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Shalom 01|25

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Welcoming Vicki Haller Graff, our new Program Director

By Brian Chartock

We are thrilled to announce the newest addition to Federation's team, Vicki Haller Graff, who has joined us as our Program Director. With a wealth of experience and a passion for fostering growth and innovation, Vicki is poised to play a pivotal role in shaping the future of our programs.

Vicki comes to us with more than two decades of significant contributions to the arts, education and nonprofit sectors. Most recently, she served as Executive Assistant to the Provost at Albright College. In this role, Vicki demonstrated exceptional organizational and project management skills, liaising with both students and external partners. Her ability to navigate complex academic environments while prioritizing student-centered events aligns perfectly with our mission and vision.

Prior to her time at Albright, Vicki served as Executive Assistant to the President and CEO at Fox Theatres in Wyomissing. During her tenure, she managed a variety of initiatives, including film bookings and events, partnerships and public relations efforts. Her hands-on approach to managing relationships and communications will be invaluable in her new role with us.

Beyond her corporate experience, Vicki is also the Artistic Director of the Reading Theater Project, where she has created and implemented innovative performance programming and built collaborative community partnerships. Her success in fundraising, grant writing, and managing budgets demonstrates her strong leadership and commitment to the arts. Vicki grew up attending B'nai Israel Synagogue in Pensacola, Fla., and is now a member of Reform Congregation Oheb Sholom.

Vicki Haller Graff

As Program Director, Vicki will oversee the development, execution, and continuous improvement of our programs, ensuring that they align with our mission and vision. Her strategic thinking, combined with her hands-on approach to management, will be instrumental in advancing our goals and ensuring that we continue to deliver exceptional outcomes for our community stakeholders.

Vicki's approach to leadership is one that values communication, creativity, and inclusivity. She believes in the power of diverse perspectives and collaborative decision-making, and she is committed to fostering a supportive and dynamic culture where every team member and volunteer can thrive. Her ability to inspire others and build strong, effective relationships will undoubtedly be a tremendous asset to our Federation.

When asked about her new role, Vicki shared her excitement about the opportunity: "I am thrilled to be joining this passionate team that is so dedicated to our community. I look forward to working alongside everyone to enhance our programs and create new opportunities for growth, learning, and impact."

Please join us in welcoming Vicki Haller Graff to our team. We are confident that her leadership and vision will help drive our programs to new successes, and we look forward to the incredible work that lies ahead.

Contact information for Vicki: Phone: 610-921-0624; email: vickig@jfreading.org

Please stop by and say hello to Vicki; we are excited to have her on board and look forward to a bright future together!

Shining a Light on Antisemitism

By Laurie Waxler

Jewish Federation of Reading proudly hosted our second annual Shine A Light on Antisemitism gathering on Wednesday, December 18 in downtown Reading. Following the City of Reading's annual Menorah Lighting, which was well attended despite a few raindrops, Federation hosted a wine and latke reception for Jewish and non-Jewish community leaders, local legislators, educators, and community members.

Serving as keynote speaker was Hank Butler, Executive Director of the Pennsylvania Jewish Coalition, an organization continuously advocating on behalf of Pennsylvania's Jewish community.

Butler addressed the increase in antisemitism, stating this is not new. Working with Democratic and Republican legislators in Harrisburg, Butler explained that antisemitism (as well as all forms of hate) is a bipartisan issue and needs everyone's support to make real change.

Following Butler's talk, Federation was pleased to present the inaugural Champion for Peace award to Mike Toledo, President and CEO of Centro Hispano in Reading. Toledo has been outspoken in the local Latino community, preaching peace and harmony among all Berks Countians regardless of race, gender, or religion. Upon receiving the award, Toledo thanked the Federation and expressed his continued desire to bring our community together.

Other speakers at the event included Darryl Mace, Vice President of Mission, Diversity & Inclusion at Alvernia University; Michael Fromm, Board President of the Jewish Federation of Reading Foundation;Reading Mayor Eddie Moran; and Brian Chartock, Federation CEO.

All in all, it was a successful and important event for our Federation to host and sponsor.

Educating our community on the dangers of increased antisemitism is more important than ever. If you would like more information about the resources we shared with our attendees, please email Amanda at info@jfreading.org or call 610-921-0624 and we will share whatever info we can to keep you up-to-date. If you've personally experienced antisemitism, I encourage you to report it on the ADL website at ADL.org/report-incident.

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Women's Philanthropy
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Your Jewish Legacy
Chai Circle
L'Chaim Society
Book of Life
Letter of Intent

