The PJ Library experience is unique and captivating. As the program professional for PJ Library Hamilton, I have managed the subscriptions and planned programs for the past year. Most PJ Library programs take place around the Jewish holidays. Other feel-good programs, like the "Shlep-over," have become an annual tradition.

I recently attended the PJ Library conference in Springfield, Massachusetts for the second time. The vibe at the conference is unmatched, and it succeeds at injecting an immense amount of electrifying energy into its attendees, who return to their communities re-inspired and reinvigorated.

As a parent, I see my children's excitement as they choose their books from their very own PJ Our Way (for ages 9-12) accounts online, anticipating the arrival of their books every month. The books are carefully chosen, touching on various Jewish topics and cultural references. Many parents agree that when their children are immersed in Jewish literature they "feel seen" and can relate to the characters and morals. PJ Library programs provide an opportunity for kids to interact with their Jewish peers in a fun and welcoming environment. For some, these programs are their primary connection to the Jewish community.

If you have recently become part of the PJ Library Hamilton family, welcome! To sign up for PJ Library, visit www.pjlibrary.org. For more information on upcoming programs, visit hamiltonjcc.com.

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EXCAVATE & EXPRESS: WRITING WORKSHOP

A six week heart-filled virtual workshop that explores intergenerational trauma and healing through writing and conversation. No writing experience needed. Presented by Claire Sicherman. On Zoom, Wednesdays, May 1st through June 5th. \$150 per person. Limited Capacity.

MENTAL WELLNESS WORKSHOP

A two-part virtual event connecting Judaism to mental health concepts. This workshop will guide participants through creating a space to think about how they can support individuals in their lives and the larger community. Presented by The Blue Dove Foundation. On Zoom, Thursdays, May 16th & 23rd. Free. Limited Capacity.

To find out more and to register, visit the Programs & Workshops tab at www.hamiltonjfs.ca

HAMILTON OUT OF THE COLD

Our acts of kindness change lives

CINDY RICHTER

AT HAMILTON'S Out of the Cold (HOOTC), our mission is to provide hot, nutritious meals for those in need in the Hamilton community. Served with dignity and compassion, HOOTC is a volunteer based, program sustained by donations of both money and food from foundations, local groups, businesses and individuals.

Normally, at the end of our season there is the expectation that we feel tired yet, in truth, we feel the opposite, because there is so much at stake for "people out there." One of our guests recently left this message:

"Without your program, I would have gone hungry for weeks at a time. My access to food is very limited so I need a program like yours. I was wondering if you would take a run at offering this all year round to help with this food crisis..."

This poignant message is a reminder that each act of kindness makes a difference in the world. This winter, 1,223 guests received 2,400 meals and so much more: toiletries, hats, gloves, coats, clothing, fresh produce and, maybe most valuable of all, smiles and recognition from our volunteers.

When we asked our 40 volunteers what they most enjoyed about volunteering, one respondent wrote, "All of it ... giving back, working with others, knowing I am helping the less fortunate, knowing



PHOTO: HAMILTON OUT OF THE COLD

Volunteers gathered at Out of the Cold.

that I am helping to provide healthy food to those who really need it, being part of a community, camaraderie, the public interaction."

We thank the generous members of our community who give in many other ways: youth who raise money, collect socks or bake as their Mitzvah projects; the generous quarterly contributions from Homeless Cars overseen by Georgina and Amanda Katz; the toiletries, hats, gloves and food that just suddenly appear, donations made by simply calling Beth Jacob Synagogue's Out of the Cold Fund.

We're so proud to represent the values of our Hamilton Jewish community. Please continue to donate through the year in anticipation of our start up in November. "Let all that hunger, come and eat." Chag Pesach Sameach.

ORDER OF HAMILTON

Lorraine Cohen recognized

YASHAR KOACH to Lorraine Cohen who was recently awarded an Order of Hamilton. This award recognizes the exceptional voluntary contributions of individual Hamiltonians building a better and improved Hamilton.

Cohen's volunteer work in the community includes helping children with reading and math skills, uplifting the spirits of Shalom Village residents and family members coming to the long-term care facility, and taking on leadership roles at the Rotary Club of Ancaster and the Hamilton Jewish Federation.



HAMILTON HEBREW ACADEMY

PTA chairs help to shape the future



PHOTO: DONNA WAXMAN

Eitan Wiesfeld and Michelle Daleo, co-chairs of the Hamilton Hebrew Academy PTA, talk about school initiatives at the school Chanukah Dinner.

ERICA DELIBATO

A REMARKABLE story of growth and engagement is unfolding at the Hamilton Hebrew Academy (HHA), where the spirit of community is thriving. At the forefront of this resurgence are the dedicated efforts of the Parent-Teacher Association (PTA), co-chaired by individuals with deep-rooted HHA legacies.

Michelle Daleo and Eitan Wiesfeld are the dynamic co-chairs with long-standing connections to the school. Michelle attended the HHA in her younger years, and Eitan's wife, Jaime, followed closely in the class of 1999. Their unique perspectives as generational members of the school community infuse their leadership with a sense of commitment and history.

"The vibrancy of our PTA showcases the growth and engagement of our school community. As we increase momentum, we see our school building and evolving into a hub of activity and learning that reaches far beyond the classroom," Michelle Daleo reflected.

