

Adam Solender, CEO  
Savannah Jewish Federation Annual Meeting Remarks

## **HERE FOR GOOD**

One of this year's national campaign themes talks to what Federation does: "**Here for Good.**" I'd like to talk about **Doing Good.**

In a year filled with new fears, old threats, and so much divisiveness, it's a refreshing topic, and one that is easy to forget about. At the Savannah Jewish Federation, **Good** is something we think about every day. Because **Good** is something that we *do* every day.

**Good** is in our DNA, as a community, and as an organization. Good is what we have been doing for each other since the William and Sarah made port here 289 years ago. It is what the Savannah Jewish Council has been doing since 1944. It's what we are focused on now, and **Good** is what we will do in the future. Because the Savannah Jewish Federation, together with your support, is **Here for Good**...here at home, in Israel and throughout the world.

But the truth is, while the Savannah Jewish Federation is the engine for **Good** in Savannah, the work we do in supporting individuals and organizations is often done in the background. Today, I'd like to spend some time shining a light on it.

## **LOCAL SERVICES**

Here in Savannah, the Savannah Jewish Federation impacts virtually every sphere of Jewish communal life. And this year, after COVID-19 changed our world, we didn't just continue our work, we evolved, finding even more ways to provide support. That included being a lifeline to those isolated in the community, providing weekly programs and addressing the individual needs of members of the community.

In many communities Jewish Family Services is a stand-alone, independent agency, but in Savannah, it is the Savannah Jewish

Federation who helps those with unique needs, families in distress, and people struggling with mental health issues or other overwhelming life challenges - all of which only increased:

- During the past year we helped a young couple who were at risk of being out on the street without JFS assistance;
- We delivered and provided thousands of meals;
- We provided financial support for prescriptions, utilities, rent, and food;
- We assisted four students with no-interest college tuition loans;
- We worked with donors to provide extra special assistance for community members

When there is a crisis, be it an unprecedented pandemic, natural disaster, economic downturn, or otherwise – we are there. For **Good**.

## **JEWISH EDUCATION**

But **Good** isn't just about working in crisis mode. It's about being proactive to strengthen Jewish life and lay the foundation for the next generation. Which is why we're dedicated to supporting Jewish educational opportunities from preschool through high school and on into adulthood.

- Programs like PJ Library, deliver Jewish learning to young families – with free books and music delivered straight to their doors each month;
- Our Annual Campaign provided essential funds for Rambam Day School and Shalom School;
- With Federation's financial support, the JEA's Preschool Savannah gives a Jewish start to many of our younger families;
- We provided grants for Jewish experiences to all who applied;

- We have partnered with Chabad of Savannah for adult learning experiences; and
- Food for Thought provides ongoing social and educational opportunities

The foundation of **Good** that begins with our youngest children, stays with them as they mature, and as the next generation finds ways to connect to their Judaism that are meaningful and relevant to *them*.

### **NEXT-GEN**

Our programming and work helps deliver on our mission to ensure that the Savannah Jewish Federation is Here For **Good**, for many years to come. We do that by connecting teens and younger adults to Israel, Judaism, Jewish culture, and one another in innovative ways. We also develop leadership opportunities and events especially geared to our Next-gen community, to involve and engage them while strengthening their Jewish roots.

With our partner, Hillels of GA we now have an advisor for Hillel at SCAD. We continue to fund two ambassadors for our monthly Young Jewish Savannah programs.

We have previously had two sessions of YESOD, our year-long Jewish leadership and learning initiative. Thus far, we have had more than 35 people go through the program and after a two-year layoff, we will be enrolling the third cohort of the YESOD Leadership Initiative later this year.

This work is essential to making sure that the 78+ years of **Good** that Savannah Jewish Federation has become synonymous with, will have the support and enthusiastic participation of a new crop of Jews excited about their heritage and homeland, and ready to pass those traditions on to the generations that follow them.

### **JEWISH COMMUNITY**

As we all know, a true Jewish community with all its rich traditions and vibrancy is multi-generational and diverse. That's why we organize Jewish

holiday gatherings that enable people of all ages and backgrounds to connect, participate and experience the joy of Jewish community. Not even COVID-19 could stand in our way of sharing **Good**. We not only found ways to offer most of our important programming virtually, but created new opportunities, some of which have been so popular, they'll live on in a post-COVID world.

