

Jewish Federation of Greater Orange County Annual Meeting

June 7, 2026, 10:00 am at Kol Yisrael

Rissa Cutler Called the meeting to order at 10:21 AM

Welcome to our Jewish Federation's 50th annual meeting. Fifty years of caring for and representing our Jewish community, 50 years of tackling acts of anti-semitism and hate, 50 years of supporting our local synagogues and agencies and 50 years of working to keep Jewish life in our county relevant, strong and vibrant. Thank you for joining us today.

The longevity and strength of our Federation is a tribute to so many people. Today we honor the planning and mission of our founders Florence Levine, Joe Schulhoff, David Rider and Doreen Shapiro and early action planners Chuck Mullin, George Handler, Andrea and Mike Dubroff, and Jerry and June Kreisberg. It all began with a meeting at the Shapiro home, and I hope we continue to honor and represent your work. This team of visionaries paved the path that led us to where we are today, and the team continued to expand.

I stand here today on the shoulders of all the past presidents, who over the decades have given their time, commitment and expertise to lead our mission. We honor the Past Presidents who are no longer with us: George Handler, Florence Levine, Chuck Mullin, Gerald Kreisberg, Norman Hecht, Harold Levine, Richard Levin and Joseph Birnbaum. And those here today: Leslie Green, Abbe Distelburger, Jack Berkowitz, and Mona Rieger. Please stand to be recognized. We also acknowledge those who were unable to join us today: Harvey Kallus, Carla Wise, Gail Oliver, Steve Rubinsky, Mark Fink, Raena Korenman, William Cieplinski, Marsha Sobel, Jack Slobod, and Andrea Dubroff.

Please check out our new column "Reminiscing With Past Presidents" in our We Are One Newsletter for reflections and memories of our past presidents.

I stand here on the shoulders of our donors. Without your generosity we could not exist. Your annual gifts allow us to do this important work and without you we would not succeed. Annual campaign donors, endowment holders and contributors, thank you.

And I also stand here on the shoulders of our Executive Director and our staff, who day in and day out work tirelessly and passionately to support our community. Wendy, Pam, Liz, Judy and Georgia (who is starting her 39th year with us); we could not do any of this without you.

And while we celebrate 50 years of our Federation, it must also be mentioned that throughout this year, our community, and many communities all over the world continue to endure endless struggles that we could not have imagined would be the reality of 2026. Israel continues to struggle for peace, safety and security, Ukraine and its citizen's deal with the reality of war each day, and here in the United States, we are facing too many incidents of antisemitism and hate. Now, more than ever, we must dedicate ourselves to continuing the mission of our Federation to support a strong Jewish community and open our hearts to our fellow citizens in need. May we continue to heal, educate, recover, and grow stronger together!

Before we continue with our business, we invite Rabbi Doug Kohn to offer an invocation, Cantor Carl Sayers to sing our National Anthem, Nava Herzog to lead us in Hatikvah.

[Invocation- Rabbi Doug Kohn, National Anthem- Cantor Carl Sayres, and Hatikvah- Cantor Nava Herzog](#)

We are fortunate to have strong connections with many elected officials and agencies in our community. We welcome New York State Assemblyman Jonathon Jacobsen today. Orange county clergy Rabbi Doug Kohn from Temple Beth Jacob, Cantor Carl Sayers from Congregation Agudas Israel, Spiritual Leader Nava Herzog from Temple Beth Hillel, Rabbi Brenda Weinberg from B’Nai Torah, Rabbi Pesach Burston from Chabad of Orange County. We also welcome Jewish Family Service Executive Director Nicki Ronsini and Newburgh JCC Executive Director Amanda Pearl. Thank you for being here with us today.