This vibrancy is evident in the array of extracurricular activities spearheaded by the PTA, which encompass a wide range of interests, including Sportsball, music, mad science, and art. These programs are designed to enrich the

educational experience of HHA students, fostering a sense of curiosity, creativity, and teamwork. These initiatives are open to the entire community and underscore a vision of inclusivity and collaboration.

Central to the PTA's mission are creative fundraising and community-building initiatives that are becoming anticipated annual events. To name some, the Spination, Poker Night, and Book Fair foster a sense of community while raising vital funds for technological enhancements in the classroom. These events draw parents and teachers together to support a common goal. "There's nothing more inspiring than watching parents champion their children's school and build community together," said Co-chair Eitan Wiesfeld.

The legacy of commitment by families like the Daleos and the Wiesfelds is a testament to the lasting impact of the HHA on its community. Now, as their children walk the halls their parents once did, the circle of learning and engagement continues to expand, propelled by a new generation of families dedicated to the Academy's success. Guided by the vision and dedication of its PTA co-chairs, the HHA is poised for even more remarkable achievements in the years to come.



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Shalom Village then & now



A whirlwind trip to Israel is a mission of love

Hamilton rabbis journey to Israel to show support for former students currently serving in the IDF

BY **WENDY SCHNEIDER**
HAMILTON JEWISH NEWS

ADAS ISRAEL Rabbi Daniel Green and Hamilton Hebrew Academy (HHA) principal Rabbi Yaakov Morel flew to Israel last January on a mission called Operation Gratitude to show their support for former HHA students serving on the front lines of Israel's war against Hamas.

In an interview with the HJN not long after their return, Rabbi Morel recounted some of what occurred during their whirlwind five-day trip, starting with boarding an El Al flight in Boston (the airline no longer flies from Canada) loaded with four duffel bags filled with community donations, and landing in Israel to an eerily deserted Ben Gurion airport.

When it became clear shortly upon their arrival that most of the HHA alumni were redeployed and would not be available, the two men improvised new plans that included a number of unforgettable moments.

Among the highlights of the days that followed were a number of impromptu encounters, beginning with a chance meeting with an IDF platoon at the site of the Nova festival, during which, after an emotional greeting by Morel, where he called them "the heroes of our nation," 40 soldiers lined up to hug him and Rabbi Green. In a moving moment, the soldiers were given thank you cards crafted personally by HHA students. Their



PHOTO: COURTESY YAAKOV MOREL

feelings of deep appreciation were evident in their expressions.

The two also went to a Jerusalem rehabilitation centre to visit the brother of an HHA teacher who had sustained injuries during the first weeks of the war. The brother was visiting Hamilton on Oct. 7 and soon after flew to Israel to join his unit.

"He took us through the clinic and we started meeting soldiers," said Morel, going on to describe how he and Rabbi Green went from room to room, hugging soldiers, taking photos and handing out leather bound books of psalms with an inscription from our community.

A similar scene unfolded later that day at another rehab centre where

they were at first refused entry.

"Tell her we're not moving from here, we're on a mission of gratitude and we're emptying our bags."

Minutes later they were given free rein to distribute their gifts. "We didn't need all these presents," soldiers told them. "You came all this way to say thank you? That's all we needed."

Before the end of their stay, the two men, accompanied at times by Rabbi Green's daughter, attended a shiva for one of 24 soldiers killed in Gaza on a single day, visited the Mount Herzl cemetery in Jerusalem, where they spoke with many mourners, including a woman who had recently lost her son.

Reunion in Jerusalem: Alan and Moleigh Wiesenthal (standing far right) hosted a gathering for Hamilton Hebrew Academy alumni soldiers and student and visiting Hamilton rabbis Daniel Green and Yaakov Morel at their Jerusalem home.

They also visited a Jerusalem hotel where evacuees from the south were staying and persuaded a reluctant security guard to let them in.

"Children, I have presents," Yaakov Morel called out in Hebrew in a loud voice once they gained entry into the lobby. Seconds later, they were surrounded by a crowd of young children. After the mayhem, a woman approached them. "It pains me to sit at this hotel," she said. "The Jewish people are all about giving. I can't take from you. When I go back to my community and we rebuild, I want to have you at my house."

The trip culminated with a celebratory dinner hosted by former Hamiltonians Alan and Moleigh Wiesenthal at their Jerusalem home. In attendance were former HHA students and other members of the school's extended family.

"We should be proud of the Hamilton community for producing these young men and women with the highest morals and values of protecting the Jewish people. We have a lot to be proud of. These kids have stepped up to the plate. They're on the front lines fighting for us on a daily basis. They have a mission. They're focused. They're strong, and they're resilient," said Morel.

More than anything, Morel said the unity of purpose he felt among those they encountered during the trip, was invigorating. "They wanted us to know, 'continue praying but stay strong. Put your differences aside. Stay united.' That's what we need to do as a nation. That we continue to stress the importance of Israel. We should be proud of our history, of our community. We're creating the next generation of heroes."

"They wanted us to know, 'continue praying but stay strong. Put your differences aside. Stay united.' That's what we need to do as a nation."

RABBI YAAKOV MOREL



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