



(Left to Right) Michele Ruda, Rina Schnauffer

Rina Schnauffer & Michele Ruda on Finding Purpose Through Federation

When Rina Schnauffer and Michele Ruda sit down together, the conversation flows easily—two friends whose journeys to the Jewish Federation of Greater Rochester took different roads but led to the same destination: a deep commitment to building Jewish community.

"As a nurse, I'm used to saving people one at a time," Rina reflects. "But through Federation, I've learned that strengthening community saves us all."

Rina's Story: Choosing Jewish Life Intentionally

Growing up in Great Neck, New York, Rina didn't realize Jewish people were a minority. With four temples in her town, Judaism was simply the fabric of everyday life.

"Being Jewish isn't just a religion for me—it's who I am as a person," she explains.

But when Rina moved to Rochester, everything changed. Suddenly, she had to make conscious, intentional choices about raising her children Jewish. What had once been automatic now required effort and commitment.

Her entry point? Her children. Like so many parents, Rina first connected with the Jewish community through her kids' activities. But it was a personal invitation that transformed her involvement.

"A friend brought me in," Rina recalls. "Someone opening the door matters so much. You need that person who says, 'Come here—we need you.'"

When COVID hit, Rina found herself asking a deeper question: How can I tap in and make a real difference? The answer led her to [JCRC](#), job readiness programs, Miriam Circle, and the Jewish Home.

Today, Rina uses her employer's matching gift program exclusively for Federation. "The stories about the work we're doing—that's what moves me to give beyond my usual giving," she says. "Federation is the face of the Jewish community. I didn't fully understand that until I got more involved."

Michele's Story: A Lifetime of Service

For Michele Ruda, serving the Jewish community has been her life's work—literally. A social worker by training, Michele spent almost 30 years working at both Jewish Family Service and the JCC. She ran the Interfaith Connection and parenting programs. She's worked at both Camp Sisol and Camp Seneca Lake, serves on the [Shinshinim](#) committee, and chaperoned trips for teens to Washington and Israel.

"I feel that it's important to have a finger on the pulse of the Jewish community," Michele says simply.

After six years on the Federation board—plus countless hours on the Social Action Committee and other initiatives—Michele has given her time generously. But she's intentional about it. Michele's giving philosophy is straightforward: "I mainly give to the Federation. I'm proud of that. All the speakers, all the programs—show that we care. We help all Jews to learn, grow and thrive."

What Keeps Them Connected

Both women emphasize the power of gratitude and connection.

"Handwritten notes matter," Michele says. "When Leah Goldman wrote me a thank-you after the DC trip, it made me feel seen. It told me, 'You appreciate your volunteers.'"

Rina agrees: "Being thanked doesn't have to be a big gesture. But recognition—when people want it—should be offered. Even during programs, saying thank you is important."

They also see Federation's role as a bridge-builder. Programs like JMOMs and the [Jay Leadership Program](#) connect younger families to the broader community, creating pathways from the JCC to deeper Federation involvement.

Why Federation?

For Rina and Michele, the answer comes down to one thing: Federation represents the entire Jewish community.

"It's different from other Jewish organizations," Rina explains. "Federation is the face of who we are to the community at large."

Michele puts it even more simply: "We help all Jews—at every stage of life."

Your Invitation

Rina and Michele's journeys began with a single invitation—someone who opened a door and said, "We need you."

Who will you invite?

To learn more about getting involved with the Jewish Federation of Greater Rochester, visit jewishrochester.org.