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Hamilton
Jewish

News

DECEMBER 2024 | KISLEV 5785

The voice of Jewish Hamilton

THE RISE OF CANADA'S antisemitism

Emotions ran high through an evening dedicated to addressing the widespread antisemitism crisis infesting Canada

BY **JAZMIN RYMBERG**
HAMILTON JEWISH FEDERATION

Liberal MPs Anthony Housefather, Filomena Tassi, and Lisa Hepfner engaged with the local Jewish community on Nov. 14 during the Hamilton Jewish Federation's #NoMoreAntisemitism talks speaker series. An extension of the 2022 conference of the same name, the series tackles the growing issue of global antisemitism and provides a forum to discuss key topics like media bias and community safety. In his role as the federal government's special advisor on Jewish community relations and antisemitism, Housefather took on questions addressing the community's most urgent concerns.

COMMUNITY CONFRONTS ANTISEMITISM CONTINUES P6



PHOTO: JAZMIN RYMBERG, HAMILTON JEWISH FEDERATION

MP Anthony Housefather, federal government's special advisor on Jewish community relations and antisemitism, responds to audience questions at the Federation's #nomoreantisemitism talks speakers series. SEE COVER STORY **PAGE 7**

Holocaust Education Week at JHamilton

Margaret's Legacy and Hamilton Jewish Federation marked Holocaust Education Week with programming designed to educate and inspire

SEE STORY AND PHOTOS **P7**

“The most haunting thing for Jewish Canadians today is the feeling that these demonstrations are going on unimpeded ...”

ANTHONY HOUSEFATHER,
MP, MOUNT ROYAL, QUE.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

My Uber Driver called me a terrorist

AND WHY I'M GLAD HE DID

LAST MONTH, I was in Ottawa as part of an eight-person contingent from Hamilton taking part in the Shalom Hartman Institute's Courageous Leadership Canada Initiative. During the weekend, three of us called an Uber to travel from a synagogue to Ottawa's National Holocaust Monument. As we fastened our seatbelts, the driver noticed that one of us was wearing a kippah. Without warning, he demanded we get out of the car, sarcastically suggesting we ask Netanyahu for a ride instead. As he sped off, he shouted that we were terrorists, leaving us shocked and standing on the curb.

I'm glad I was called a terrorist. To me, it reaffirms that the work I'm doing (along with many others) is important.

Being a Jewish student on a university campus today sucks, but I can handle it because I'm confident in myself and my identity. But I can't imagine how my younger self could have navigated being Jewish during this time. Kids in school are still in the process of figuring out who they are and forging their identity, but today, Jewish teens are having to navigate what it means to be Jewish with a war raging in the Middle East. People don't want to be friends with terrorists. Teachers don't want to hear the voices of terrorists.

When I was in high school, I was involved in my student council, and that experience played a part in shaping the person I am today. If I were in high school now, I don't think I'd stand a chance running for student council. It makes me sad that opportunities are being taken away from Jewish teens simply because they are Jewish. It makes me sad that Jewish teens are being isolated from social groups and picked on for their beliefs.

I could handle being called a terrorist by a complete stranger. I will never see this man again in my life. What I can't fathom is how I would feel if I had to run into him in the hallway the next day or sit beside him in math. Would I choose to stay home from school or would that be giving him what he wants?

I don't think we can fix this issue, but I do think we can make it a little better. I think that this fight matters. I think that teachers need to understand the definition of antisemitism, that students need to learn the history of Israel, and that Jews need to stand up for themselves and each other. I think this is all doable, and I think that, in Hamilton, we're on the right track.

Students and parents, your voices matter. Join us in our fight against antisemitism in our schools by emailing me at jrosenbaum@bbyo.ca.

JACK ROSENBAUM, BBYO CHAPTER ENGAGEMENT ASSOCIATE

Disturbing developments in Strathcona

JEWISH RESIDENTS AND ALLIES EXPELLED FROM NEIGHBOURHOOD FACEBOOK GROUP

WE WOULD LIKE to inform the Jewish community about disturbing developments in a Strathcona Facebook group. It has been disheartening to witness what feels like the "ethnic cleansing" of our Jewish neighbours and their allies from this once-inclusive group. Recent events, including a disturbing sticker campaign and sidewalk graffiti calling for the annihilation of Israel, and other graphic claims, have fostered an atmosphere of hostility that has upset many families in our neighbourhood, particularly those with children. We were told it was because of our support for Israel — or in one shocking case — for our own safety. That one among us was verbally assaulted with the words "baby killer" for merely wearing a dog tag is indicative of a deeply troubling trend. In contrast to this unsettling atmosphere, it has been truly heartwarming to witness the number of non-Jewish residents who have stepped up to voice their opposition to this antisemitism. The new friendships that have been formed serve as a powerful reminder of the strength we derive from solidarity. To our non-Jewish friends and neighbours: your support and advocacy mean more to us than words can express. In a time when many of us feel under attack, your courage to stand against hate and discrimination brings hope and resilience. Let us work together to foster a community where inclusion triumphs over division. Our strength lies in our commitment to stand together against bigotry of all kinds.

JAN SUMMER STRATHCONA RESIDENT

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

Creating a real “Shakespeareance”



PHOTO BY WENDY SCHNEIDER, HAMILTON JEWISH NEWS

Does Shakespeare’s *The Merchant of Venice* have a contemporary role in theatres and schools? This was the theme of an interactive workshop at Beth Jacob Synagogue on Nov. 24 by Shakespeareance Performing Arts, a non-profit organization that brings professional actors into Ontario classrooms with the goal of making Shakespeare more accessible. Above, Canadian actors Colm Feore and Robyn Stevan perform a scene from the play, as Shakespeareance founder Marvin Karon directs the action. The 90-minute workshop sparked lively debate over whether Shakespeare’s depiction of Shylock perpetuates antisemitic stereotypes.

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HJN

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Federation hires security expert to safeguard Jewish institutions

Former Halton police officer, Glenn Mannella will direct Federation's community security program

BY WENDY SCHNEIDER
HAMILTON JEWISH NEWS

The Hamilton Jewish Federation has appointed Glenn Mannella, a seasoned law enforcement professional, to strengthen the safety and security of the city's Jewish institutions. With more than 30 years of experience with the Halton Regional Police, Mannella brings a wealth of knowledge in security operations and a deep understanding of both the human and operational sides of policing. His appointment is part of a collaboration between the Federation and the Secure Community Network (SCN), a nonprofit established by the Jewish Federations of North America (JFNA) to enhance security for Jewish communities across the continent.

Mannella recently completed rigorous training at SCN's Chicago headquarters, where experts monitor antisemitic extremism and hate incidents. In his new role, he will focus on conducting security assessments for Hamilton's Jewish institutions, fostering relationships with law enforcement and community leaders, developing a coordinated crisis response network, and implementing training programs to help staff and community members identify and address potential threats.

Mannella sees his role as an opportunity to leverage his operational planning and crisis management skills to benefit a community facing rising security challenges. "With SCN's support, we are well-positioned to create a safer environment for Hamilton's Jewish institutions," he said.

Federation CEO Gustavo Rymberg



PHOTO: WENDY SCHNEIDER, HAMILTON JEWISH NEWS

welcomed Mannella's appointment, stating, "Having Glenn on board brings peace of mind. His expertise, combined with SCN's resources, provides our community with a level of security we couldn't achieve on our own."

The Hamilton Jewish Federation joins a growing network of federations partnering with SCN to establish comprehensive security programs designed with an "all threats, all hazards" approach. These initiatives connect directly to SCN's National Jewish Security Operations Command Center, providing access to best practices, resources, and support for physical security, training, and incident response.

Mannella's position is funded by the Federation's community security fund, with additional support from JFNA's \$130-million LiveSecure Campaign—the largest initiative to date for creating a security infrastructure for Jewish communities across North America.

Grateful for the warm welcome he has received, Mannella expressed his enthusiasm for the role. "The appreciation for this position being filled is humbling, and I'm thrilled to be part of this critical initiative," he said.

Glen Manella brings 30 years of experience in law enforcement with the Halton Regional Police to his new role with the Federation.

Education committee aims for greater advocacy role

Efforts focus on antisemitism in Hamilton's public schools

BY WENDY SCHNEIDER
HAMILTON JEWISH NEWS

A DEDICATED group of eight local educators has come together to develop community-wide educational and social initiatives aimed at addressing antisemitism in the public school system. The group includes Arielle Farber, a supply teacher with the Halton District School Board, parent of three, and HHA PTA member; Inbal Chaimovitz, a Jewish educator and mother of four; Lila Strub, an experienced educator and head of education at Margaret's Legacy Holocaust Learning and Advocacy Centre; Dora-Ann Cohen Ellison, a mother of two, HWDSB elementary school teacher, and director of religious education at Temple Anshe Sholom; Aviva Millstone, co-director of Camp Ramah Canada and mother of three; Rabbi Ben Shefter, Hillel director and father of three; and Jack Rosenbaum, a BBYO staff member. The newest members of Federation's education committee were recruited by its chair, Romy Friedman, a high school science teacher with 18 years of experience, eight of which have been with the Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board (HWDSB).

Since September, the committee has concentrated on advocating for Jewish students in the public school system, advancing antisemitism awareness training for school board administrators, and supporting new initiatives within the city's Jewish day and afternoon schools.

The make-up of this year's committee—which has representation from across the communal spectrum—is the fulfilment of Friedman's long-held dream to see greater community

collaboration and cohesion. In her seven years of volunteering for Federation, Friedman says their dedicated efforts towards improving Jewish students' lived reality and combating antisemitism in the schools as "the most momentum I've ever seen happen."

"It's exciting. We're embracing the advocacy role where we're coordinating efforts, setting up meetings with public school boards, and listening to what parents and students have to say," she said.

BBYO's Jack Rosenbaum said he's excited by the committee's support for his vision of creating a network of Jewish teens in Hamilton from across the religious spectrum.

"There are big issues that the Jewish community is facing around education right now, and I feel like I am a part of a group of people who are passionate about facing these issues head-on and really helping to make meaningful change in the public school and in the Jewish community as a whole."

Friedman's deep understanding of both the public school system and the Jewish community—bolstered by her role as a Federation board member and her involvement in Holocaust education—positions her perfectly to advance the committee's initiatives. Whether guiding a concerned Jewish parent from a WhatsApp group to the appropriate school board official or connecting HWDSB administrators with antisemitism training opportunities at the Margaret's Legacy Holocaust Learning and Jewish Advocacy Centre, Friedman plays a pivotal role in bridging these efforts.

"I feel like we're doing a lot this year. And since Oct. 7, there's been a lot of need ... I want to use all the amazing people we have working towards the same goals and actually see outcomes."

Jewish student forum gives voice to student concerns

A joint project between BBYO and the Hamilton Jewish Federation

BY WENDY SCHNEIDER
HAMILTON JEWISH NEWS

IN THE 15 months since the Hamas terrorist attacks on October 7, 2023 triggered a year of intense violence in Israel, Gaza, and across the Middle East, Jewish students in public schools have borne the impact of anti-Israel activism, which often manifests as antisemitic bullying. With Jewish students representing only a small minority in local schools, many have felt outnumbered and unheard. This prompted the creation of the Jewish Student Forum, a collaborative initiative between the Hamilton

Jewish Federation and BBYO as a vehicle through which Jewish students can share their concerns directly with Hamilton Wentworth District School Board (HWDSB) administrators.

The forum held its inaugural meeting on Oct. 8 at JHamilton, where moderators Noah Jaye, a Grade 12 student at Dundas Valley Secondary School, and Liav Yakov, a Grade 11 student at Westmount Secondary School, encouraged the eight attendees to share their experiences. HWDSB Director of Education Sheryl Petrazzini, along with several principals and trustees, were present to listen.

