

Federation Focus

A quarterly publication of the Jewish Federation & Foundation of Northeast Florida.

Fall 2026

L'shanah tovah!



READ ABOUT:

The 2026 Annual Meeting

Celebrating the people, partnerships, and collective impact strengthening Jewish life in Northeast Florida and beyond.

Letter From Your New Israeli Shlich

Special introduction from Bar Gershon!

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From Leadership

As we welcome Rosh Hashanah and the High Holidays, we are reminded of the strength that comes from being part of a vibrant Jewish community, and of the possibilities that emerge when we stand together and embrace the power of the collective.

This past year brought its share of challenges, but it also reminded us of what makes our Northeast Florida Jewish community so special. We came together to learn, lead, celebrate, advocate, support one another, and strengthen our connection to Israel. Across generations, congregations, organizations, and communities, we continued to show that we are stronger and more connected when we work together.

As we look toward the year ahead, we do so with optimism. We see a community that is growing, engaged, and ready to embrace new opportunities. We see new leaders finding their voices, young people building their Jewish identities, and individuals coming together to create meaningful change.

We have a year filled with programs, events, and opportunities to connect, learn, and celebrate together. We invite everyone to participate and join us. We especially look forward to seeing our community come together for BIG Night with Howie Mandel on February 7, 2027!

The New Year invites us to look forward with hope, imagine what is possible and consider how each of us can help build the future we want to see.

Thank you for being part of this incredible community and for all that you do to strengthen Jewish life in Northeast Florida.

From our Federation family to yours, we wish you and your loved ones a Shanah Tovah U'Metukah, a happy, healthy, peaceful, and sweet New Year.

With gratitude,



Jennifer Plotkin

Jennifer Plotkin,
Board Chair



Mariam Feist

Mariam Feist,
CEO

SHLICHUT PROGRAM

Letter From Your New Israeli Shlichah

Hi everyone! My name is Bar Gershon, I'm 23 years old, and I'm so excited to be joining the Jacksonville Jewish community as your new Shlichah.

I grew up in the small town of Zichron Yaakov in northern Israel, a beautiful place rich in history. Ever since I was a kid, I've loved the English language and learning about different cultures. I even asked my parents to speak to me in English so I could practice before I understood what they were saying. That curiosity led me to major in diplomacy in high school and later serve in the IDF's International Cooperation Unit.

After my military service, I joined The Jewish Agency for Israel's Summer Camp program in Washington State. That summer taught me so much about what it means to be Jewish in North America, and I came home with friendships that are still an important part of my life.

It also showed me that I wanted to keep building those

kinds of connections, which is why I decided to become a Shlichah.

During my time in Jacksonville, I hope to become a real part of the community, get to know as many people as I can, and build friendships that last long after my Shlichut ends. I want to share what growing up in Israel has been like for me while learning what being Jewish in North America means to you. I hope those conversations will help people feel more connected to Israel, more confident in their Jewish identity, and know they'll always have a friend in Israel.

This role is also deeply personal to me. My grandparents were Holocaust survivors who built a new life in Israel, and their story reminds me how important it is for Jews to stand by one another, no matter where we live. Being a Shlichah is my way of giving back, and I feel incredibly lucky to do it with all of you.

See you soon!



Bar Gershon, Community Shlichah



ISRAEL & OVERSEAS

Celebrating 25 Years of Partnership with Hadera-Eiron

The Jewish Federation & Foundation of Northeast Florida has built a meaningful and lasting partnership with our sister region of Hadera-Eiron in Israel, strengthening Jewish life through connection, collaboration, and shared experiences.

Our continued Partnership2Gether programming with Hadera-Eiron includes English tutoring, visits to the region, visiting speakers, and shared cultural experiences. This year, we proudly welcomed 20 teens from Hadera-Eiron to Northeast Florida for Teen Week, creating opportunities for friendship, learning, and cultural exchange.

These connections empower Jewish youth, foster mutual understanding, and help develop the next generation of engaged Jewish leaders. Together, we are strengthening Jewish life locally, in Israel, and around the world.



In 2026, we distributed more than \$500,000 in Annual Campaign grants to partners in Israel and around the world, supporting programs that strengthen Jewish communities and create meaningful global impact.

The Partnership2Gether teen delegation learning about Jewish life in Northeast Florida by visiting First Congregation Sons of Israel synagogue in St. Augustine.