Give the gift of presence

By Laurie Waxler

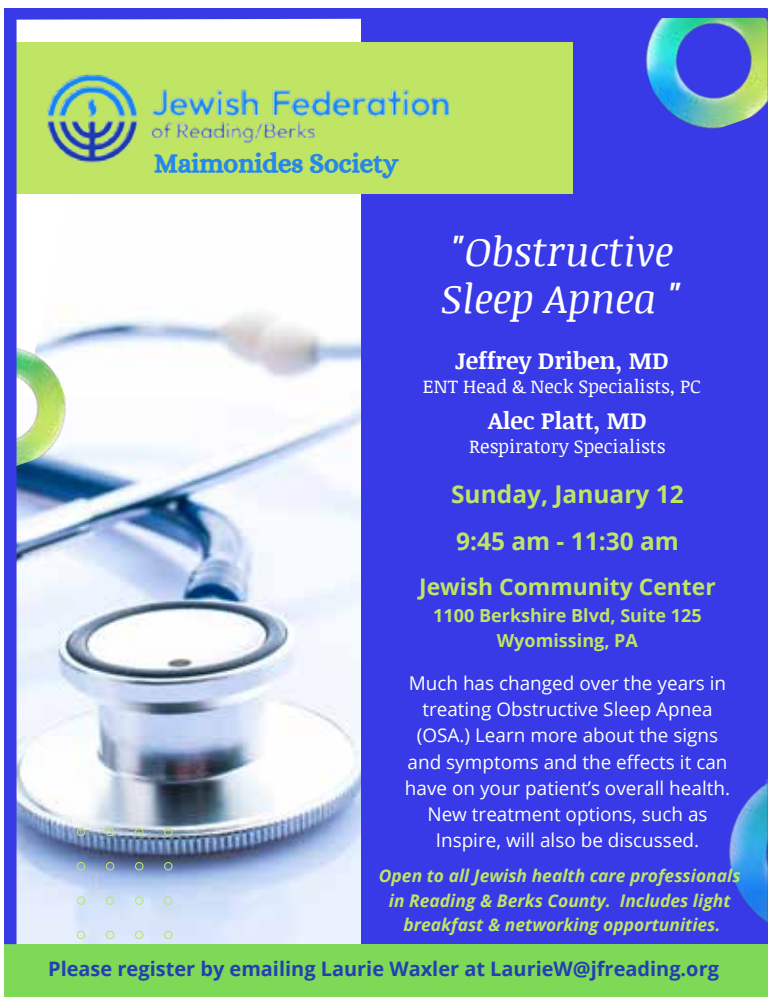
This is such a crazy time of year, regardless of your religion. In less than a week we'll be writing 2025! We all remember Y2K when everyone thought the world was going to end at midnight, Dec 31, 1999, only to wake up on Jan. 1 to another regular day. It's hard to believe that was a quarter-century ago!

The end of the year brings a lot of unnecessary stress. We never think we've done enough but in reality, we probably have. I believe one of the best gifts you can give is your presence. Putting your phone down and really listening to your friends and family when they're talking, dropping off a little something when you sense someone may be in turmoil, or picking up the phone and calling a friend to check on them, or share a funny story, rather than sending that easy text.

We also have a second chance at a new year resolution (following Yom Kippur.) If your resolution is to lose weight and get healthy and it's been that for the last few years, I recommend finding a new one. Maybe your goal this year could be to reconnect with friends and family in a more positive and personal way. We could all use a little more 'connection' in our lives.

One of the things I've loved most about working for Federation is the connections I've made with community members I'd never met before. Our Federation family is so lucky to have some of the nicest, most sincere and generous people in Berks County. People who show up to help with events or deliver meals, people who come to events willing to share personal experiences to help others grow, and those who are willing and able to make a financial contribution to help a fellow community member in need. Thank you to everyone has given a gift of time, talent and/or treasure as you are the heart of our community.

I wish you all a very Happy Chanukah and a happy and healthy new year, and remember, if you haven't yet made a gift to our Annual Campaign, it's never too late! Be part of our 2024 Campaign by donating before Dec. 31 at ReadingJewishCommunity.org or kick off our 2025 Campaign by making your donation in the New Year! Either way, your gift will be equally appreciated!



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From the CEO's Desk

Jewish Federations and Tu B'Shevat: A shared commitment to community, growth and sustainability

By Brian Chartock
CEO

Tu B'Shevat, the "New Year for Trees," is a Jewish holiday that celebrates nature, growth and environmental responsibility. Observed on the 15th of the Hebrew month of Shevat (Feb. 13 this year), it has become a time for Jews worldwide to connect with the environment, plant trees, and reflect on the significance of nature in Jewish tradition. Interestingly, Tu B'Shevat also shares a connection with Jewish Federations, organizations that work to support Jewish communities locally, nationally, and internationally.

Jewish Federations are central to Jewish communal life, providing funding, resources, and support for programs that promote Jewish identity, education, social justice and community engagement. Their work extends to supporting environmental initiatives and sustainability projects, making Tu B'Shevat — a holiday dedicated to trees and nature — a perfect opportunity for these organizations to reinforce their commitment to community growth and environmental stewardship.

At its core, Tu B'Shevat is focused on the natural world, particularly trees. It marks the beginning of the tree-planting season in Israel and is a time when Jews express gratitude for the earth's bounty. One of the main traditions is to eat fruit, especially those associated with the Land of Israel, such as figs, dates, olives, and pomegranates. Some communities hold "seder" meals, similar to a Passover seder, where participants sample fruits and nuts, each symbolizing aspects of the natural world and the Jewish relationship to it.

The theme of growth and renewal on Tu B'Shevat aligns, too, with the mission of Jewish Federations, which cultivate strong, sustainable Jewish communities. Just as Tu B'Shevat celebrates the growth of trees and the environment, Jewish Federations work to support the growth of Jewish life, whether through funding educational initiatives, social services, or community-building efforts.

While Jewish Federations traditionally focus on supporting Jewish life through social services, education and community development, many also work to promote environmental sustainability, aligning with the values expressed on Tu B'Shevat. Jewish organizations have long recognized the importance of preserving the earth and its resources, and many Federations have launched initiatives that reflect these concerns.