"A lot of them raised really good points," Jaye said. Yakov echoed the sentiment. "I think we got off to a good start. The students were taking the lead and were on point, which



PHOTO: WENDY SCHNEIDER, HAMILTON JEWISH NEWS

BBYO members Noah Jaye (front row, second from right) and Liav Yakov (front row, far right) at the first Jewish Student Forum meeting with HWDSB administrators.

made me really happy."

But Yakov, who's grown accustomed to seeing Palestinian flags displayed in certain classrooms and to the existence of an anti-genocide club founded by a teacher at his school, is less confident about board administrators' ability or willingness to depoliticize school environments.

"It's tough because the board doesn't want to limit freedom of speech," he said. Nevertheless, Yakov is still hopeful that the forum's activity will positively impact the Jewish student experience. "I want more neutrality, as well as more support ... I'd just like to come to school and feel safe," he said.

Margaret's Legacy nominated for 2024 YMCA peace medal



PHOTO: WENDY SCHNEIDER, HAMILTON JEWISH NEWS

The **Margaret's Legacy** Holocaust Learning and Jewish Advocacy Centre was one of five nominees honoured on Nov. 27 for a YMCA Peace Medal award for demonstrating a commitment to the values of peace through contributions made within their local, national, or global community. YMCA presenters Alyssa Lai and Karet Sakran are pictured above with Maggie Norris, Jazmin Rymberg, Sasha Weisz, Janet Weisz Asa, Gustavo Rymberg, and Lila Strub.

Romy Friedman receives teaching award

BY **WENDY SCHNEIDER**
HAMILTON JEWISH NEWS

LOCAL HIGH school teacher Romy Friedman has been honoured with the 2024 Sharon Enkin Teacher Award for Excellence in Holocaust Education. This distinguished award is given annually to elementary or secondary teachers within the Hamilton-Wentworth District Public or Catholic School boards who demonstrate exceptional dedication to Holocaust education.

Federation CEO Gustavo Rymberg presented Friedman with the award during Holocaust Education Week, praising her as “a tireless ambassador who promotes Holocaust education and provides essential resources for administrators, staff, and students. Her innovative approach to teaching has made a lasting impact on countless young minds.”

Friedman has significantly advanced Holocaust education by ensuring access to relevant resources, fostering collaboration between the Jewish community and public



PHOTO: WENDY SCHNEIDER, HAMILTON JEWISH NEWS

education, and creating opportunities for meaningful dialogue. She is also recognized for championing the importance of teaching students to make ethical decisions and for empowering Jewish students to share their perspectives with school administrators.

Romy Friedman, after being presented with the Sharon Enkin Teacher Award by Federation CEO Gustavo Rymberg.

Paul Jaye runs for Ward 4 trustee position

BY **WENDY SCHNEIDER**
HAMILTON JEWISH NEWS

THE ABSENCE of Jewish representation on the Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board has been a central topic in community discussions regarding the need to sensitize school board trustees to the needs of Jewish students. The Hamilton Jewish Federation is pleased to support community member Paul Jaye's decision to run for the vacant school board trustee position in Ward 4, following the resignation of trustee Ray Mulholland last fall. Ward 4 encompasses the lower city, bordered by the Escarpment and King's Forest Golf Course

to the south, Hamilton Harbour to the north, Ottawa Street to the west, and the Red Hill Valley/Expressway to the east. Residents or landowners in Ward 4 who support the HWDSB are eligible to vote to fill this vacancy. Online voter registration opened on Dec. 1 and closes on January 6, 2025. If elected, Jaye aims to ensure that all students, regardless of their background, feel safe and free from discrimination based on their identity. Originally from Toronto, Jaye brings extensive experience as a senior director of research in various corporate settings and a long history of volunteering within the Jewish community.



Paul Jaye says that if he's elected, his priority will be to make every student from any background feel safe.

Hamilton Jewish Federation letter to Minister of Education Jill Dunlop and Ontario Premier Doug Ford

November 25, 2024

Dear Minister Dunlop,
I am writing to you as a deeply concerned member of the Jewish community about the Human Rights and Equity practices within the Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board (HWDSB), particularly regarding the systemic exclusion of Jewish voices from key decision-making roles.

While I recognize and appreciate HWDSB's efforts to foster inclusive environments, the current composition of its Human Rights department lacks meaningful Jewish representation. Instead, the department appears dominated by individuals affiliated with a single minority group, creating a dynamic that isolates Jewish and Israeli parents, students, and staff. This imbalance raises critical questions about whether the department can effectively address the diverse needs of the communities it serves.

This lack of representation has tangible and harmful consequences. Jewish parents and students frequently feel they have no one to turn to for support within the department. Additionally, a review of social media activity by some staff members suggests affiliations or perspectives that may reflect biases against Jewish and Israeli individuals. How can a department tasked with fostering equity and human rights adequately support communities it does not represent or understand?

Numerous Jewish parents are voicing concerns about bullying, antisemitism, and the lack of meaningful action taken to address these issues within HWDSB. These are not isolated incidents but part of a troubling pattern that further underscores the systemic inequities within the Board. Furthermore, a letter from Jewish teachers detailing their own experiences and concerns has been submitted to your office. I urge you to review their accounts, as they provide critical insight into the challenges faced by Jewish students and staff in our schools.

A notable example of these systemic challenges occurred with HWDSB's Equity Action Plan. Its initial cover imagery marginalized Jewish voices, whether intentionally or inadvertently. Although the document has since been revised, this incident underscores the risks of exclusion in decision-making processes. Such missteps could have been prevented with diverse perspectives at the table, including Jewish voices.

My own attempts to constructively engage with HWDSB have been met with dismissiveness. Minister Dunlop, I urge you to address these critical issues with urgency. Specifically, I request the following actions:

1. An Immediate Review of HWDSB's Human Rights Department

Evaluate whether the department's structure, practices, and staffing align with the Ministry's commitment to equity and inclusion for all communities, including the Jewish community.

2. Guidance on Hiring Practices for Equity and Inclusion Roles

Ensure that individuals in these roles are free from biases and assess whether their affiliations or past activities might compromise their ability to serve all communities equitably.

3. Mandatory Jewish Representation in Equity and Human Rights Departments

Jewish voices must be included in decision-making spaces to prevent further marginalization.

4. Development of Training and Education on Antisemitism

Incorporate contemporary understandings of antisemitism, including antizionism, into staff training to ensure these issues are effectively recognized and addressed.

As a Jewish parent and an active member of the community, I implore you to take decisive action to ensure Jewish students, parents, and staff are fully supported, respected, and represented within HWDSB and across Ontario's education system.

Thank you for your attention to this urgent matter. I would welcome the opportunity to discuss these concerns further and work collaboratively toward solutions that uphold the principles of equity and inclusivity.

Sincerely,

Gustavo Rymberg
CEO, Hamilton Jewish Federation

“I’m unaware of any other segment of society that has to hide its identity” **LOREN LIEBERMAN**

Hamilton community confronts antisemitism

CONTINUED FROM THE FRONT PAGE

AFTER HOUSEFATHER’S keynote address, audience members shared their concerns about the increasing prevalence of antisemitism in schools and public spaces. Parents highlighted issues in Hamilton high schools, where fear of harassment has compelled many young people to conceal their Jewish identity. Others raised concerns about the exclusion of Jews from Equity, Diversity, and Inclusivity (EDI) initiatives at McMaster University and the University of Guelph.

The CBC came under fire for consistently giving a platform to anti-Israel perspectives, while Canada’s unions were also called out for allowing anti-Israel propaganda to go unchallenged.

In response to a question about the federal government’s decision to resume funding the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), Housefather explained that while he voted against the decision, the reality is that “most of the world” sees UNRWA as the agency best positioned to administer aid delivery in Gaza. His comment led to Hamilton Jewish Federation’s director of communications, marketing, and public relations, Jazmin Rymberg, posing a broader question to the other two MPs.

“Antisemitism isn’t just a fight for the Jewish community,” she said. “I’d love to hear from all three of you. This is not a battle we can win alone.”

Minister Tassi responded by affirming her commitment to combating antisemitism and fostering inclusive communities. She further explained that, as a cabinet minister, she was obligated to support the government’s decision on restoring UNRWA funding. “I try and do the best I can each and every day,” she told the audience.

“Am I always getting it right? Probably not. But am I trying as hard as I can? Absolutely.”

Hepfner spoke about her recent experiences on a parliamentary trip to Israel and expressed her solidarity with the Jewish community, particularly after witnessing the events of Oct. 7.

One of the evening’s most pointed comments came from Loren Lieberman, who said he takes no solace in comparing antisemitism in Canada to antisemitism in other countries.

“I would rather compare ourselves to other communities,” he said. “My grandchildren go to the Hamilton Hebrew Academy. They have never gone to school without armed guards. I don’t know of any other segments of Hamilton’s ethnic communities that can say the same thing. We have generations in this city that have not gone to a synagogue outside of a police presence. Can Muslims say that? Can Buddhists say that?”

The sense of isolation felt by many Jews in today’s political climate was underscored by Strathcona resident Gillian Creighton, who expressed concerns about her Jewish neighbors feeling let down by NDP Member of Parliament Matthew Green due to his anti-Israel stance. “How can the Jewish community in Strathcona feel safe or supported when they can’t trust their own Member of Parliament to advocate for them?” she questioned.

Housefather responded by emphasizing the need for Jewish Canadians to have advocates in all three federal parties.

The evening raised an important issue for the Liberal Party as it prepares for re-election: how can Jewish



PHOTO: WENDY SCHNEIDER, HAMILTON JEWISH NEWS

Canadians feel assured when cabinet members, due to their role within the party, are required to vote in line with government positions on sensitive issues? While Tassi is stepping down from her position, her replacement will also face the same challenge of balancing party loyalty with addressing the concerns of Jewish Canadians and other communities on these critical matters.

Housefather urged the community to maintain its pride as Canadians, stressing the long history of Jewish contributions to the country. However, he also acknowledged that the rise of antisemitism, particularly on social media, has contributed to a sense of fear among many Jewish Canadians.

“There is no benefit to feeling like we can’t leave our house or wear a Star of David,” Housefather said, urging the community to continue engaging with the political system and

advocating for their rights. He also pointed out the generational divide, with older Jewish Canadians, who are less active on social media, expressing less concern about antisemitism compared to younger, more digitally connected generations.

The evening underscored the urgency of addressing the challenges facing the Hamilton Jewish community, including rising antisemitism, media bias, and the need for stronger political engagement. While Housefather’s participation in the session was appreciated, his role as the primary spokesperson for the Jewish community left many attendees questioning the lack of participation from the other MPs. The #noMoreAntisemitism talks are made possible through the Milli and Allen Gould Foundation.

The Hamilton Jewish Federation has invited representatives from all three major political parties to address the Jewish community and does not endorse any political party.

Community members expressed frustration to Members of Parliament over school boards failure to address antisemitism in schools

“How can we feel safe or confident when our own MP won’t advocate for us?”

GILLIAN CREIGHTON

Strathcona neighbourhood resident

“We have generations in this city that have not gone to a synagogue outside of a police presence.”

LOREN LIEBERMAN

Community member

*Wishing our community
Happy Chanukah!*

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Holocaust Education Week at JHamilton

10 days of profound and meaningful encounters for our community members and leaders, students and teachers

BY JAZMIN RYMBERG
HAMILTON JEWISH FEDERATION

MARGARET'S LEGACY and Hamilton Jewish Federation marked Holocaust Education Week with 10 days of programming designed to educate and inspire. Teachers, civil servants, Jewish community professionals, volunteers, and lay leaders participated in specialized training, while high school and middle school students attended thought-provoking seminars.

International presenters included Edward Serotta, the head of the Vienna-based institute Centropa, as well as Yad Vashem educators Yoni Berrous and Sheryl Ochayon. Canadian children's author Kathy Kacer presented *By Chance Alone*, her latest book recounting the true story of Holocaust survivor Max Eisen and

his resilience in the face of unimaginable loss.

"It was incredible to see the space utilized for its intended purpose," said Gustavo Rymberg, Hamilton Jewish Federation CEO. "When we broke ground just over a year ago, this was a dream. Now, it's a reality, surpassing even our hopes."