AS ONE: CELEBRATING OUR IMPACT, SHAPING OUR FUTURE

2026 Annual Meeting Highlights

More than **150 community members** gathered for our 2026 Annual Meeting - an inspiring evening of reflection, celebration, and vision for the year ahead.

Together, we celebrated the impact we have made **AsOne** and recognized the people whose leadership, generosity, and commitment continue to strengthen our Jewish community.

A Year of Record Impact

Our community continues to demonstrate remarkable generosity and commitment.

For the **fourth consecutive year**, our **Annual Campaign increased**, reaching a record **\$2.817 million**. At the same time, we expanded our impact through our Foundation, Corporate Gifts, State Appropriations, National Grants, and Directed Philanthropy focused on security and combating antisemitism.

In total, we raised more than \$5.8 million this year.

These resources enabled us to respond to both longstanding community needs and emerging challenges, ensuring that our Jewish community remains strong, secure, connected, and resilient.



(From left to right): Jewish Federations of North America Board Chair Gary Torgow, Jewish Federation & Foundation of Northeast Florida CEO Mariam Feist, and Board Chair Jennifer Plotkin.

Gary Torgow was the keynote speaker at the Annual Meeting, addressing the challenges facing Jewish communities today and offering a broader perspective from his role as Chairman of the Jewish Federations of North America.

2026 Award Winners



Ilene Sari Selevan Young Leadership Award:

Dan & Gigi Schwartz

Joe P. Safer Community Service Award:

Moti Demri z"l

Accepted on his behalf by his wife, Cindy Demri.



Modernizing How We Invest in Our Community

This year marked an important step forward in how our Federation approaches community investment.

Our Federation Board approved a transition to a **hybrid allocations and grantmaking model**, allowing Annual Campaign dollars to support both general operating needs and specific initiatives aligned with three priorities identified through our Demographic Study:

- **Combating antisemitism**
- **Strengthening security**
- **Increasing engagement**

This approach gives us the best of both worlds: the ability to maintain continuity and support for our historic community partners, while creating greater flexibility to respond strategically to changing needs.

It is part of our commitment to **modernizing how we invest in our community** - using data, community insight, and thoughtful stewardship to ensure that our resources make the greatest possible impact.

Investing In What Matters

In 2026, we **allocated and granted nearly \$4.7 million** through our Annual Campaign, Foundation, and security grants.

Behind every dollar is an opportunity: to strengthen an organization, develop a leader, enhance community security, build Jewish connection, respond to a crisis, or create a stronger future for generations to come.

We invite you to scan the QR code and explore our **AsOne 2026 Annual Report**.

Learn more about where your support is making a difference and the many ways our Federation and Foundation are strengthening our community.



Looking Ahead: Our Priorities for 2027

At our Annual Meeting, **Jennifer Plotkin, Board Chair**, shared our priorities for the year ahead. Each reflects our commitment to building a stronger, more connected and more sustainable Jewish community.

1. Turning Data Into Strategy

We will begin developing a strategic plan informed by our Demographic Study findings.

The study gives us a clearer understanding of who we are as a community, what our community members need, and where opportunities exist for greater impact.

Our strategic planning process will use that data to guide the Federation and Foundation's priorities and investments for the years ahead.

2. Building a Legacy for the Next Generation

We are excited to launch Harold Grinspoon Foundation's Life & Legacy program, an eight-year partnership designed to help communities strengthen after-lifetime giving through permanent endowment funds.

Through Life & Legacy, our Federation and Foundation will work with local Jewish organizations to build a culture of legacy giving, ensuring that the organizations our community values today have the resources to thrive tomorrow.

It is an investment not only in institutions, but in the future of our Jewish community.

3. Showcasing Our Impact - Much More than a Fundraising Organization

From grantmaking and leadership development to global connections, security, and advocacy, our Federation touches virtually every aspect of Jewish community life.

In 2027, we will place an even greater emphasis on telling that story - demonstrating how philanthropy creates meaningful change and how our collective efforts strengthen our community locally, nationally, and around the world. Most importantly, we will continue embracing one of our most essential roles: being the community convener. We bring people together. We connect organizations and ideas. We identify challenges and opportunities.

We create partnerships and mobilize resources. And when our community faces moments of uncertainty, we come together AsOne.