In addition, I would like to thank the following Annual Meeting Sponsors:

Jack Berkowitz and Suzanne Brown
Pamela Carroad
Abbe Distelburger
Barbara and Robert Fromowitz
David Fromowitz
Felicia Gell
Leslie and Glenn Green
Jeff and Rachelle Harmer
Joseph and Nava Herzog
Dr. Irv and Liz Kadesh
Mark and Sheila Lakritz
Steven and Robin Licker
Debbie Metzner
Sherrill and Stacey Murray Lazarus
Mona and Ian Rieger
Babi Sommer-Satzman
Rabbi Brenda Weinberg
Lorraine Wernow
Frank Wolf

I would also like to thank Pam Mason and Roberta Nakagawa who spent many hours going through photos and creating the albums at our information desk. And, thank you to Gail Conklin, who is graciously giving her time to take photos for us today.

Continuing with our business, the minutes from last year’s annual meeting are posted on our website. Mona Rieger made a motion to dispense with the reading of the minutes and approve them as written, Leslye Joseph seconded. All were in favor of the motion. No abstentions. The minutes are approved.

President's Report

Over the past five decades, the important work of our Federation has continued to have a great impact on our community and the impact of this effort can be seen all over Orange County. In 2025, we sponsored 6 Jewish Book Council events, a self-defense course through the community security initiative, 4 Israeli dancing opportunities, 14 microgrants under the leadership of committee chair Steve Rubinsky, 19 scholarships for summer camp, Israel trips and other Jewish experiences, a Levine Speaker Series event thanks to the generosity of the Levine family and the leadership of Abbe Distelberger, and the list goes on.

The work of our Zachor Antisemitism Initiative lives on thanks to the early vision of the steering committee Susan Notar, Leslie Green, Sharon Goldberg and Jack Berkowitz. Thanks to a generous donor, our Zachor Director Judy Ronay, and the commitment of our Board, we continue to respond to antisemitism and to host our annual Stop Hate Essay Contest in the Orange County schools. Our contest culminates with a Countywide Stop Hate Symposium. This year's panel included Julika von Stackelberg, Michael Edelstein, and daughter of a Holocaust survivor, Chana Widawski. You can find out more about the Symposium on our website.

As a retired teacher, I know firsthand the importance of educating our students and engaging these eager learners against hate in all forms. This year, we want to take a few minutes to honor and acknowledge some of the people who helped to make this year's Stop Hate Essay contest so successful. To share more about this year's contest, I invite Wendy Cedar.

Once again, Middletown High School Holocaust and Genocide Studies teacher Jennifer Younghans leaned into this work and continues to go above and beyond for her students in teaching and advocating for Holocaust studies. Jennifer was named one of 30 educators nationwide as a 2025 Echoes & Reflections Advanced Learning Seminar Fellow. She participated in intensive summer instruction in Poland to study the Holocaust with experts from Yad Vashem, the ADL, and the USC Shoah Foundation. Now, Jennifer not only shares her expertise with students, but also conducts continuing education courses and seminars for teachers, school administrators and the community at large. Jennifer, thank you for your expertise and partnership. Your work is so important, and we are honored to recognize you today.

Our essay contest continues to expand throughout the Orange County schools, and provides opportunities for students to explore hate, antisemitism and inequality in many forms. This year there were more than 100 essays entered in the contest and our Honorable Mention winner Bryan Sanchez is here today. Bryan, you wrote a wonderful essay that is posted on our website so everyone can read it. Thank you for coming today so we can congratulate you.

And we also welcome 10th grader Damaria Green, our grand prize winner, who is here to perform her winning rap for us.

You can see why she won! Thank you Damaria.

In addition to working in our schools, we continue to support PJ Library and PJ Play, for our youngest friends. Board member Elizabeth Frederick is our PJ Library Coordinator. This year, Elizabeth has been busy executing activities and events for our youngest families all over the county as they are introduced to Jewish books and each other. She recently attended the PJ Library Coordinator's conference to network and get ideas to bring to our community.

The backbone of our office and partner in all we do, Wendy Cedar, our executive director, is completing her fifth year with us. Since joining our organization, Wendy has become co-chair of the Orange County Human Rights Commission and is active in the Orange County Chamber of Commerce, representing Federation around the county. She has worked to participate in the work of our committees and has been closely involved in our timely responses to antisemitism in partnership with our Community Relations Council. This important work would not happen without your dedication. Wendy, thank you. I am looking forward to our continued partnership in the coming years.