Visitors connected profoundly with the artifacts, particularly those with ties to Hamilton residents. Staff were especially impressed by the respect, curiosity, and insightful questions posed by students to the presenters. Margaret's Legacy Holocaust and Jewish Advocacy Centre, located at JHamilton at 1605 Main St. W., welcomes volunteers and visitors. To get involved or plan a visit, please visit margaretslegacy.com.



A high school student asks a question during a session led by children's author Kathy Kacer.

PHOTOS: WENDY SCHNEIDER, HAMILTON JEWISH NEWS AND JAZMIN RYMBERG, HAMILTON JEWISH FEDERATION



Far left: Middle school students ask Kathy Kacer to sign copies of her book.



Left: International educators Ed Serotta from the Centropa Institute and Yoni Berrous from Yad Vashem engage HWDSB teachers in a discussion about teaching the Holocaust.



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Dr. Nick Kates

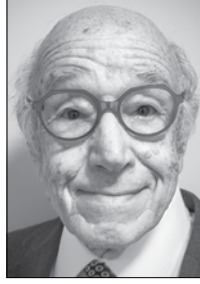
THE HJN and Hamilton Jewish Federation congratulate the following community members for the recognition and notable accomplishments they've achieved in their respective fields.

Dr. Nick Kates

The Canadian Psychiatric Association (CPA) recently awarded Dr. Nick Kates with a Special Recognition Award for his life-long contributions to advancing collaborative mental health care in Canada.

As chair of the Canadian Collaborative Mental Health Initiative (CCMHI) from 2003 to 2007, Dr. Kates led a consortium of 12 national organizations who worked together to support the delivery of mental health services in primary care through interdisciplinary collaboration.

Kates has consulted to more than 100 Canadian and international



Leslie (Les) Lasky

governments, organizations—including in Holland, Denmark, the U.S., the U.K., Israel, Ethiopia, New Zealand and Australia. During his 12 years as director of the Hamilton Family Health Team's mental health and nutrition program, Dr. Kates integrated mental health counsellors and dietitians into 170 family physician offices and inspired countless residents to follow in his footsteps and practice in, and advocate for, collaborative mental healthcare.

Leslie (Les) Lasky

Leslie (Les) Lasky is this year's recipient of the City of Hamilton's Bernie Morelli Lifetime Achievement Award, one of nine Senior of the Year awards presented to adults 65 and older who contribute time and talent to enrich the community's social, cultural or civic life. Lasky was recognized for serving on the boards of Theatre Aquarius, St. Joseph's Hospital, the



Jennifer Howe-Loewith

United Way of Hamilton Burlington and the Hamilton Community Foundation. In the Jewish community, Lasky served as president of Beth Jacob Synagogue, the Hamilton Jewish Federation, and Shalom Village. During his 50 years of service at Shalom Village, Lasky played a crucial role in fundraising to build the residence.

Jennifer Howe-Loewith

Congratulations to Summit Station Dairy's Jennifer Howe-Loewith, who was a nominee finalist for the 2024 Women in Ag Award, organized by the German Agricultural Society and the Women in Ag magazine. The award celebrates the role of women in agriculture. With more than 100 applications received from 34 nations, reflecting innovative approaches within the agricultural sector, being recognized as a finalist was a notable accomplishment.

“Tuesdays with Morrie” onstage at Player’s Guild Theatre

BY **SANDI KATZ**
SPECIAL TO HAMILTON JEWISH NEWS

HAMILTON Jewish community members may recall attending the 2019 production of *Visiting Mr. Green* at The Pearl Company, which I directed, and which starred Howard Jerome and Daniel Schneiderman. Enid Aaron, Dan Penrose and I had formed Snapping Turtle Productions that year and produced the play as an independent theatre company. As it was a major hit for the Pearl Company, Dan and I attempted to mount the sequel which at that time was titled, *This Is My Family*. We contacted Jeff Baron who wrote the original and the sequel. He held the rights and sent us the draft script for us to hold as a public reading with him in attendance, but

Howard Jerome had sadly passed away the following year, and The Pearl Company had folded. Jeff asked us to audition a reading of the play on Zoom with a new Mr. Green, Michael Hannigan, and Dan Schneiderman reprising his role as well as two other new actors. Jeff told us he was not ready to release the play as a full production, and so we disappointedly moved on.

It's now 2024. The global pandemic is over. We submitted a play proposal to a local community theatre for a play that might resonate in a way that “*Visiting Mr. Green*” had. A popular two-hander, “*Tuesdays with Morrie*” came up as a possible show for the Players Guild Season in 2025. It was the 25th anniversary of the novel written by Mitch Albom. We



PHOTO: COURTESY SANDI KATZ

Local actors Greg Solomon and James Vezina, who play Mitch Albom and Morrie Schwartz in *Tuesdays with Morrie*.

felt that the play, as well as the novel, needed to be celebrated. We submitted the play derived from the novel and it was accepted as the third play of the season. We are thrilled to have cast two local professional actors in the roles of Morrie and Mitch. James Vezina (Morrie) and Greg Solomon

NEED TO KNOW

What: Tuesdays with Morrie

Where: Player's Guild Studio Theatre, 80 Queen St. S., Hamilton.

When: March 14, 15, 20, 21, 27, 28 & 29 at 8 p.m. March 16, 22, 23 & 29, 2025 at 2 p.m.

Contact: Call 905.529.0284 or visit playersguild.org.

(Mitch) created magic during their audition process.

Even though the play has been a popular choice on community theatre rosters for a couple of decades, it has a timeless appeal and needs to be seen. As Dan Penrose describes, “This play is a rich, true account of a man facing his mortality and his journey with his former student along for the ride.” This play is more about living than dying.

Both Mr. Green, a Jewish man in his 80s, and Morrie Schwartz, a Jewish sociology college professor, have tremendous impact on their younger protégés and their friendships kindle the flame of transformation and self-acceptance. Their influences are equally life affirming and life changing. In both of these plays, we are all transported to a place of *tikkun olam* through *mitzvot*.

Even though it may not be on a Tuesday, spending an evening with Morrie will be an unforgettable learning experience.



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Bohemian Beirut a welcome addition to Dundas food scene

Lebanese restaurateur Maro Al Chamaa wants to build authentic connections with his Jewish customers

BY WENDY SCHNEIDER
HAMILTON JEWISH NEWS

THE ONLY thing Maro Al Chamaa knew about Jews before walking into a 2013 Stratford performance of *Fiddler on the Roof* was the antisemitic propaganda he had absorbed while growing up in Lebanon, but he walked out of that theatre several hours later profoundly changed. The fear and prejudice he once harboured gave way to a sense of connection and shared humanity, especially as he recognized parallels between his own values and those depicted in the play—most notably in Tevye’s struggle with his daughter Chava’s marriage to a gentile.

“You have to remember, I’m Druze, and Druze don’t marry outside the faith ... I was already married out, so right away, I’m looking at her and thinking, this is my story.”

Maro Al Chamaa is the dynamic owner of *Bohemian Beirut*, a newly opened restaurant in downtown Dundas that radiates Middle Eastern charm and hospitality. Sitting in the restaurant’s



PHOTO: WENDY SCHNEIDER, HAMILTON JEWISH NEWS

Bohemian Beirut owner Maro Al Chamaa, is a seasoned restaurateur with a gift for bold choices. Top right: Fried cabbage with pesto feta cheese.

sunlit alcove on a November morning before opening hours, he shared his journey with the *Hamilton Jewish News*—a journey defined by bold choices and a fearless embrace of life’s possibilities. From moving to Canada at 17 and converting to the Bahá’í Faith, to twice marrying and divorcing Iranian women, building a reputation as a celebrated Oakville restaurateur, and falling

in love with a space that became *Bohemian Beirut*, Al Chamaa’s life is a testament to following one’s heart.

Bohemian Beirut marks Al Chamaa’s third foray into the restaurant world. His two Oakville establishments, *Maro’s Bistro* and *Narenj*, have become beloved community gathering spots, and he’s determined to make his latest venture just as inviting—a



PHOTO: KALOR MEDIA

place where guests feel truly at home. Judging by the full house during the *Hamilton Jewish News*’ lunch visit, he’s well on his way to achieving that goal.

Bohemian Beirut, Al Chamaa explains, is his tribute to the city that shaped him. “I brought Beirut here. This is Beirut,” he said, “It’s a place where everybody can come, connect, laugh, and be themselves. You have to be yourself. You can’t connect with anyone if you can’t be yourself. I understand that Israelis and Jews are wary but all that my message is is be yourself.”

This philosophy of acceptance and coexistence hasn’t come without challenges. Al Chamaa’s Oakville restaurants faced social media backlash during earlier clashes between Israel and Gaza,

and the hostility has only intensified in the past year.

When asked if the negative campaigns have hurt his business, Al Chamaa is resolute.

“Absolutely not. I’m a businessman.

I tell the haters that 95 per cent of Middle Eastern people who come to my restaurant are Israelis.”

Despite the criticism, Al Chamaa rejects political labels. “I’m not pro-Israel. I’m not pro-Palestine. I’m pro finding solutions so we can live together. We are very rich cultures. You have no idea how much the world can benefit from us. I mean Arabs and Jews.”

Aware that a feature in a Jewish publication might spark further backlash, Al Chamaa remains undeterred.

“I believe that if you want to hate, not matter what I do, you will hate. Yes, I’m going to lose lots of Arab customers, but on the other side, I’m achieving what I believe in. The reality is we have to learn how to live together.”

For Al Chamaa, the restaurant is more than a business—it’s a platform for connection. “This is my goal, the restaurant is a front. The food is the minimum requirement. You’re fascinated with the vibe, with the décor, with the food? Done. Now I catch your eye. Can we build connection?”

On October 7, 2024, nearly 1,000 Jewish Hamiltonians and allies united as one to commemorate a year since Hamas’ terrorist rampage in Israel.

We came together to mourn the victims,
to pray for the release of the hostages,
to dance through the pain,
and to march with pride.

Thank you for standing with us.
Your participation made this moment unforgettable.

**Together, we remember.
Together, we stand.**



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We wish you and yours a very happy Hanukkah!

Keep your eyes on your inbox for our upcoming Hanukkah appeal in support of the outstanding Shalom Village Staff who help our residents and participants to enjoy "Moments that Matter" each and every day!



Hamilton Jewish Film Festival returns to Ancaster venue

2025 Festival will take place at Ancaster Memorial Arts Centre March 23 to 25

BY **HELAINÉ ORTMANN**
SPECIAL TO HAMILTON JEWISH NEWS

After last year's record-breaking turnout, the Hamilton Jewish Federation is excited to announce the return of the 2025 Hamilton Jewish Film Festival (HJFF) from March 23 to 25, 2025, at Peller Hall, Ancaster Memorial Arts Centre—a welcoming venue that has graciously opened its doors once again.

Featuring six absorbing feature films and documentaries, this year's lineup stays true to the HJFF's mission of engaging the Jewish community while fostering understanding of Jewish culture, Israel, and Jewish history within the broader Hamilton community.

Sunday, March 23

Sunday's line up features three outstanding Israeli films beginning at 1p.m. with "Seven Blessings." Based on a true story, this award-winning film portrays the unique tradition in Moroccan culture where families gave away their children to relatives

who are unable to conceive. The moving story tells the story of a new bride who struggles with the traumatic discovery of being given away while searching to understand, love and forgive.

At 3:30 p.m., the Canadian premiere of "Outsider, Freud" will be screened. This imaginative documentary by renowned Israeli filmmaker Yair Qedar blends rare archival footage with brilliant dreamlike animation to explore the life and work of Sigmund Freud. A pre-recorded Q&A with the director will follow.