For example, some Jewish Federations partner with local environmental organizations to promote sustainable practices, such as recycling, reducing carbon footprints and conserving natural resources. Others fund projects related to reforestation, urban gardening and environmental education, which resonate deeply with the Tu B'Shevat ethos of honoring nature and fostering growth. This connection between environmentalism and community-building reflects a key value in Jewish thought: tikkun olam (repairing the world).

Tu B'Shevat has particular significance in Israel, where the holiday celebrates the planting of trees and the protection of natural landscapes. Over the years, Israel has faced significant environmental challenges, from water scarcity to land preservation. Jewish Federations like Reading/Berks, particularly those with ties to Israel, have been instrumental in supporting environmental initiatives in the Jewish state. Federations fund projects that focus on reforestation, protecting natural resources and promoting sustainable agriculture in Israel. These efforts not only support the environmental health of the country but provide an opportunity for Jews worldwide to connect to Israel in meaningful ways. On Tu B'Shevat, Jewish Federations often highlight their work in Israel's environmental sustainability, tying the holiday's themes of growth and renewal to tangible projects that benefit both Israel and the Jewish community at large.

A Friendship Circle Tu B'Shevat Seder at the JCC in 2023..

Another key aspect of Tu B'Shevat is its role in fostering community engagement. The holiday is celebrated in schools, synagogues and Jewish communities around the world, with activities that encourage people to get involved in planting trees, learning about the environment, and participating in local environmental projects. Jewish Federations use this time to engage their communities in environmental initiatives, organizing tree-planting events, environmental clean-up projects, and educational programs that align with the values of Tu B'Shevat.

By integrating Tu B'Shevat into their programming, Jewish Federations provide a platform for community members to come together for a shared purpose: to celebrate nature and contribute to its preservation. These events create a sense of unity, as they bring together people of all ages and backgrounds to work toward a common goal — caring for the planet and one another.

Jewish environmental ethics, which draw from texts such as the Torah and the Talmud, emphasize the responsibility humans have to care for the earth. The Jewish principle of bal tashchit (do not destroy) forbids the unnecessary destruction of natural resources, and the concept of shmita (the sabbatical year) calls for the land to rest every seven years. These teachings encourage Jews to approach environmental sustainability as an integral part of their religious and cultural practices.

Jewish Federations have embraced these values by funding environmental education and advocacy initiatives that promote Jewish ethical principles. By integrating Tu B'Shevat into their programming, Federations provide an opportunity for individuals to connect these ancient values to modern-day concerns about climate change, resource conservation and social responsibility. Tu B'Shevat, as a holiday focused on nature, acts as a reminder of the importance of stewardship and respect for the environment, reinforcing the Jewish ethical obligation to care for the earth.

Tu B'Shevat also serves as an opportunity for Jewish Federations to broaden their reach and engage members of the community who may not be as involved in traditional Jewish holiday celebrations. Environmental issues such as climate change, sustainability and conservation are concerns that resonate with many people today, especially younger generations. By emphasizing the connection between Tu B'Shevat and environmental responsibility, Jewish Federations can attract a broader audience, fostering a deeper sense of Jewish identity through a commitment to environmental stewardship.

Tu B'Shevat events organized by Federations often blend Jewish tradition with contemporary environmental issues, making the holiday more accessible and relevant to people from diverse backgrounds. Whether through tree-planting initiatives, eco-friendly programs, or educational webinars on sustainability, these events offer a meaningful way for people to participate in Jewish life while addressing pressing global challenges.

Tu B'Shevat, with its focus on nature, growth, and sustainability, provides Jewish Federations with a unique opportunity to engage their communities in both traditional and modern forms of Jewish practice. Through environmental projects, community engagement, and support for Israel's ecological needs, Jewish Federations help bring the values of Tu B'Shevat to life.

By linking Tu B'Shevat to their ongoing work, Jewish Federations underscore the importance of growth — both in the natural world and within the Jewish community. The holiday serves as a reminder of the Jewish responsibility to care for the earth, to repair the world, and to nurture the next generation, making it a fitting symbol of the work done by Jewish Federations to strengthen Jewish life and foster sustainability from generation to generation (l'dor v'dor).

Shalom

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Jewish Federation of Reading/Berks

Join us for Noontime Knowledge in January

‘Evitchka: A True Story of Survival, Hope and Love’

From Federation staff

Join authors Lawrence Levitt and Stephanie Smartschan on Wednesday, Jan. 15, at noon at the Jewish Federation of Reading as they discuss their book “Evitchka: A True Story of Survival, Hope and Love.” It tells the story of an inspirational woman and her family in two parts.

The first chronicles the life of the Ritter family — a young Evitchka, her parents, grandparents and aunt — and how they were able to survive the Holocaust in Czechoslovakia.

The second part picks up when an 18-year-old Eva meets a young, soon-to-be doctor named Larry Levitt. Their journey comes full circle when they travel with Eva’s parents and their children back to Czechoslovakia, visiting Auschwitz and reuniting with the couple that took them in. A few years later, incredibly, they have the opportunity to repay an unpayable debt when the man who saved them falls ill.

Dr. Lawrence Levitt founded the Neurology Division at Lehigh Valley Hospital in Allentown.