The commitment of these professionals and our Federation Board has enabled our work to touch thousands of community members, making a positive impact along the way.

Our work, especially in today's world, is vital. Of course, our challenge, as in any nonprofit organization, is raising much needed funds. We count on our donors to support us so that this important work can continue to make a difference in Orange County and abroad, supporting Israel and Jewish communities all over the world. In fact, during this year's budget process, our Board voted to increase our overseas allocation by 5%.

In addition, our endowments provide a vital foundation, and we are working to increase our total and make this base even stronger in the coming year. Under the leadership of Endowment Chair Jeffrey Harmer, our funds remain strong.

As we look ahead, plans are already underway to continue our ongoing campaign efforts. You will hear from our treasurer in a few minutes, and while the total of our annual campaign has decreased over time, we have been able secure campaign gifts over the past three years and continue to allocate valuable resources to our community partners thanks to the generosity of our donors, many who have increased their pledges. For our work to continue, we must keep an upward path going and increase our donor base. We must continue to reach out to our community and secure annual gifts that allow us to fund our important initiatives. The current economy makes this increasingly difficult, as people feel pulled in many financial directions. However, the work of the Federation cannot happen without successful fundraising. We are counting on you.

By being here today, you acknowledge your commitment and support of our Federation and I thank you for your partnership. With the goal of increasing our campaign total and continuing to build community connections, planning for our annual Major Gifts event is underway so stay tuned for this information to be shared. We hope many of you will join us for Major Gifts and consider increasing your pledge to support our campaign.

To give you an inside peek and to highlight our Federation's journey over the past 50 years, I invite Executive Director Wendy Cedar to share a look back at what we have accomplished.

Wendy showed the slide show.

Rissa then introduced Treasurer, Jeff Harmer for a Financial Report. See treasurer's report.

Rissa then mentions Nominating Committee Chair, Steve Rubinsky (unable to attend) and presents the nominees to be installed.

Our Slate of Officers and Trustees is included in your packet. The strength of our team can always use more energy, and you will note that we have a few open spots. Please see me or Wendy if you are ready to step up and join our Board.

There were not any additional nominations from the floor. David Rider made a motion to close nominations, Paul Pomerantz seconded.

All were in favor of the motion to elect the candidates proposed by the nominating committee. No abstentions. The motion carried. Rissa direct one ballot be cast on behalf of all those nominated.

The following Trustees will continue in their Board Positions which will conclude in 2029: Elizabeth Frederick, Rachelle Harmer, Joseph Herzog, Irv Kadish, Janet Kass, Gay Miller

The nominees rose to be installed.

Rissa It gives me great pleasure to install these Trustees. I am looking forward to working together in the coming years.

YOUR RESPONSIBILITIES ARE:

To contribute to the policy-making, planning and oversight of our Federation by:

1. Attending board meetings
2. Serving on at least one Board committee
3. Making a meaningful personal gift to the Federation's Annual Campaign and making best efforts to solicit donations on behalf of the organization
4. Being a public representative who is knowledgeable about Federation's mission, programs and activities, and a willingness to share this, as appropriate, with members of the community
5. Exemplify in words and actions, the Jewish values of klal yisrael, tzedekah and tikkun olam, by which our Federation strives.

All accepted this board position and agree to serve to the best of their ability, according to the aforementioned responsibilities.

Rissa asked all Past Presidents and Founders present to come forward to be recognized.

Wendy Cedar called the county's Volunteers of the Year to be honored, receive a certificate, and receive a certificate from Rep. Jonathan Jacobson.

Wendy: Our community is built on the dedication of our volunteers. It is my honor to congratulate this year's Volunteers of the Year. Full biographies will appear online and in the monthly WE ARE ONE newsletter. When your name is called, please come forward to receive a certificate and to have your photo taken. At the end of the program, we will ask all Volunteers of the Year to come together for a group photo. We will also post all of the photos on our Federation website and social media pages.

Rissa closed the meeting after a motion from Leslie Green, seconded by Lea Morgenstein.

Meeting adjourned at approximately 11:45am.

Notes adjusted and submitted by Wendy Cedar 6/10/26