Following Sunday's second film, guests are invited to a reception before the 6 p.m. screening of "Bliss," the latest feature from acclaimed Israeli director Shemi Zarhin featuring stellar performances by Israeli actors Sasson Gabay and Assi Levy. HJFF committee member Daniel Kollek describes this as a "beautiful film about love between couples and across generations, love that uplifts and hurts, love that sacrifices and love that forgives." Filmed in northern Israel before the October 7 war, "Bliss" provides a record of place that may never be the same again.

Monday, March 24

The second day opens at 6:30 p.m.



PHOTO: SUPPLIED BY ISRAELI FILMS

"Bliss," a film by Shemi Zarhin starring Israeli actors Asi Levi and Sasson Gabay.

with "Thirteen," a touching short film inspired by true events. It highlights a mother's relentless quest to hold a Bat Mitzvah for her disabled daughter, challenging societal barriers with love and determination.

At 7:00 p.m., the documentary "Rabbi on the Block" will be shown. It follows Tamar, a Black Jewish rabbinical student and activist, as she brings her faith from the synagogue to the streets of Chicago. Following the film, Rivka Campbell, executive director of Beth Tikvah Synagogue in Toronto, will lead a discussion on diversity, antisemitism, and women's evolving roles in Judaism.

Tuesday, March 25

The festival concludes with "We Will Dance Again," a deeply moving documentary recounting the stories of survivors from the Nova Festival massacre of October 7, 2023. Through powerful interviews, the film honors those who lived and pays tribute to those lost. A special post-film program will follow.

Ticket price per film is \$18 with a Festival pass at \$90 (\$60 for students). Sponsorship opportunities are also available. For more information visit jewishhamilton.org for more information or contact Wendy Schneider at wschneider@jewishhamilton.org.

Chag Chanukah Sameach

Wishing you and your loved ones warmth and light this Chanukah season.

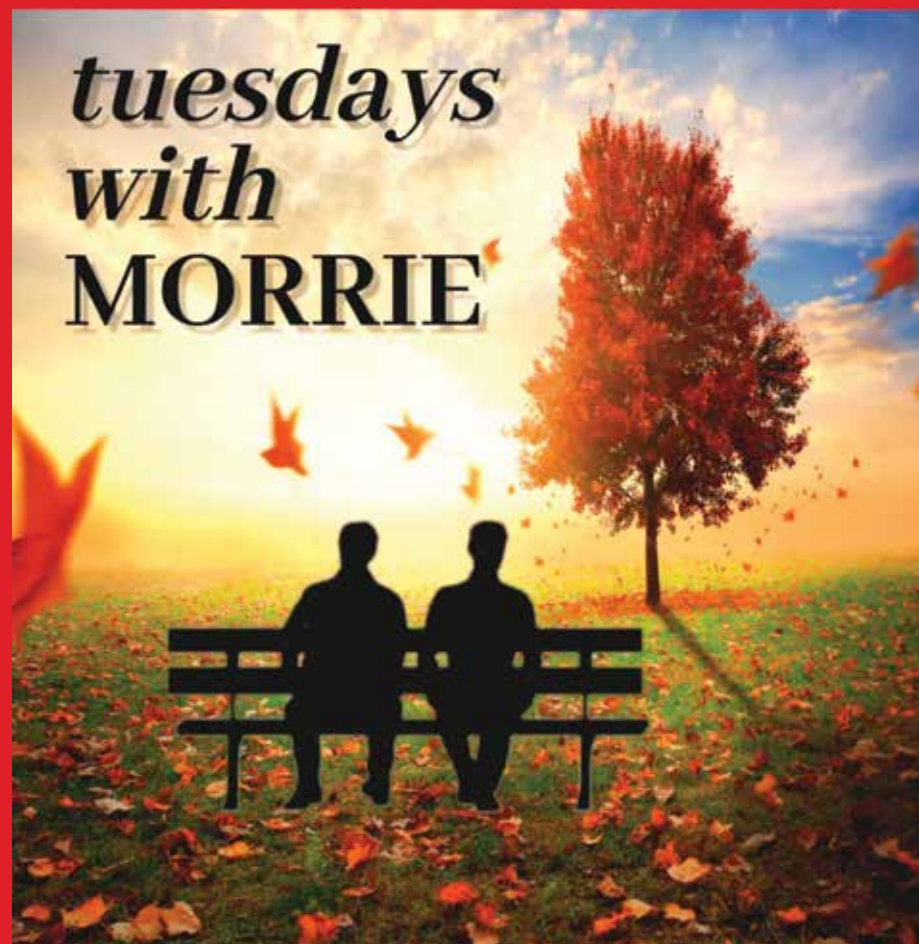
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tuesdays with MORRIE



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Presented at the Player's Guild Studio Theatre
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March 14, 15, 20, 21, 27, 28 & 29, 2025 at 8 p.m.
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SAVE THE DATES HAMILTON JEWISH FILM FESTIVAL

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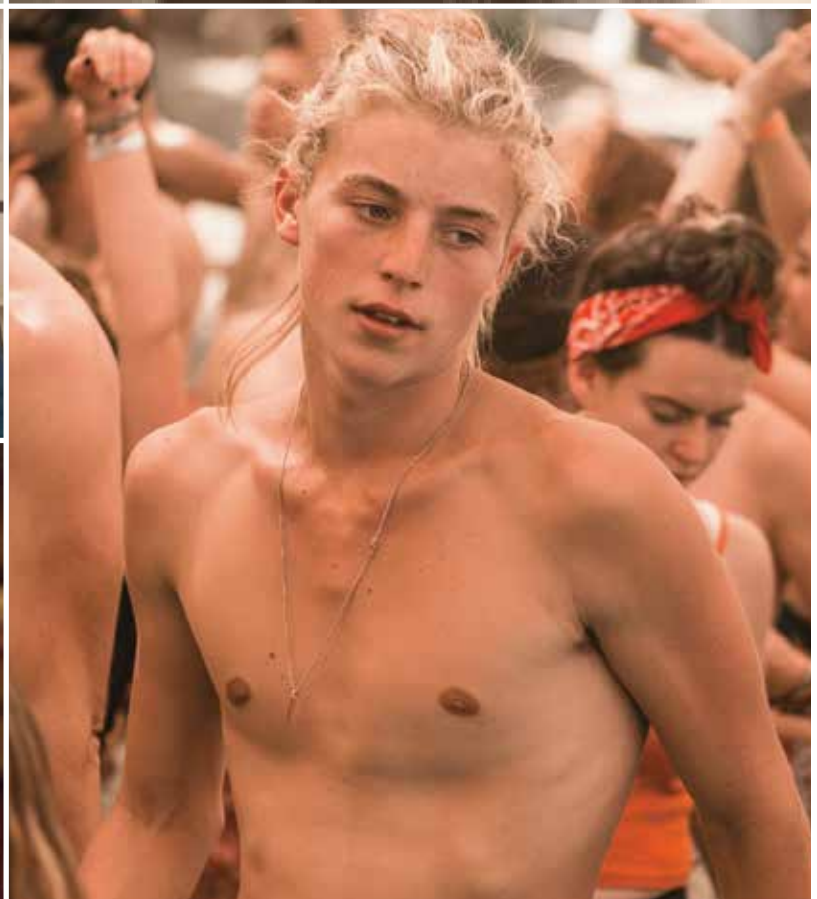
BLISS

OUTSIDER, FREUD

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MORE INFORMATION AT JEWISHHAMILTON.ORG

THANK

As we near the end of our Annual Community Campaign, we are filled with immense gratitude and pride for the unwavering commitment and generosity you have shown. Your contributions have brought us closer than ever to reaching our goal, and it is thanks to you that we can continue building a vibrant, caring, and resilient Jewish community.

Your support ensures that vital programs, services, and initiatives thrive—strengthening Jewish life in Hamilton, supporting those in need, and standing in solidarity with our brothers and sisters in Israel and around the world.

Every donation, every act of kindness, and every gesture of support makes a difference. Thank you for your belief in our shared mission and for your incredible generosity.

Let's keep the momentum going and finish this campaign strong!

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For more information please contact Elaine Levine, Campaign Director at elvine@jewishhamilton.org

The minyan maker

Helping others is an opportunity to help yourself



Harvey Starkman

I IMAGINE you still remember where you were at the very cusp of the COVID-19 lockdown in March 2020.

My wife and I were in southern France, waiting for a Sunday train to take us to Paris and a rushed flight home.

That's how on a bright Shabbat morning, I found myself in a once grand Orthodox synagogue in Bayonne, the unexpected ninth man in the congregation. My presence had clearly raised the rabbi's hopes: if one more man appeared, he could lead a full Torah service. The fact that there were at least five women on their side of the sanctuary didn't count. After half an hour of shivering in the unheated sanctuary, one of the original eight congregants returned with a 14-year-old boy in tow, the minyan was made, and the prayers for taking out the Torah began.

I had been in a similar position once before.

Years earlier, on a cold, rainy November evening my wife, two young sons and I were sitting in a steamy Chinese restaurant on Spadina Avenue in Toronto, deciding what to order. Looking up, I noticed a small man wearing a kippah enter the restaurant and nervously scan the dining area, clearly uncomfortable and unsure of whether or not to enter. Our eyes locked. Hesitating a little, he walked to our table, looked at me closely, and asked if I was Jewish. I've been asked that before, and sometimes I'm a bit wary, wondering what's coming next. I felt like telling him that I was Irish, but this felt like a question carrying some genuine and urgent hope, so I told him I was.

I didn't expect what followed.

He explained that he needed to recite Kaddish for his wife, and they had only nine men at the shul around the corner. He asked if I would go with him to make a minyan. I would be doing a mitzvah he said.

My grandfather, Sam Caplan intuitively

understood the meaning of minyans and mitzvot and would not have hesitated. His shul was on Hunter Street (the original Beth Jacob Synagogue), but they knew in the Cannon Street Shul (the original Adas Israel) and the Hess Street Shul (now located in Shalom Village) that he would come there too if they asked.

Unlike my grandfather, I didn't want to go. I was hungry, I didn't know the man, I didn't want to leave my family, I had no connection with that shul nor with any shul. And I did not understand what it really means to do a mitzvah or who one does the mitzvah for.

At that time, I was at a transitional point in my life, and a lot of my thinking was about me. I was a newly appointed high school department head facing a major test: a departmental evaluation that I saw as either a career maker or career breaker. Maybe going would be a good idea. With all that pressure, I reasoned, a little help wouldn't hurt. Weighing

“I can't resist laughing at the thought that nine orthodox men realized the most likely place to find their minyan maker would be in a Chinese restaurant.”

the potential upsides against the possible downs, I smiled weakly at my wife and boys and followed the man out the door and into the rain.

Like the synagogue in Bayonne, the Anshe Minsk had seen better days, its members long since lost to the lure of the northern suburbs and the globalization of the Spadina garment trade. Descending a basement stairwell, we entered a small, dimly lit space where tattered prayerbooks covered a bare table. Following the briefest of introductions, the service continued, and the man was able to recite the Kaddish prayer. Twenty minutes later, I was back in the restaurant with my family.

With time, I've come to understand that being part of a minyan is an opportunity to help others, not yourself. Still, when I think about how they found me, I can't resist laughing at the thought that in a dank synagogue basement, nine orthodox men, needing just one more Jew, suddenly realized that the most likely place to find their minyan maker would be in a Chinese restaurant.

Harvey Starkman has deep family roots in Hamilton.

Dispelling name change myths

There is no evidence Jewish immigrants changed their names



Kaye Prince-Hollenberg

IN SEPTEMBER, I spoke at the Norfolk County Genealogy Symposium. While discussing Jewish Genealogy in Canada, I mentioned the myth — the persistent bubbe meise — that names were changed at ports of entry. I explained to attendees that there is no evidence that names were ever changed at any port, be it Ellis Island or Pier 21, or any other.

A collective gasp filled the room. I laughed to myself a bit at that as the gasp or the scoff are the two most common reactions I get. I went on to explain that ship manifests were actually prepared at the port of departure and went aboard the ship to its destination.