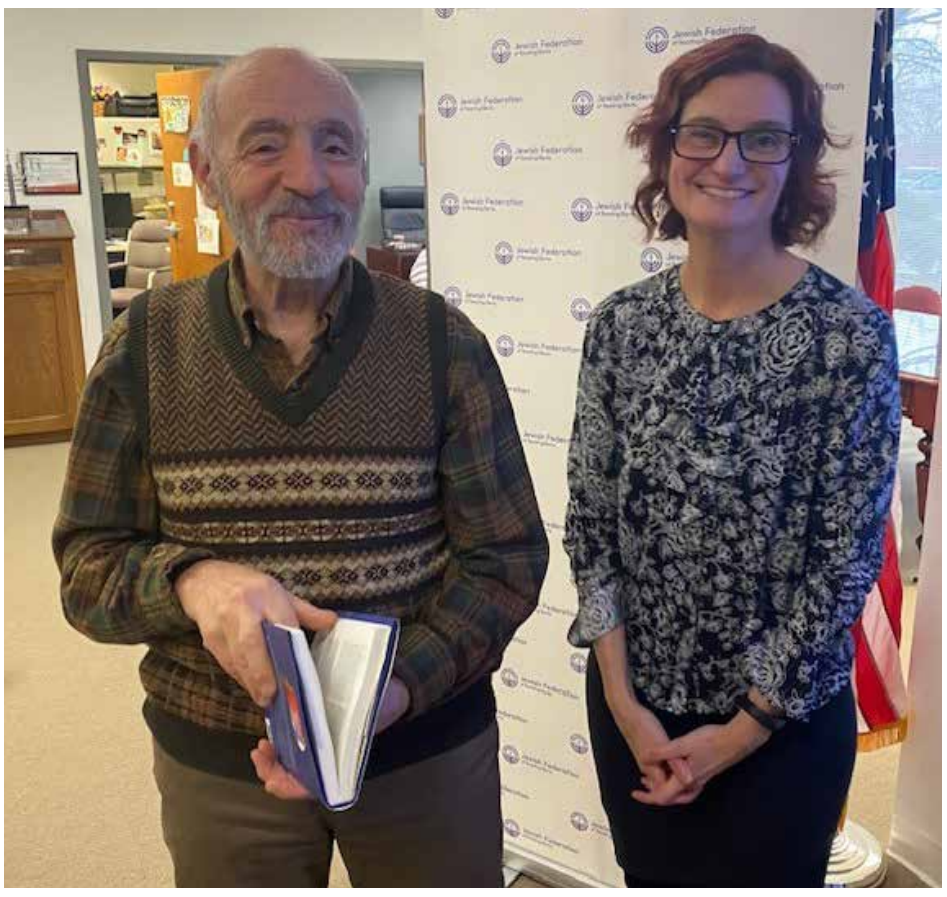
‘Profiles in Mental Health Courage’

From Federation staff

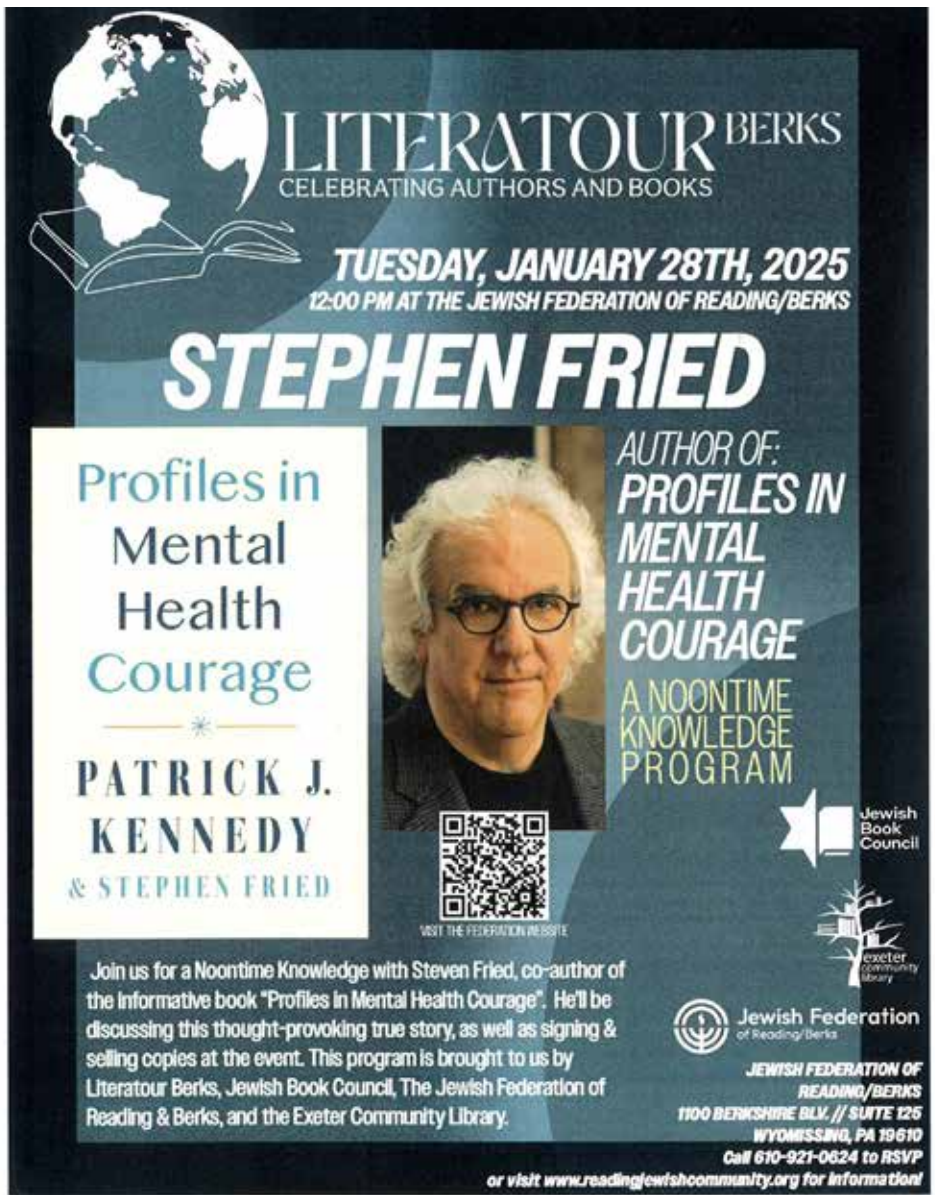
Join award-winning medical journalist Stephen Fried on Tuesday, Jan. 28, at noon at the Jewish Federation of Reading as he discusses “Profiles in Mental Health Courage,” co-authored by former Congressman Patrick Kennedy.