Last year was the inauguration of the Savannah Jewish Cultural Arts Festival. For 19 days we offered movies, dance, music, cooking, and crafts. It is something that only the Federation could do for the Savannah community.

It's reaffirming to know that despite the challenges, our traditions and legacies are stronger than anything that can keep us apart. Thanks to the resources and programs we already had in place, and the innovative nature of the Savannah Jewish Federation, our community endured and thrived.

## **ISRAEL BEYOND**

While a lot of the **Good** we do happens on the local level, we always remember that strengthening our Overseas bonds are essential to a strong Jewish future. Through our partners, the Jewish Agency for Israel, JDC, and World ORT, we provide Israel-focused advocacy and provided essential funds to help the most vulnerable. This coming year we are travelling to Israel as a community thanks to the organization of the Federation. We are providing a \$1,000 subsidy to all adults and \$1,500 to those under the age of 50. Together, we will travel to Israel to celebrate the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of the state.

When the War in Ukraine began, our community responded to the Federation Campaign for Ukraine. In less than 60 days, we transmitted over \$100,000 to our partner agencies to help integrate the thousands of Ukrainian Jews to Israeli society. The initiative continues on today.

**Here for Good** means being ready and able to assist anywhere we're needed. The changes we have made show that we are equipped and ready to support the global Jewish community now and in the future.

## SECURITY

As we do this **Good** at home and around the world, we are reminded that a thriving Jewish tomorrow depends on a safe, secure Jewish community today. With the undeniable rise in antisemitism and hate, we are actively involved in making our world a more secure place. We are doing it through the Secure Community Network (SCN), an initiative of The Jewish Federations of North America and the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations. This partnership is focused on providing security preparedness training customized for our Jewish communal institutions, as well as high-level national affiliation with federal, state and local law enforcement.

We are deep in the process of hiring a Security Director for our community...an individual who will provide individualized assessments for our synagogues and Day School, train our lay and professional members, be on-site for incident response and crisis management, and be a liaison between the Savannah Jewish community and Savannah PD, GBI, FBI, Homeland Security, and SCN's national security infrastructure.

For your benefit

For our benefit.

For the benefit of Jews throughout the country,

It is essential that we all have common training, that we all have similar responses, if God forbid, we have a significant security challenge.

SCN has already done Threat, Vulnerability, and Risk assessments for the JEA, Rambam Day School and Congregation Bnai Brith Jacob. Once our Security Director is identified, hired, and is in place, we will continue to do TVRAs on the other communal institutions and they will assist on addressing the deficiencies.

Over the next three months, with the assistance of the Memorial Hospital head of Trauma Services, we will be having community training in Stop

the Bleed, a program that encourages bystanders to become trained, equipped, and empowered to help in a bleeding emergency before professional help arrives. It literally can be the difference between life and death.

In November we will be having a two-day community training which will include Active Shooter Training, Run, Hide, Fight, and Security Awareness. These programs are the start of this Federation initiative to provide the entire community with ongoing training, awareness, and skills.

We are part of a national initiative called **Live Secure** which is providing us with challenge money...for every dollar we can raise, they will match up to 50%. That means that if we raise \$600,000, a group of national philanthropists will provide another \$300,000. This is a unique opportunity for our community. One you will hear more about during this campaign season.

We invest in our security because being **Here for Good** means ensuring that our people never have to fear for their safety. And that their right to live openly and freely as Jews is never in question.

The Savannah Jewish Federation is **Here for Good**. But **Good** doesn't just happen on its own. It comes from our supporters, who are dedicated to the promise of a flourishing Jewish future.

With your continued support, with your continued contributions, you will help families struggling in our community get back on their feet, ensure the vulnerable continue to be cared for, and that younger generations are given the opportunities to connect to our heritage and Jewish communal life.

Your support means that the Savannah Jewish Federation will continue to help Good grow.

Just as we have in the past.

Just as we will in the future.

Because with your help, we are going to be **Here for Good**

Shana tovah umetukah