Surviving artifacts and official documents show that at times, immigrants had a tag pinned to their clothing that denoted their page and line number on the manifest. In fact, the manifests themselves included instructions for reference; Canadian arrival manifests from the 1910s state “Instructions to Pursers: Each passenger should be given a card indicating the number of sheet and line on sheet on which name is to be found. Column 3, 29 and 30 are to be filled in by the Immigration Agent at the Port of Landing.” These columns (which denote money the immigrant travelled with, how they were travelling inland, and the inspector's initials) and sometimes ticking off the names as he went were generally the extent of the inspector's contributions.

The immigrants lined up, presented that page and line information, and went on their way (of course there are other reasons they might be held for longer such as sickness). Can you imagine how long this entire process would have taken if these inspectors were actually filling in full information for each of the thousands of immigrants who arrived on ships every day?

There was no place, chance, or reason for an inspector to change or dole out random new names. A good percentage of inspectors were immigrants themselves or first generation, and many spoke

multiple languages. Spelling variations happen, especially when a name is being transliterated from one language to another, but wholesale name changes were just not a thing.

Interesting research has been done about the persistence of this myth and how these stories have been passed down as truth. Many immigrants did adopt new names themselves, sometimes simply choosing an Anglicized first name, and most did so within five years of immigrating.

Those new names would be used in everyday life, on paperwork, and during the naturalization process. One common theory is that “my name was changed at Ellis Island” was really a euphemism for this entire process — immigration, assimilation, and naturalization. Another theory is that as time went on, some immigrants and their descendants were ashamed or embarrassed about feeling the need to adopt a new name and so blaming the change on an unnamed official helped to explain the change to others without explanation. This was bolstered of course by this myth infiltrating popular media such as *The Godfather Part II* or *An American Tail*.

All of this doesn't make finding an immigrant's original name any easier of course. Look for naturalization papers (which in Canada can be obtained by filing a FOI request, although there are complications here — maybe we'll discuss that in a future column?) and check all of the important life events — I've seen parents recorded on marriage records with their original surname and a baby born years after her father immigrated and changed his name recorded with his original surname. If your immigrant ancestor had siblings or other family who immigrated, check their records as well. You might just get lucky!

In January, I'll be speaking to the London Jewish Federation about Jewish Genealogy in Canada, and in March I'll be speaking at RootsTech about online Holocaust resources. Registration to attend RootsTech online is free, so I hope a few of you will sign up!

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

*Wishing the community
Happy Chanukah!*



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My mother's chicken soup

When I make chicken soup, I think of my mother



Helaine Ortmann

WHEN I MAKE chicken soup, I think of my mother; when I sip it, I feel warm, happy and loved.

Growing up, I remember being in the kitchen, watching her wrestle with the soup chicken she brought home from the kosher butcher.

She washed it, cut it up, removed the skin, plucked any feathers, sprinkled the pieces with kosher salt, and let them sit for an hour or so on a board on the counter. It was messy, sticky, and at times bloody; but nowhere near as awful, she told me, as shopping with her parents at the downtown market for a live chicken she was entrusted to hold in a wagon on the way home.

This was all something I wanted no part of, until Friday nights, when we sat down together as a family to enjoy our *Shabbos* meal.

There were Sephardic-style foods passed down from my father's Bulgarian-Romanian side of the family like hot stuffed peppers with fresh challah to mop up the juice, roasted rice made in a yellow vintage pyrex casserole with a ridged glass cover (now mine and exclusively saved for making roasted rice like my mother and paternal grandmother did), as well as *pastel*, a ground beef meat pie in a flour-oil-water salted pastry dough. These dishes co-mingled amiably with my mother's much anticipated chicken soup with *lokshen* or rice, breaded chicken breasts, overdone vegetables, and dessert.

It was not until after I had my own children that I decided it was time. To make soup. Why would I have made attempts any earlier? My mom's soup — in flavour, colour and shimmer from trace parts of fat — was peerless. Everyone said so; even my cousins. "The gold standard" wrote my brother, a serious foodie and French-trained chef, in the January 2020 obit that summed up mom's life, pleasures and talents.

From memory and with the assistance of the "Second Helpings Please!"

cookbook my mother was prescient enough to gift me when I left home in 1977 for my first job; and, for the well-being of our (then) two young sons, I set out to earn the title of *balabusta* (and expert chicken-soup maker) I so coveted.

After all, wasn't it a young Malcolm Gladwell who postulated in his 2008 book "Outliers" the theory that 10,000 hours of practice was the magic number for greatness? Surely, mom, over her long lifetime, achieved this status.

Fast forward. When I shop, I don't ask for a "nice" *pullet* the way my mother did. That's why I add bones to fortify my soup. The differences don't end there. The chicken I buy is from the kosher section of the grocery store; it is pre-cut into eighths; and the packaging assures me it is already cleaned and salted.

But after this, I am one with history, tradition, and my mother.

I remove the skin using designated meat scissors, carefully drop the pieces into an enamel-coated pot filled almost to the brim with cold water, and, like a doting parent, I hover until the water boils and I can remove the *schum* with my fine mesh strainer; a strangely satisfying process. Then, in go the following: two to three carrots, the same number of celery stalks, one onion, a parsnip, a handful of fresh parsley, and salt to taste. I stir, loosely cover the pot, and let it simmer two hours or so for the alchemy to happen.

Once the soup is cool, I discard all the vegetables except for the carrots (I savour them as long as the soup lasts), remove the chicken, and refrigerate it overnight to let the fat congeal on top. Like renowned cook Noreen Gillett, I take off the *schmaltz* to avoid "unwanted calories or cholesterol" (one less medication), then bag the precious elixir to store in the freezer.

My eldest son, now vegetarian, no longer eats my soup; my younger son does and receives a "care package" every time he comes home to visit. My husband, bless him, patiently waits for holidays and special occasions when I unlock it from the vault.

As a retired person living in Hamilton, Helaine seeks out opportunities in everyday life to nourish mind, body and spirit.

Life without cell phones

In my teenage years, no one assumed a phone call was private



Phyllis Shragge

I HAVE A mental block when it comes to remembering numbers, especially phone numbers. I worry that someday this brain glitch will cause me major grief.

I picture a scenario where I lose my phone, and a kind stranger lets me borrow hers. The borrowed phone is useless to me because I haven't memorized one phone number in my contact list. I've tried, but I've failed. It's sad, but true. I have no recall of any of my five adult children's phone numbers, or the number of a friend. Without a single phone number embedded in my brain, I am paralyzed, stuck in cell phone oblivion, unable to reach anyone who might rescue me.

But then, as I imagine this scenario, my mind switches gears and I rethink my potential problem. What would be so terrible about not being able to instantly reach someone I know? How did I manage in the '80s, before cell phones became the norm?

In those days, if I needed to call someone while I was out, I likely would be out of luck. The first obstacle would be finding a pay phone. Although common in those days, they were not on every street corner. And if I could find a phone, the person I wanted to reach probably wouldn't be home. Being out of touch was the reality.

Nowadays, we expect instantaneous and 24/7 connection with family and friends. If we don't have it, we lose our footing on the well-travelled technological road of life. Obviously, we are too dependent on our phones.

Of course, we rely on our phones for much more than calling and texting. We are dependent on them as a vehicle for research we consider crucial. We can't wait for answers. Where's the nearest pizza restaurant and are the reviews positive? What's the score of the baseball game? What's the current news, here and abroad? God forbid if we don't have

access to what's happening the instant it happens.

We know we're addicted to our phones. We know we depend on them for communication, entertainment, and for the answers to every question that pops into our minds. We know we should limit our usage, and we know if we want a good sleep, we should not be on our phones prior to bedtime. We know all this, but it changes nothing.

I think back to when I was a young teenager. There were two phones in my house, one in the den on the main floor and an extension in my parents' bedroom. In those days, no one assumed a phone call was private.

If the phone rang, the person closest to one of the phones answered, then shouted at the top of his or her voice for so-and-so to pick up. For example, my sister might call out: "Phyllis! Get the phone. It's Fran." I'd rush to the nearest phone, know-

ing full well that everyone in my house knew I was about to chat with my best friend. If I was lucky, my sister would hang up as soon as I got on the phone. If I wasn't, and my sister was in the mood to eavesdrop, I might get a few minutes into the conversation before I noticed she was listening.

Those black-corded phones were our link to the outside world, but their limits were obvious. We had no expectations about those old phones. We couldn't imagine phones of the future that could be transported in a pocket or a purse. We couldn't dream of phones that would magically provide us with information. We'd laugh at the concept of a phone being the first thing we would look at in the morning and the last thing we check at night.

Interestingly though, even though I currently can't remember my contacts' phone numbers, I know for certain that my phone number when I was growing up at 425 Cordova St. in Winnipeg was HU (for Hudson) 9-2922. Eventually, the number was changed to 489-2922. I wonder if my old phone number still exists (with the area code 204 tacked on to it, of course), and if so, is it a landline on Cordova St. in Winnipeg? Wouldn't that be a hoot?

"We'd laugh at the concept of a phone being the first thing we would look at in the morning and the last thing we check at night."



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The importance of allies in the fight against antisemitism

Why I believe standing with my Jewish neighbours is my moral obligation



BY **GILLIAN CREIGHTON**
SPECIAL TO HAMILTON JEWISH NEWS

DURING THE Christmas seasons of my childhood, my devout Catholic mother always placed a menorah on the dining room buffet "...so our Jewish friends will feel valued, and their traditions respected." The menorah looked slightly out of place adjacent to the Nativity creche, and I dismissed it as one of my mother's eccentricities. I did not yet understand the importance of demonstrating allyship with the most persecuted group in history. The menorah was a symbol of safety for Jews in our home.

Last year, my husband and I bought a house in the Strathcona neighbourhood of Hamilton. We were delighted to join this tightly knit community, in which the active Facebook group members posted invitations to share garden tomatoes, tune-up bicycles, and announce movie nights in the park. A welcome change from life in downtown Toronto!

But on Oct. 7, 2023, we watched the news programs in horror when young people who had been celebrating peace at a music festival in Israel were murdered; cheering terrorists with AK-47s paraded a young woman covered in blood, her limbs bent at odd angles, through Gaza. The vision of Noa Argamani being torn from her boyfriend's arms by terrorists while she begged for her life haunts me still.

As Jews everywhere grieved, I was sickened that many Westerners brainwashed by anti-Jewish propaganda celebrated the attacks and excused the odious behaviour of jihadists. Jewish history was being rewritten on social media. While this resembled Nazi propaganda in the 1930s, in today's climate of virtue signalling, the rhetoric and terminology have shifted. The term "anti-Zionism" has come to denote hate speech and implies the perpetrator is, in fact, the saviour of the oppressed. Modern-day antisemites refuse to consider historical facts and instead choose to trust distortions and outright lies expressed on social media.

One common sentiment I have

consistently heard from my Jewish friends this past year is that their most acute pain has come from silence. Friends who have not reached out, loved ones who have not checked in, a heavy silence that implies, "I do not care about your pain," and amid this raging storm of anti-semitic propaganda, perhaps that silence means they, too, are amongst the brainwashed masses.

Our Strathcona Facebook group's administrators (and neighbours) posted anti-Israel propaganda using terms such as "Nazis," "white supremacists," and "zios" (an ethnic slur favoured by David Duke) to describe Jews. Members of Hamas were labelled "freedom fighters". The administrators then followed up by arbitrarily kicking out several of the group's Jewish members. When I expressed my concerns about this unacceptable behaviour to an administrator, I received a feeble, non-committal response.

I believe that Canadian gentiles have a moral obligation to support our Jewish community. Questioning the legitimacy of Israel and its struggle for survival against those who genuinely seek to perpetrate genocide is akin to engaging in the moral territory of Holocaust deniers. We cannot accept the insidious antisemitism that disguises itself as anti-Zionism in our schools, communities, and the institutions and media we once respected.