They spent hundreds of hours in conversations with people living with mental illnesses and its consequences.

“Profiles in Mental Health Courage” is a reminder not only of the humanity of those who suffer from mental illness and its consequences, but of how incapable our wider society is of coping with this crisis.



At left, Meir Mazuz talking to Jennifer Koosed about her Noontime Knowledge presentation “Judith and Her Midrashim” on Dec. 11. Right, Brian Engelhardt and Seth Rosenzweig discuss “Finding a Home for the Reading Public Museum” at the Dec 17 program.



Learn about world with Great Decisions series

By Amanda Wertz

Artificial intelligence. India. World Economy. Climate Change. China. NATO. American Foreign Policy and After Gaza. These are the hot topic international issues that will be discussed at this year's Great Decisions series at the JCC.

Moderated by local professors from Alvernia University, Kutztown University and Penn State Berks as well as community members, Great Decisions is the country's largest discussion group on world affairs. Each week a different global issue will be discussed by the group after reading the Great Decision Briefing Book and watching the related DVD.

Our group will be meeting on Monday mornings from 10:30 a.m. until noon at the JCC beginning Feb. 17. Great Decisions runs for eight weeks through April 7. The cost is $35 per book or $40 for two people sharing one book. We always have a lively and intellectual discussion and welcome new participants!

To register for Great Decisions and to order a copy of the Great Decisions Briefing Book, please contact the JCC at info@jfreading.org or call 610-921-0624.

2025 GREAT DECISIONS

Meeting at the Jewish Community Center
1100 Berkshire Blvd. Suite 125, Wyomissing

Monday mornings 10:30 a.m.
February 17 through April 7

PREPARE TO DISCUSS THE WORLD

2/17/25	AI and American National Security	Jim Shankweiler
2/24/25	India: Between China, the West and the Global South	Dr. Solomon Lausch
3/3/25	U.S. Changing Leadership of the World Economy	Dr. Randall Newham, PSU Berks
3/10/25	International Cooperation of Climate Change	Larry Cohen
3/17/25	U.S. China Relations	Jim Shankweiler
3/24/25	The Future of NATO and European Security	Dr. Victoria Williams, Alvernia University
3/31/25	American Foreign Policy at a Crossroads	Dr. John Stanley, Kutztown University
4/7/25	After Gaza: American Policy in the Middle East	Dr. Gordon Perlmutter

$35 one person, one book or $40 two persons, one book

To register for Great Decisions and to order a copy of the 2025 Great Decisions Briefing Book please visit readingjewishcommunity.org or call the office 610-921-0624

Jewish Federation of Reading/Berks

ADL: Jewish Americans face job discrimination

Anti-Defamation League

Jewish American job candidates needed to send 24% more applications to receive the same number of positive first responses from prospective employers as Americans with Western European backgrounds when applying to the same role, according to a study published in December by the ADL (Anti-Defamation League) Center for Antisemitism Research.

Further, the study found that Israeli Americans needed to send 39% more applications, indicating substantial discrimination.

For this study, leading labor economist Bryan Tomlin, PhD, independently conducted a field experiment applying online for administrative assistant job postings using resumés that were identical except for specific characteristics, including names, that signal if the applicants were Jewish American, Israeli American, or American with Western European backgrounds.

"This is groundbreaking evidence of serious antisemitic discrimination in the labor market," said Jonathan A. Greenblatt, ADL CEO. "On top of increasing antisemitic incidents and growing antisemitic beliefs, this landmark study illustrates the very real need for employers to take anti-Jewish and anti-Israeli prejudice more seriously to have a workplace that works for everyone."

"Without the benefit of a study of this kind, it is difficult, if not impossible, to prove adverse treatment in the labor market based on one's religion or cultural identity," said Tomlin. "This study shows that Jewish and Israeli Americans may be missing out on job opportunities just because of their identity, not their qualifications, and it provides a start toward quantifying some of these more subtle but still harmful symptoms of antisemitism."

Tomlin conducted a pre-registered, large sample, field experiment, sending 3,000 inquiries to administrative assistance job postings across the United States between May and October using identical email text and resumés that differed only in (a) the name of the applicant — selected to "sound" Jewish, Israeli, or Western European — and (b) resumé signals of likely Jewish, Israeli, or Western European background.

This methodology follows an approach similar to that utilized by other correspondence-based field experiments in the labor market.

The ADL Center for Antisemitism Research builds upon the organization's antisemitism expertise through an applied research network, innovative initiatives and signature projects to evaluate and identify what makes a difference in the fight against this hatred.