The Future Is Ours to Build - Together

The year ahead holds both challenges and tremendous opportunity. We are entering it with a clear sense of purpose, a commitment to data-informed decision-making, and a deep belief in the power of collective action.

Thank you to everyone who makes this work possible—our donors, volunteers, community partners, professional team, and volunteer leaders.

Together, we are building a stronger Jewish community today and creating a lasting legacy for tomorrow.

Ways to Get Involved

BRIDGES Leadership Development Program

Join a network of over one hundred young professionals who have benefitted from this comprehensive 10-month program.

Contact: Charles Miller
charlesm@jewishjacksonville.org

Women's Philanthropy LEAD Program

Our community depends on the strength of female Jewish leaders. Join us and learn more about and connect with our Jewish community through the LEAD program.

Contact: Lauren Rickoff
lauren@jewishjacksonville.org

October 7th Community Commemoration

Featuring kibbutz Nir Oz survivor Barak Morag, he will share how he and his family survived the October 7th attack, and how human kindness and solidarity helped them find light in the darkness.

Contact: Jill Metlin
jillm@jewishjacksonville.org

Presents:

With



HOWIE
MANDEL



Sunday, February 7, 2027 | 7:00PM

Open to the community!

Cost to Attend: FREE*

Big Night Co-Chairs:

Laurie Berger, Lauren Block, Adam Gitlin

Event Sponsors*

*As of 9/2/26

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SHUMAKER
ADVISORS

Become a Big Night Ambassador



Scan the QR Code to become
an ambassador and enjoy:

- Exclusive registration access
- First look at all the details
- Invitation to the Big Night Ambassador Kickoff event

*Please note that while there is no charge for the event, all attendees will be asked to make a minimum commitment of \$180 to the 2027 Annual Campaign

FEDERATION LEADERSHIP

Mazel Tov to Our Outstanding Northeast Florida National Leaders!

When members of our community step forward to lead, they carry the values, strength, and spirit of Northeast Florida with them.

Join us in celebrating these outstanding leaders who have been appointed to positions on the national stage this year:



Mariam Feist

Board of Governors
Jewish Agency for Israel (JAFI)



Adam Gitlin

Executive Committee
National Young Leadership Cabinet
(NYLC)



Erica Jolles

Board Member
National Women's Philanthropy
(NWP) Board



Haley Trager

Board of Trustees
Jewish Federations of North America
(JFNA)
Co-Chair
NYLC Alumni



Kimberly Zavon

NYLC Representative for the Board
of Governors Observer Program
Jewish Agency for Israel (JAFI)



(From left to right): Supervisory Special Agent Sam Parker, Special Agent Ana Marcus, and Community Security Director Alex Silverstein conducting a cyber safety training session for students, parents, and faculty of the Martin J. Gottlieb Day School and the Bernard and Alice Selevan Religious School at the Jacksonville Jewish Center.



Women's Philanthropy met for their kickoff Steering Committee meeting, where members discussed ways to engage and connect with women throughout Northeast Florida. (From left to right): Debbie Banks, Laurie Berger, Marjie Rogozinski and Tulin Ostfeld



Janet Goldestein and Marlene Goodfriend celebrating the Federation's previous community shaliach, Oren Pery, and everything he's done for our local Jewish community at his farewell party.



Federation staff and Jewish community leaders advocating for continued support of Israel, security funds, and combating antisemitism at the 2026 Israel Fly-In Days in Tallahassee.



The Young Professionals & Families 2025-2026 BRIDGES Leadership Development Program cohort celebrates their graduation ceremony at The Jessie Ball duPont Center. Want to join the upcoming BRIDGES cohort? Registration is now open! See "Ways to Get Involved" on page 6.



Teens after community program "Bridging Perspectives," an open-discussion panel to exchange experiences, knowledge, and culture between American and Israeli youth. In partnership with the Spread Cream Cheese Not Hate® program.



(From left to right): Leslie Held and Leah Palestrant at Federation's 2026 Board Retreat, where staff and board members participated in a leadership development workshop and discussed strategic plans for this year.



**Jewish Federation
& Foundation**
of Northeast Florida

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**Jewish Federation
& Foundation**
of Northeast Florida

GIVE TODAY TO THE 2027 ANNUAL CAMPAIGN!

When our community comes together,
amazing things happen.

Let's continue this momentum
TOGETHER - As One.

Scan here to make a gift
or go to jewishjacksonville.org