I recognize my privilege as a white, non-religious woman allows me to express my opinions freely, while my Jewish neighbours are punished when they endeavour to express their own. To stop this tide of evil, we need to start with our leadership. In Hamilton Centre, our MPP is Sarah Jama, and our MP is Matthew Green. Jama has repeatedly expressed support for Hamas, and Green hides his prejudices behind anti-Zionism while publicly showing support for Jama. At the next elections, we need to make different choices. Our vote is our voice.

My husband and I are looking forward to celebrating Christmas in our new home this year and have already started stringing up decorative lights. My menorah will be displayed in the entryway, next to the Christmas tree.

Gillian Creighton lives in Hamilton with her husband and their two dogs.

Jews and their allies; A marriage of moral courage



BY **NICKI FRANEK**
SPECIAL TO HAMILTON JEWISH NEWS

MORAVIA, 1942. The Nazi occupation had been raging for three years. Given that Nazi racial theories de-

meant both Jews and Slavs, no one in Bohemia or Moravia felt safe. My non-Jewish grandfather's family were heavily involved in the partisan forces fighting the Nazis; his parents hid partisan fighters, his older brothers actively participated in ambushing the Nazis; and my grandfather, at the tender age of 12, functioned as a runner carrying ammunition to the partisans hiding in the woods. At the end of the war, the entire family was awarded with the Memorial Slovak National Uprize Medal of Courage.

Jewish history is nothing if not a collection of stories about courage. I have been moulded by these stories and can remember internalizing at a young age that courage was a moral virtue that could be demanded of me at some point in my life simply because of my Jewish ancestry. That day would come on Oct. 7, 2023, when the Goliath of antisemitism woke the David in me.

After a year of watching the world's response to the relentlessly rising antisemitism, however, I've come to realize that courage is not just a defining characteristic of Jewish history—it's the defining characteristic that marries Jews and their allies. During the Holocaust, only 28,217 Europeans (0.005 per cent), risked their lives to aid Jews and only 7,500 citizens (0.1 per cent) of Bohemia and Moravia joined the partisan forces who fought the Nazis. The courage it took to choose the path of persecution demonstrates a moral integrity that leaves me speechless. These heroes are the bedrocks of Western civilization and I see now that my courage comes from both the Jew and the ally in my lineage.

Sadly, these numbers also reveal a truth about our societies today. As our universities are overrun by students wearing keffiyehs and the majority of houses in my neighbourhood display lawn signs that glorify pan-Arab imperialism while they credit themselves as anti-colonialists, it is clear the courageous bedrocks are still few and far between. Meanwhile, the most outspoken and influential self-styled

revolutionaries, operating within the security of our democracy and without a true understanding of genuine courage, are praised as paragons of virtue.

But this should come as no surprise when our leaders and academics fail to lead with moral courage themselves; when our Prime Minister validates the fraudulent International Criminal Court (ICC) ruling and threatens arrest of an ally and democratically voted leader; or when Carleton University hires Hassan Diab, a PFLP terrorist directly involved in the 1980 bombing of a Paris synagogue that killed four, to teach a class called "Social Justice in Action"; or when tax funded CBC dilutes acts of antisemitism and frames a violent and premeditated pogrom in Amsterdam as "a clash between Israeli football supporters and Dutch youth."

It can be deeply disheartening to witness history once again exposing the cowardice of the silent majority. Seeing so many vilify Jews as a means to signal virtue or gain clout—echoing the very narratives our grandparents recounted—can dim even the brightest hope. Yet, in stark contrast, a single story of courage and solidarity can reignite boundless optimism within our community. Stories like that of Martha and Waitstill Sharp, American Unitarian aid workers who, in 1939, sailed from Massachusetts to Prague to help thousands of Jews escape to the U.S.; or Imrich and Irene Valentovci from Bratislava who risked everything to hide and feed our family friends the Rosas within the walls of their home for the entirety of the war; or even the wife of my Jewish great-great uncle, whose brave refusal to annul their marriage, despite the grave personal risk, saved him from the gas chambers. These acts of bravery remind us of the enduring power of allyship in the face of adversity.

This past year has deeply challenged my world view. Through this time of reflection, I have come to a profound realization that I was raised amidst a rare and precious relationship between Jews and their courageous allies; a relationship full of admiration, integrity, respect, shared pain and trauma. We may not have the world on our side, but we have something so much greater: a forever union with the world's most courageous heroes.

Nicki Franek lives in Toronto with her husband and two children.

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HAMILTON JEWISH FAMILY SERVICES

The antidote to campus antisemitism is Jewish pride

McMaster University Hillel president Hayley Kupinsky reflects on four years of antisemitism on campus



BY **HAYLEY KUPINSKY**
SPECIAL TO HAMILTON JEWISH NEWS

IN SOME WAYS, a lot has changed since the Hamas attacks of Oct. 7, 2023. On the other hand, we students know that the antisemitism we are facing on university campuses isn't new. I'd like to posit that the type of antisemitism we have seen on campuses hasn't changed—it is simply unmasked, the offenders emboldened. What has changed, however, is how our Hillel chapter has become stronger, supporting more students than ever before. But before I tell you what has changed since Oct. 7, I'd like to take you back to the fall of 2021, to my very first day of university, to illustrate what has not.

It was the first day of Welcome Week, when incoming students have a chance to tour campus and meet peers. A friend and I were handed a copy of the Silhouette, the McMaster student newspaper, and began flipping through the pages of articles, when one caught our eye. It was called "Zionism at McMaster: What does the MSU's (McMaster Student Union) support of a pro-Israel club mean for Palestinian students?" The "pro-Israel club" was Hillel – the only Jewish club on campus. The author went on to describe Hillel as a "propaganda mouthpiece" and advocated for the MSU's support for BDS to be



PHOTO: MCMASTER HILLEL

McMaster Hillel memorial to eight Canadian citizens murdered by Hamas.

applied to Hillel's club status. To see this blatant hatred towards the only Jewish club on campus published in a school newspaper on my very first day of university came as a complete shock. I saw this article before I even attended a Hillel event, but by virtue of Hillel being the voice of Jewish students on campus, I had been labeled as a supporter of apartheid, genocide, and ethnic cleansing before classes had even begun.

Looking back, I think the most disturbing aspect of this incident is imagining students like my classmates who told me that I am the first Jew they ever met,

reading this article before they had ever had a face-to-face encounter with someone from our community. I wonder how this article primed them to think about Jews, about Hillel, and about Zionism, and informed their views in a post-Oct. 7 world.

Much has changed since September 2021. When I read that article, I had yet to even become a member of Hillel, or walk through our doors. Now, I'm the president of McMaster Hillel. I've found myself reflecting on this experience recently and even went back to read the article last month before making a presentation opposing university divestment from Israel to the McMaster board of governors.

While antisemitism on campus has taken on new forms, the one idea that has stayed consistent is that of "anti-normalization." Anti-normalization, which is a core value of many anti-Israel groups and BDS campaigns, is the idea that engaging with Jews and Israelis gives credibility to the State of Israel, and thus these organizations oppose any form of open dialogue with groups like Hillel. This idea, which I was introduced to on my first day of university, isn't new, but is brought to the forefront of campus culture through efforts to isolate Hillel, which still persists today.

Now that I'm in my fourth year of university, I'm able to look back on my years at Hillel and appreciate how much our club and the students who have been part of it have grown more resilient despite all the challenges they

face. More than ever before, our community has leaned on one another, welcomed Jews who needed a safe space, and found allies in unexpected places. On my first day of university, when handed that newspaper article, I could never have imagined I would one day lead the very organization singled out. Yet, I couldn't imagine a more meaningful way to spend my time at McMaster.

Hillel Ontario's motto this year is "Hinenu – We Are Here," and I think it perfectly encapsulates how we have stood strong in the face of campus tensions.

Instead of minimizing our presence on campus, we've enhanced it. To commemorate the 1,200 lives lost on Oct. 7, 2023, and raise awareness about the 101 hostages still held in Gaza, we have held memorials and exhibits on campus. We've also embraced new ways to celebrate our culture through a series of events highlighting Ethiopian, Sephardic, and Ashkenazi traditions. Our annual Israel Week was held in late November. We also hosted DJ Artifex, who is a survivor of the Nova Music Festival massacre for a "We Will Dance Again Party." This event was a reminder that in the face of tragedy, we will never relinquish our pride in being Jewish.

Jewish pride is a powerful antidote to antisemitism and a defiant act of resilience that strengthens our community from within. Not only are we here—we belong here and are here to stay.

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When Chanukah and Christmas overlap

This year's confluence of holidays offers the community an opportunity to open our hearts to interfaith couples and families



BY **RABBI MIRIAM WAJNBERG**
SPECIAL TO HAMILTON JEWISH NEWS

MORE THAN 20 years ago, the American TV show *The OC* introduced Chrismukkah. Chrismukkah blends two holidays from distinct faith traditions—Christmas and Chanukah—allowing the character Seth Cohen to celebrate both of his family's heritages. Especially in years like this one, when Chanukah begins on Christmas Day, Seth Cohen's family is not unique.

According to the 2018 Survey of Jews in Canada, nearly a quarter of married Canadian Jews have a spouse who is not Jewish. This number increases to one-third when looking at married Jews ages 18-29, the youngest age cohort surveyed. Researchers Fern Chertok and Matthew A. Brookner predict, based on this generational shift, that "the Jewish intermarriage rate in Canada is just a generation behind the rate in the United States and will inevitably match US levels," where two-thirds of non-Orthodox adults married since 2020 are in interfaith marriages.

Regardless of what emotions these statistics raise, the reality is that interfaith families are a growing part of the Canadian Jewish landscape. Even when a household is exclusively Jewish, their circle of family might include extended family members who celebrate holidays from other religious traditions, due to interfaith marriage or conversion.

In the past, the phrase "the December dilemma" framed how interfaith couples and families decided how to celebrate December holidays. This framing starts from a place of negativity – that to be an interfaith family, to have multiple heritages and holidays that your loved ones celebrate, is—at its core—a problem. Today, interfaith couples and families see December as an opportunity to share traditions with family, and to bring in more light when it is so desperately needed.

Longtime Hamilton resident Tova Vertes does exactly that. "My husband and I blended families, children, pets, houses, and religion. Our families come together to bring both our traditions and cultures into the home. My husband's relatively secular family comes from Norway and the Bahamas. Except for Christmas, when his father reads from the Bible, salted Norwegian lamb graces the table and

we dance around the Christmas tree. In the midst of all this, we welcome Hanukkah. We light the menorah as an entire family, have latkes occasionally beside Bahamian mac and cheese, and enjoy the Christmas tree lights. The Norwegian trolls sit at the base of the tree while our blue and silver baubles and homemade Magen David ornaments sparkle." Vertes and her family observe both holidays with each other, sharing traditions and forming new ones.

For Lauren Schreiber-Sasaki, the associate director for Jewish community inclusion and engagement at Toronto's Miles Nadal JCC, this year's proximity of Chanukah and Christmas is an opportunity to create new rituals of meaning-making for families that celebrate both holidays. "You could make havdalah (the ritual traditionally used to mark the transition from Shabbat or a holiday) to separate between Christmas and Chanukah at nightfall on Dec. 25. We're closing a distinct time, and opening a distinct time. It's a way of using Jewish technology to acknowledge the reality families live in." In her work with the Jewish& (mnjcc.org/jewish-and) program at the Miles Nadal JCC, Schreiber-Sasaki runs programs that aim to meet the unique needs of

interfaith families. "The Santa Claus Parade goes right past our building, so we always hold an event called 'Cookies and Cards' on the same day, to allow families to decorate cookies and make holiday cards — for any holiday—while watching the parade from inside."

18Doors (18doors.org), a nonprofit that supports Jewish interfaith couples and families and their inclusion in Jewish communities, offers online and programmatic resources for couples and families thinking about the December holidays. There, families can find resources for grandparents, recipes, conversation starters, and a guide for talking about Christmas trees.