The Center catalyzes and conducts scholarly investigation into key areas on antisemitism by sponsoring fellowships and grants, conducting the Anti-Defamation League's own empirical research and organizing speaker series and publications.

Follow us on social media!

Jewish Federation of Reading &
Jewish Cultural Center of Reading

@jfedreadingberks

Don't forget to share your email with us to keep on the latest Community news!

Send us an email at info@jfreading.org to get added to our email list!

Give back to Jewish Family Service this season by donating your gently used items to CommunityAid!

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Miracle of rededication

By Cantor Ted Prosnitz
Kesher Zion Synagogue

Uniquely among the Jewish holidays, Ḥanukkah stretches from one month into another, from Kislev to Tevet. The successful Maccabean revolt enabled the Jews to practice their religion again and rededicate their sacred spaces, particularly the Temple in Jerusalem.

Shiviti Adoshem L'negdi Tamid / I keep the Lord in mind always (Ps. 16:8). Similarly, Jerusalem is always on my mind. This month, on the 10th of January, the beginning of the siege of Jerusalem that resulted in the destruction of the Temple is specifically recalled. From one of the Selichot/penitential prayers said on that day: "In the month of Tevet I was stricken sorely. The world changed its course…" In a time of change we can pray, as in another of the selichot, ḥazkenu b'yiratecha / strengthen us in reverence of You.

In Israel, the 10th of Tevet (which coincidentally is also the 10th of January) has been designated as a "general kaddish day" (yom hakaddish ha'klalli). Victims of the Holocaust and other people whose date and place of death are unknown may be remembered by relatives and mourners. How best to honor our dearly departed? Study our heritage, practice tzedakah-meaning charity and righteousness, and by doing good deeds in their memory.

Tevet/January also holds hidden possibilities. This is the month in which Esther, of Purim fame, was brought to the king's palace. With the renewal of each year, month and day, we face the challenge and opportunity to be thankful for and make the best use of the gifts that we have been given.

May the lights we kindled at the beginning of Hanukkah and which we continued to ignite into the beginning of this secular year, continue to inspire us to rededicate ourselves with faith in our Creator and to shine light when and where there is darkness.

Celebrating Hanukkah, community in downtown Reading

The downtown Reading menorah lighting and Shine a Light on Antisemitism event. Clockwise from top left, Mike Toledo of the Hispanic Center of Reading receives the Champion of Peace Award, a large and diverse crowd listens to speakers; Hank Butler of the Pennsylvania Jewish Coalition delivers remarks, and community leaders gather. Some photos by Michelle Lynch courtesy of Reading Eagle.

Martin Luther King Jr. Day of Service set for Jan. 20

By Rev. Megan Huesgen
Immanuel UCC, Shillington

"Life's most persistent and urgent question is – what are you doing for others?" — the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

For the past several years, our interfaith partners, including the Jewish Federation of Reading/Berks, have provided a communitywide event on the Martin Luther King, Jr holiday.

Rather than simply thinking of holiday as a "day off" but rather a "day on" to caring and serving our neighbor.

Last year, we:

- Created more than 100 greeting cards for elderly individuals and thank-you's for first responders
- Made more than 350 sandwiches for New Journey Community Outreach
- Prepared more than 500 Power Packs (nonperishable options) for local students
- Completed several no-sew blankets
- Designed countless friendship bracelets.

We seek to provide a similar opportunity on Jan. 20 beginning at 10 a.m.

The event will take place at Immanuel United Church of Christ, 99 S Waverly Street, Shillington.

We are grateful for the offering of the Interfaith Thanksgiving Eve service to help offset the cost of supplies for the event.

Financial donations are welcomed and can be made to Immanuel United Church of Christ or the Jewish Federation of Reading.

Local clergy gather at Reform Congregation Oheb Sholom for the annual Interfaith Thanksgiving service. Proceeds from the offering are going toward the MLK Day of Service.

JFS hospital, outpatient visits

By Carole Robinson and Sari Incledon

Jewish Family Service social workers visit Jewish patients at local hospitals, senior communities, nursing homes and rehab centers.

Our goal in these visits is both to be friendly and supportive at a difficult time, and to provide access to social services that supplement and complement the case managers at these locations.

If you or a loved one is at a local hospital or nursing home and would like a visit, please call us.

If you or a loved one are treated at a hospital out of our area we are also available for follow-up visits upon discharge.

At times of ill health, stress or crisis, families are often looking for information about home care, transportation services, senior communities, nursing homes and rehabs. This is what we're here for.

Please call Jewish Family Service social workers for help at 610-921-0624.

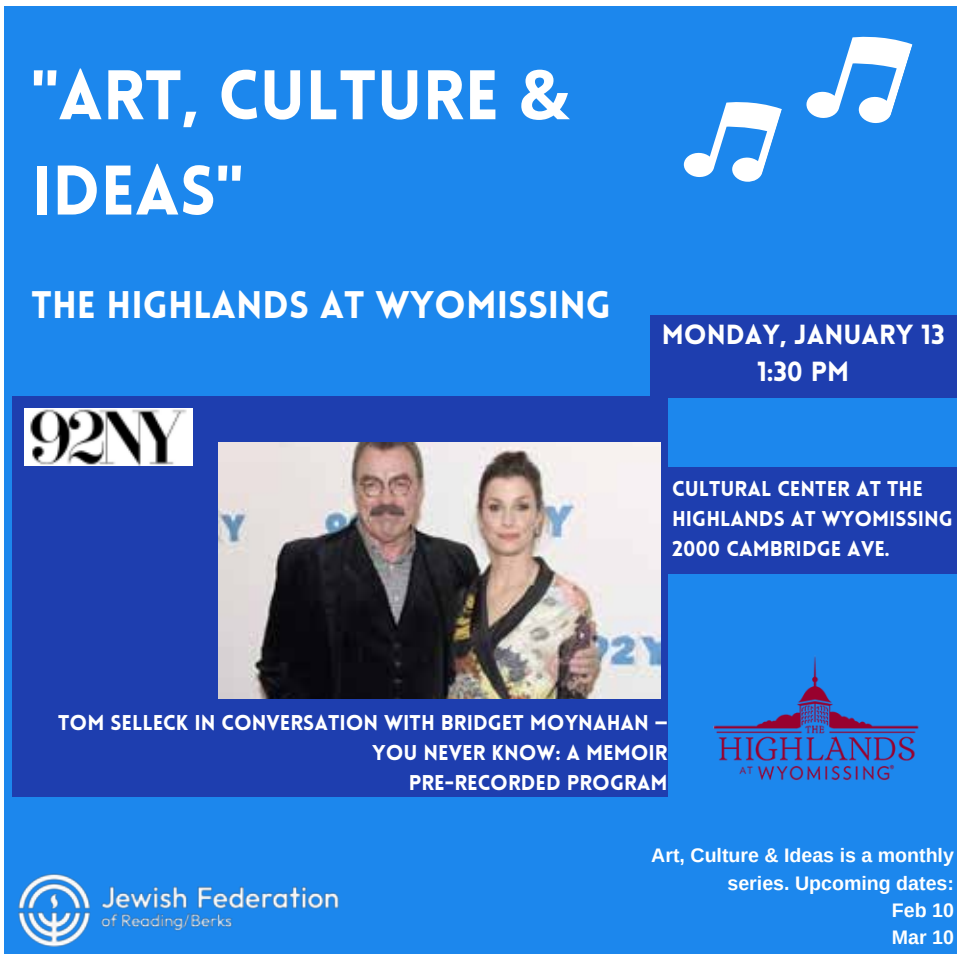
Join local organizer Amana Woolf-Gibbs for a weekly 0.5 mile/18 min. walk in honor of the 100 hostages still being held in Hamas captivity. The purpose of this peaceful walk is to raise awareness and send a message of solidarity to families who are awaiting their return.

When: every Sunday at noon (new time)

Where: Reading Public Museum by the walking trail.

Why: Global run/walk events calling for the immediate release of the hostages held by Hamas

More Info: R4TL.Reading.PA@gmail.com



Lighting the darkness

By Carole Robinson

My sister Stephanie recently told me about an encounter she had at her local gym. She introduced herself to a woman in the locker room (I'll call her "Beth"), and they started talking.

Beth lost her two part-time jobs due to medical issues. She is currently homeless and living in her car. Beth has been given permission to use the shower at the gym, but most gym patrons ignore her because of her unwashed clothes and tendency to talk to herself.

Stephanie looked her in the eye and humanized her by asking her name. Although Stephanie cannot resolve Beth's living situation, she brings her food and treats her with kindness.

You may wonder what this story has to do with those of us living in Berks County. In case you aren't aware, Berks is also plagued by the challenges of homelessness. In fact, the Berks Coalition to End Homelessness served more than 2,000 people in the Berks Homeless response system in 2023. 80% of them were facing homelessness for the first time.

And we are encountering homeless people at our food pantries, some who live in their cars and some who live on the street. The shelters don't have enough room for them, and they don't have other options. One client was worried about running out of gas while she waited in her car for her food; others live in tents in the woods.

Who are the people experiencing homelessness? You may assume they are drug addicts or have mental health issues. In actuality, the three leading causes of homelessness are lack of affordable housing, unemployment and poverty.

The root causes for the rise in poverty are expiration of benefits, underemployment, rent burden, food insecurity, and wage stagnation. For over 20 years, rents have risen higher than wages, creating a mass epidemic of rent burden. Housing purchase prices have also increased, making home ownership an impossible dream for many.

According to a Charles Schwab Modern Health Survey in May 2019, 59% of Americans live paycheck to paycheck and are at risk of homelessness. 44% usually carry a credit card balance or struggle to keep up with bills.

Millions of middle-class Americans are just one missed paycheck away from poverty, without enough liquid assets to cope with an unexpected disruption in income.

It's pretty scary when you step back and look at these numbers! So, what is Berks County doing to help the homeless or people at risk of homelessness? The Berks County Coalition to End Homelessness offers information on available services, such as emergency shelters, food pantries, and rent and utility assistance. They also have a security deposit assistance program, coordinated entry and a safe parking lot, where people living in their cars can park safely and legally overnight, with access to restrooms, hygiene products, and charging stations. Call 211 for help or more information.

For those wondering how Jewish Family Service is helping:We operate two food pantries, in partnership with Helping Harvest, serving 600 households and distributing more than 10,000 pounds of food each month.

We also provide emergency rent and utility assistance to our JFS clients, as well as offering grocery cards and help with medical bills.

We would not be able to fight food insecurity without our band of committed volunteers, who show up with smiles on their face even in the frigid winter weather!

One volunteer, Allison Althouse, makes helping at our pantries her priority whenever she is in town. As a recent retiree, she has the time to volunteer and feels that food pantry distributions are a way she can help meet the community's needs. Other volunteers are pantry clients who want to show their appreciation to us for the food we are giving them.