18Doors strives to build Jewish communities of belonging, in which interfaith couples and families can be wholly themselves, finding ways of connecting with their Judaism and other faith and cultural heritages. The month of December, and this year's confluence of Chanukah and Christmas, offers families and communities an opportunity to respond with compassion, curiosity, and openness to interfaith couples and families.

Hamilton resident Rabbi Miriam Wajnberg is the director of professional development at 18doors.org.

Dan MUYS
Member of Parliament for Flamborough-Glanbrook

Chag Chanukah Sameach

to all our friends in Hamilton's Jewish Community!

Dan Muys, M.P. | 905 692 2917 | Dan.Muys@parl.gc.ca

Chanukah Sameach!

May this time be filled with peace, happiness, and love.

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SHALOM VILLAGE

Honouring the moments that matter

MARIANNE KLEIN

AS THE lights of Chanukah begin to brighten our homes and hearts, I'm filled with gratitude for the unity that defines our Shalom Village community. This year, marked by challenges for the Jewish people, has only strengthened our resolve and deepened our connections as we support one another through adversity.

Our Jubilee anniversary year is a powerful milestone, celebrating 50 years of dedication to our mission. Our founders, alongside Sheila Burman, envisioned a sanctuary where the Jewish community and all seniors would receive exceptional care and services. Today, we honour Sheila by "making moments that matter" every day for our seniors, and by continuing to develop programs and services that enrich their lives. This year we worked with you, our community, to envision an exciting future for Shalom Village. With

innovative initiatives on the horizon, we look forward to sharing these plans with you soon.

As we light each menorah candle, we embrace gratitude for the meaningful connections we share. We are especially grateful to the volunteers and donors who support our mission. Through their generosity, we are able to sustain and grow our programs, enhancing the lives of everyone who calls Shalom Village home. This allows us to keep creating meaningful experiences and to celebrate the essence of Chanukah—unity, gratitude, and hope.

We are also grateful for the dedication of our staff, who work tirelessly to ensure that every resident is safe, valued, and well-cared-for. Their commitment makes Shalom Village a place of warmth, comfort, and joy, where each person can find both care and connection. This year's Chanukah fundraising appeal will focus on supporting our staff, with funds going



PHOTO: SHALOM VILLAGE

Shalom Village staff members making moments that matter together throughout the year.

toward treats, gifts, and recognition to acknowledge their efforts. Your donations will help us thank the staff who give so much, to make Shalom Village a true home for our residents.

We also warmly invite you to join us for our Shabbat services and Kiddush luncheons occurring on the third Shabbat of each month. There is no charge to

participate, and our residents are always happy for your company! To RSVP or to learn about sponsorship opportunities, please contact Kathleen at the Foundation office.

On behalf of everyone at Shalom Village, we wish you and your loved ones a chag Chanukah sameach. May this Festival of Lights bring health, happiness, and peace.

HAMILTON JEWISH FAMILY SERVICES

We are a light in the darkness

BY CARA BENSIMON AND RACHEL BERNHOLTZ

SHERRY WEINBERG recently moved to Hamilton with her two young children. They are making connections with the Jewish community. They attend shul when possible and have enrolled in some of the great programs at the JCC. Despite working two jobs, Sherry is barely making ends meet. With Chanukah coming up, she knows there is no extra money for chocolate gelt, latkes or to attend community celebrations.

While Sherry is not a real person, her story is very much a real example of the families that HJFS helps each year.

Since 1929, HJFS has been a source of support for the Hamilton Jewish

community, through mental health programs, holistic case management, Holocaust Survivor programs, food security, and seniors supports.

Our food bank, Carol's Cupboard, is the only kosher food bank west of Toronto in Ontario. Visits are by appointment only to protect confidentiality. Using a grocery store model, visitors have the agency to get what they need for their families. Delivery is available for those clients who are unable to come to us.

Carol's Cupboard is open to everyone, regardless of race, religion, age, or beliefs. Jewish clients may visit from anywhere in the Greater Hamilton area, whereas non-Jewish clients must reside within our defined nearby catchment.

Not only does Carol's Cupboard provide

non-perishable food, fresh produce, kosher meats, and cleaning and hygiene items, it is also a connection to Jewish culture and tradition. For example, at Rosh Hashanah and Passover, we distribute baskets filled with all the items needed to celebrate in a meaningful way. We also offer tickets to attend local Passover seders. At Chanukah we give out candles and menorahs.

From 2021 to 2024 we have seen a 115 per cent increase in the number of visits to Carol's Cupboard. In 2024 we are seeing an average of 80-90 households per month. Hamilton has one of the highest Jewish poverty rates in the country compared to the Jewish poverty rates in other cities. According to the 2021 Canadian census, poverty within the Jewish community is nearly identical to the non-Jewish community with 14.6 per cent of Jewish families living below the poverty line. However,

Jewish poverty is more hidden and less acknowledged. With "Jewish" removed from the choices of ethnicity in the census, tracking rates of Jewish poverty has become increasingly difficult.

Happily, Sherry learned about HJFS and made an appointment to visit Carol's Cupboard. We were able to provide her with food, a menorah and peace of mind.

Everyone will need a helping hand at someone point. We offer not just food, but support for individuals and families as they navigate difficult periods, whether temporary or ongoing. Today it is them, tomorrow it could be you.

Carol's Cupboard is named in honour of its founder Carol Krames, who started the food bank in the 1980s. Every day we strive to run it in a way that would make her proud—with empathy, compassion and love for everyone who comes through our door. Chag Chanukah sameach!

BETH JACOB HEBREW SCHOOL

Chanukah miracles happen here

SOPHIE GEFFROS

WHEN A CHILD in our Hebrew School was given the task of decorating a construction paper dreidel — only, of course, after he proved he could recognize the sounds that each Hebrew letter made — his eyes lit up. "I can draw my family on there!" he shouted, grabbing a purple crayon. His

family had travelled across the globe to end up in Hamilton, and the excitement he felt at being able to represent his family on the dreidel was palpable.

The day before, during a training session for teens helping with our upcoming preschool Shabbat program, one youth was struck with inspiration while watching the trainer lead a Hebrew Through

Movement session on Purim.

It has been a difficult year for many of us. We are dealing with immense challenges, and sometimes cannot help but feel as though we are fumbling in the dark.

A great miracle happened there, yes. But when I see a child without any prior exposure to Chanukah traditions instinctively grasp that this is a time for family and

togetherness, and when I see the eyes of a teenager light up as they rattle off ideas for how to effectively engage our youngest children, I cannot help but see that a great miracle has happened here, too, and that every generation will be part of our grand tradition of bringing light in the most unlikely places.

Chag Chanukah Sameach.

TEMPLE ANSHE SHOLOM RELIGIOUS SCHOOL

Programs for all age groups



Hands-on learning Sukkah building at Temple Anshe Sholom

PHOTO: DORA-ANN COHEN ELLISON

DORA-ANN COHEN ELLISON

THIS YEAR, 58 students are enrolled at the Jewish Learning Program at Temple Anshe Sholom. Our school hallways are buzzing each Shabbat morning and Wednesday afternoon. Our goals are to enhance student and family connections within the Jewish community, and help our students find their own passion for Jewish learning.

As we help our students find their Jewish interests, we have launched our Wednesday Choose Your Own Jewish Adventure, where students choose an elective to learn in a way that is of interest to them. We are offering; Ukelele Lessons and Shabbat Songs, Values through Zen Doodling and Hebrew Calligraphy, Israel—People and Places through Games and Art, and JIM—Values of Jews in Motion. Our electives are for Kindergarten-Grade 7 students, and we are still accepting enrollment.

We are also fostering connections among Jewish adults through our drop-in social hours. Please join us on Wednesday afternoons from 5-6 p.m. as we

schmooze and learn together. We wrap up December with a guided painting adult social with Cantor Paula on Dec. 11 and 18. Attend more than two sessions to create a beautiful Chanukah painting to hang for the holidays (\$5 fee for materials, pre-registration IS required for this activity) at templeanshesholom.shulcloud.com/event/paintwithpaula.

Our winter adult sessions resume on Jan. 8 with Mahjongg with Laura Wolfson for four weeks, followed by a three-week book club. As part of our community activities, students will be learning about Hamilton Jewish Family Services and Hamilton Jewish Federation. We kick off our annual food and toiletry drive Nov. 27 and encourage anyone visiting the Temple to drop off items to our collection bin in the front foyer through Dec.14. Our high school students will once again go door to door in our community collecting donations on Dec. 12.

For more information about joining our Temple community or Jewish Learning Program, please contact Dora-Ann Cohen Ellison at dacellison@anshesholom.ca or visit anshesholom.ca.

KEHILA HESCHEL

Meet our new leadership team



Kehila Heschel welcomes a new leadership team, with Anita Bernstein (left) heading up the school's education committee and Lishai Peel (right) stepping into the role of school principal.

PHOTO: WENDY SCHNEIDER, HAMILTON JEWISH NEWS

KEHILA STAFF

As we celebrate 25 incredible years at Kehila Heschel school, we're thrilled to share the exciting news that we're growing our leadership team!

In January, we welcome a new principal, Lishai Peel, who will head up our talented teachers and enthusiastic volunteers. As the former executive director of gritLIT (Hamilton's Readers and Writers Festival), Lishai brings a wealth of executive experience. She is an award-winning writer, dynamic educator, and a dedicated advocate for egalitarian principles — Jewish values that define Kehila Herschel as an inclusive and vibrant community.

In welcoming our additional leadership, we also express our deep gratitude to Anita Bernstein. Anita has been at the heart of our community, wearing multiple hats as Head of School and director of education. Her vision and passion have shaped Kehila into the inclusive, vibrant school we're so proud of today.

Under Anita's leadership, Kehila joined an elite group of just four Heschel schools across North America, meeting the rigorous standards needed to carry the name of Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel

— a visionary theologian, philosopher, and civil rights icon. From bringing EcoSchool Canada's Platinum certification to our classrooms, to steering us through the challenges of COVID, Anita's achievements are immense. She has created a school where Judaism is celebrated in deeply meaningful ways, and where Jewish values blend seamlessly with an enriched trilingual Ontario curriculum. We're thrilled she will become head of our education committee, and lend her valued guidance and expertise as Lishai transitions into her new role.

And there's more exciting news: Paul Prasanth is stepping in as our new office administrator, filling the shoes of Michele Schneider, who retired after 13 amazing years. While Michele transitions out of the office, we're thrilled she'll continue to join us, delighting our students with her hot lunches.

At Kehila Heschel, our students don't just learn; they thrive academically, spiritually, and personally, growing in ways that make each day at school a joy.

Registration for 2025/26 is now open, so why not book your visit today? Call us at 905.529.7725 and discover why our students can't wait to get to school every morning!



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a Happy and Peaceful Chanukah*

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HAMILTON HEBREW ACADEMY

STEM club a hub of creativity



HHA students at its new STEM club. By nurturing curiosity, creativity, and environmental consciousness, HHA is preparing its students to thrive in a world of limitless possibilities.

PHOTO: COURTESY HHA

RABBI YAAKOV MOREL

IN TODAY'S rapidly evolving world, a strong foundation in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) is critical for future academic and life success. At the HHA, students are being equipped with critical thinking skills, creativity, and problem-solving abilities to thrive in a tech-driven society.

This past September, Dylan Mitchell joined the HHA faculty as the school science lead. A passionate Ontario Certified Teacher (OCT) with a degree in Zoology, Mitchell brings a wealth of knowledge in biology and environmental sciences, including unique experiences like participating in a shark research lab in the Bahamas. His innovative teaching methods inspire students to explore the wonders of science, making complex concepts both accessible and exciting.

Mitchell also leads the weekly HHA STEM Club, a hub of creativity and collaboration. Beginning with an introduction to the scientific method, students engage in activities like analyzing historical objects based on their physical characteristics — such as guessing the function of a 1920s ice cream maker.

Recently, they explored aerodynamics by designing paper airplanes and experimenting with variables like lift, thrust, drag, and weight. Thanks to a generous grant from the PTA, the STEM Club has acquired advanced engineering tools, including K'nex, Structure Sticks, Techno Gears, and City Engineering and Design Building Sets. These resources allow students to construct weight-bearing structures, study forces at play, and develop teamwork skills. Projects range from following blueprints for bridges to unleashing creativity through abstract designs.

Looking ahead, the HHA community is excited to host STEM Night: Full STEAM Ahead on Feb. 13 at 6 p.m., which will showcase students' achievements in STEM education. The evening's theme, environmental stewardship, will highlight students' understanding of human impact on the planet and their innovative solutions to reduce carbon footprints. Through these projects, students are also cultivating a sense of responsibility toward preserving the environment. By nurturing curiosity, creativity, and environmental consciousness, HHA is preparing its students to thrive in a world of limitless possibilities.

TEMPLE ANSHE SHOLOM

Join us for our Chanukah events

PAULA BARUCH

TEMPLE ANSHE Sholom is celebrating Chanukah this year with a rich blend of traditional and community-oriented events that bring members of all ages together. Chanukah, the Festival of Lights, commemorates the rededication of the Holy Temple in Jerusalem and the miracle of the oil that burned for eight days. This story of resilience and faith is honoured each year with great enthusiasm at Temple Anshe Sholom, where members gather to light the menorah, sing songs, share traditional foods, and deepen their connection to Jewish history and culture.

Our Chanukah Shabbat dinner and service includes a candle lighting ceremony, held in the sanctuary, accompanied by singing and blessings and a service welcoming Shabbat. In the theme of rededication, our religious school's newest students are welcomed at consecration and celebrated. Temple invites families to bring their own menorahs, creating a beautiful display of flickering lights that

symbolizes unity and continuity. Activities for children include dreidel games, arts and crafts, and storytelling sessions that recount the miracles of Chanukah in engaging ways.

Community service is another important aspect of the Chanukah celebrations at Temple Anshe Sholom. This year, our charitable initiative is focused on our Chanukah food drive. This spirit of giving aligns with the holiday's theme of bringing light into the world.

Our Shabbat services during Chanukah are infused with festive melodies and prayers that reflect the holiday's joyful spirit. Members come together in gratitude, celebrating the light that Chanukah represents in the Jewish tradition. Through these meaningful rituals and gatherings, Temple Anshe Sholom provides a warm and inclusive environment where members of all generations can come together to honour the holiday and its enduring message of hope, resilience, and community.

ADAS ISRAEL

Rededication of the Hamilton mikvah

RABBI CHANAN WEISER

THE HAMILTON Mikvah, a cornerstone of Jewish life in our community, is entering a new chapter of beauty and purpose. Recently selected by Mikvah USA for a transformative matching grant, the mikvah will soon undergo a complete renovation, becoming a luxurious, state-of-the-art facility. This initiative celebrates not only the physical space but also the profound spiritual role a mikvah plays in Jewish life—a portal to purity, renewal, and a more meaningful existence.

The mikvah is a timeless tradition deeply embedded in the cycles of Jewish life. For centuries, the mikvah has marked moments of transformation, from embracing the sanctity of our families to celebrating new beginnings such as marriages, conversions, and spiritual growth.

For many, visiting the mikvah is profoundly personal and transformative. The beauty of the space helps individuals feel cherished and respected, turning the act of immersion into an uplifting and memorable experience. The transformation of the Hamilton Mikvah is being made possible through the support of Mikvah USA, an organization dedicated to establishing and renovating mikvahs across North America. The renovation of the Hamilton Mikvah is about honouring the legacy of those who built and sustained it while ensuring its vitality for future generations. The origins of this mikvah are steeped



PHOTO: COURTESY ADAS ISRAEL

The original Hamilton mikvah will soon undergo a dramatic renovation.

in miraculous stories of faith, such as the generosity of Mr. Hershel Seigel 65 years ago, who, guided by dreams and deep conviction, provided the funds to bring the mikvah to life. It is the story of the family of Zoltan Freeman a'h, in the 1990s, who rededicated the mikvah in Hamilton in memory of his family who perished in the Holocaust and their commitment to this Jewish ritual. It's also the story of the next generation of families, together with new community leaders, who are championing our future.

Now, decades later, the Hamilton Jewish community has the opportunity to rededicate this sacred space, reflecting the same passion and dedication that brought it into existence. The new mikvah will stand as a testament to the enduring power of faith and community, and it will continue to be a source of inspiration for generations to come.

OUT OF THE COLD

Our meals make a difference



PHOTO: WENDY SCHNEIDER, HAMILTON JEWISH NEWS

Out of the Cold volunteers (l to r) Monique Peer, Rabbi Miriam Wajnberg, Helen Yanover, Cindy Richter and Lila Strub.

CINDY RICHTER

MANY WEEKS before our first meal service in November, Out of the Cold volunteers and supporters start to get excited for a new season feeding those in need in Hamilton. When asked if they will be returning to help out, our volunteers always answer, "Yes, where else would I be?" It is that spark of enthusiasm which is, after 25 years, what we are programmed for!

Collective effervescence is a term coined by French sociologist Emile Durkheim more than 100 years ago. It is a process of synchronization and intensification of emotions among individuals that occurs during participation in collective rituals. Durkheim considered it a central component of collective behavior by which society empowers individuals to cope. In our present day we really need this feeling of energy and harmony when people are engaged in a shared purpose.

Collective effervescence flows from our team to the kitchen island to the

stove and ovens to the ladles over the bowls to the closings of the dinner containers to the assembly line where takeaway bags contain the collective sighs of relief that are bound to our guests.

Very often, guests are curious about the volunteers and the means we have to create the meals that they receive. Humbly, we reply that the Hamilton Jewish community has been honoured for 25 winters to feed and clothe, shelter and give the warmth of a smile.

Your involvement is greatly needed. Toiletries for our Chanukah "loot bags," socks, warm hats and gloves (adult sizes only) can all be dropped off at JHamilton. Celebrate an important person or milestone with a donation to the Beth Jacob Out of the Cold fund by calling 905-522-1351. Our meals make an immediate difference in the lives of people whom you have never met. For further inspiration, visit our site at ErskinePresbyterianChurch.org or email c-richter@sympatico.ca. Chag Chanukah Sameach.

A family's emotional return to the Czech Republic

Three generations of Hamilton's Loewith family returned to their ancestral villages to celebrate a family Bar Mitzvah

BY **RACHEL LOEWITH ROCHWERG**
SPECIAL TO HAMILTON
JEWISH NEWS

AS OUR ELDEST son began to approach Bar Mitzvah age, my husband Bram and I considered different ways we could mark this important milestone. We wanted to celebrate his Bar Mitzvah in a way that would feel meaningful to Nate and to us, and lay a foundation for his Jewish future that honours his heritage and history. In that spirit, we chose to have Nate's Bar Mitzvah in the Czech Republic. Nate's maternal great-grandparents, Minna and Joe Loewith, came to Hamilton in 1938 as refugees from Czechoslovakia, along with 37 extended family members, so the country is an important part of our history.

We were fortunate to connect with Rabbi David Maxa, a warm, wonderful, and progressive rabbi based in Prague. He enthusiastically supported our hope to have Nate become a Bar Mitzvah at the Great Synagogue in Pilsen, where my great grandparents, Leo and Ida Abeles, were married in October 1921. The Great Synagogue is the second largest synagogue in Europe, and a truly magnificent building. It escaped destruction during World War II because it was used to store ammunition and Jewish belongings confiscated by the Nazis.

The Great Shul was returned to the Jewish community in 2016, and is now used as a museum, housing the permanent collection "Here lived the Jews." Today, there are fewer than 100 Jews in the Pilsen community. They gather in a small room in the building to mark holidays, but there is no active congregation. Nobody could tell us the last time a Bar Mitzvah was held in the



PHOTO: ZACH TAUB

Bar Mitzvah boy Nate Rochweg prepares to read his Torah portion as grandparents Ken and Shelley Rochweg and Bonnie and Dave Loewith look on.



PHOTO: HOWARD BROWN

Descendants of Joe Loewith gathered in front of their family patriarch's store in Horsovsky Tyn, Czech Republic for a once-in-a-lifetime family photo.

synagogue. However, after Rabbi Maxa explained why we wanted to use this space, the community members welcomed and supported us.

Recognizing this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to learn about our family's origins, we were blessed to be joined in the Czech Republic by 78 family members and friends, from ages three to

84. Rochweg and Loewith *mishpocha* travelled from Hamilton, Toronto, London, New York, Michigan, New Mexico, England, Switzerland and Israel. We spent the week based in Prague, learning about both its long Jewish history and the country's broader history, and feasting on schnitzel and dumplings. We travelled to Terezin, the concentration camp

where many of our relatives who were not able to flee were held, and ultimately transported to and killed in Auschwitz.

The day before the Bar Mitzvah, three generations of Loewiths loaded onto a coach bus to Bohemia — the westernmost part of the Czech Republic, near the German border, to visit our family's ancestral villages. In advance of our trip, my grandmother's 103-year-old cousin, the only living member of the original group of 38 refugees, had put me in touch with a local citizen of the village of Horsovsky Tyn. Ludek, a complete stranger, arranged for the most wonderful day for us in his community. We were welcomed by the mayor in front of the town's Holocaust memorial. Ludek (who is not Jewish but has a keen and seemingly encyclopedic knowledge of the local Jewish history) guided us through town by foot to every home and building that had been owned by Jews prior to 1939, many of whom were our relatives.

As a family, we gathered in front of Joe Loewith's family's general store — a store, building, and livelihood stolen from him by the Nazis — and here we returned, 50 people strong; his three sons, all nine of his grandchildren, and 20 of his 24 great grandchildren, plus many of our partners. As we drove seven kilometres down the country roads to Blizejov — the small village that my grandmother, Minna, grew up in — we listened to the farmers amongst us analyze the fields and barns that once belonged to their predecessors. We stood in front of the homes of my grandparents, and great great grandparents, while the younger kids played football and wrestled in the grass. We imagined what their

life had been like before 1938, and starkly compared it to what initially waited for them upon arrival in Canada. It was a deeply meaningful day for us all.

On the day of Nate's Bar Mitzvah, our family and friends were joined by a handful of members from Rabbi Maxa's Prague congregation and people from Pilsen's small Jewish community. We were told that we more than doubled the Jewish community of Pilsen for the day. We watched as Nate, on the elaborate and ornate *bimah*, chanted his Torah and *haftarah* portions, and gave his *d'var Torah*. Words cannot describe the mix of nachas, connection, and sentimentality we felt seeing him on the very *bimah* where his great great grandparents were married 103 years earlier.

After the service, the members of the local Jewish community joined us for lunch at a nearby hotel, and as we all danced the *horah* through the restaurant. While the waitstaff looked on with wonder and amusement, we celebrated both our Jewish history and our Jewish future. I wondered if my grandparents could have ever imagined so many of their descendants celebrating all these years later in the Czech Republic, a country that my grandfather felt so deeply betrayed by, and my grandmother loved so dearly.

There is no shortage of conflict in this world. Religion and politics and land continue to tear people apart. We are so grateful for our life here in Canada and are immeasurably indebted to those whose countless sacrifices made it possible. We can think of no better way to teach our son the true meaning of becoming a Bar Mitzvah.

This Chanukah let's remember:

The light we share is stronger than any darkness.

At Federation, we're here for today. We're here for each other.

And we're here for good.

CHAG SAMEACH!



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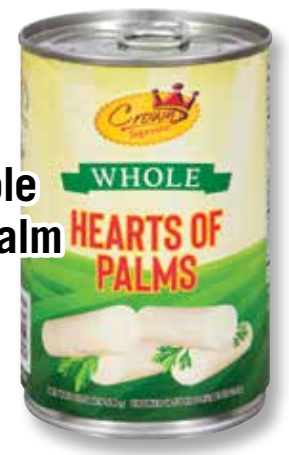
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