Community volunteer Vicky Sokoloff donated bags of hand knitted scarves, hats, and throws to help spread warmth to our clients during the holidays!

And speaking of warmth and light, I thought of Eleanor Roosevelt's words as I kindled the Hanukkah lights this year, "It is better to light a candle than curse the darkness." Our Hanukkah menorah symbolizes the hope that can come even in the darkest times.

Hanukkah celebrates the victory of the Maccabees over oppression, the triumph of light over darkness. We too can fight for social justice by supporting those who are homeless or at risk of homelessness by offering not just material support, but human connection and respect.

Thank you Stephanie for reminding us of the humanity and individual stories of those experiencing homelessness!

You are always invited to join us in our battle against food insecurity by joining us at one of our pantries or making a donation to JFS Food Pantry. Contact me for more information at caroler@jfreading.org or 610-921-0624.

Our volunteers make a difference at pantries

From left, volunteers at the SDA food pantry in December; volunteer Chad Schlanger, and newly elected state Rep. Jacklyn Rusnock helping out with food distribution.

Many thanks to our Food Pantry volunteers who distributed food to over 600 households in December

Allison Althouse
Mary Anne Avins
Cindy Balchunas
Sam Flamholz
Sarah Flamholz
Raymond Gehring
Patty Hartman
John Incledon
Pete Jacobson
Sid Lempiner
Lisa Levine
Paul Mintz
Debra Montanino
Jenn Reilly
Rep. Elect Jacklyn Rusnock
Mike Schein
Chad Schlanger
Ellen Schwartz
Russ Shanahan
Joan Sherman
Oleg Umanov

Thanks from JFS

JFS thanks Vicky Sokoloff for her donation of beautiful handknit hats, scarves, and throws for our clients. They will be appreciated in this cold weather!

Jewish Family Service

Food Pantry
Friendship Circle
Counseling Services
Transportation
Financial Assistance
Hospital and Home Visitations
Living with Loss
Information and Referral
Case Management
Holiday Programs

Great times at Friendship Circle

A Thanksgiving celebration at Friendship Circle. Ellen Schwickrath and Bret Miller, left and Louise Zeidman, Sylvia Wenger, Lila Shapiro and Ingrid Soltysik, right. Bottom left, Jane Polonski and Mary Engleson.
Bottom right, Hallie Vaughan presents a program on Famous American Women on Dec. 5.

Friendship Circle meets twice monthly at the JCC on Thursdays at 1 p.m. Each program includes an optional luncheon followed by a fun or educational program.

See the January events below.

FRIENDSHIP CIRCLE

Jan 9- "Celebrate 2025 with a toast and a music program"
Singer/guitarist Steven Barth will entertain with music from Simon and Garfunkel, James Taylor, John Denver and older songs from musicals, including works by Rodgers and Hammerstein. You are welcome to sing along with Steve! Program sponsored by the Jacob Krumholz Fund.

Jan 23 - "Meet Vicki Graff Jewish Federation's New Program Director"
Vicki will introduce herself and provide an interactive experience.

Friendship Circle is held twice a month on Thursday afternoons at 1:00 p.m. at the JCC. An optional lunch is served, followed by an entertaining or educational program or holiday celebration.

Programs are free; optional lunch is $7. Contact Carole at 610-921-0624 to make lunch reservations.

Federation trip to 76ers game a big winner

The Jewish Federation of Reading/Berks offered community members a chance to take part in Jewish Heritage Night at a Philadelphia 76ers game on Dec. 4.

JFS TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM

This program provides transportation to members of the Jewish community, age 60 and over or those with disabilities, who have no other way of getting around. It allows participants to retain their independence and keeps them from becoming homebound and isolated. It can be used for medical appointments, synagogue attendance, shopping and other errands.

It is easy to participate. Purchase a book of 25 taxi tickets from the Federation at a cost of $25. Each coupon is worth $3. The phone number for Reading Metro Taxi is printed on the ticket book. Call the company and arrange your ride. At the end of the ride, sign your coupon(s) before giving them to the driver. Tipping is left to the passenger's discretion. Coupon does not include cost of tipping.

This program is subsidized by the Jewish Federation of Reading/Berks

"CONCERT WITH STEVEN BARTH"

JAN 9 2:00 P.M.
AT THE JCC

Singer/guitarist Steven Barth will entertain with music from Simon and Garfunkel, James Taylor, John Denver and older songs from musicals, including works by Rodgers and Hammerstein. You are welcome to sing along with Steve!

Program sponsored by the Jacob Krumholz Fund

To RSVP call 610-921-0624	info@jfreading.org

Movie Monday at the JCC

January 27 at 1:00

"Red Sea Diving Resort"

Chris Evans stars as an Israeli Mossad agent, who runs a covert operation to rescue Ethiopian-Jewish refugees from Sudan to a safe haven in Israel. It is loosely based on the events of Israel's Operation Moses and Operation Joshua in 1984-1985.

RSVP by calling the JCC at 610-921-0624 or email info@jfreading.org

Jewish Federation of Reading/Berks

Grab a seat for a Jewish themed movie each month at the JCC. It is usually held on the 4th Monday of the month, and the popcorn and the movie are both free!

Getting ready for Chanukah

Candle and donut decorating at Chabad for a pre Chanukah ladies night out on Dec. 17. Another fun and inspirational evening.

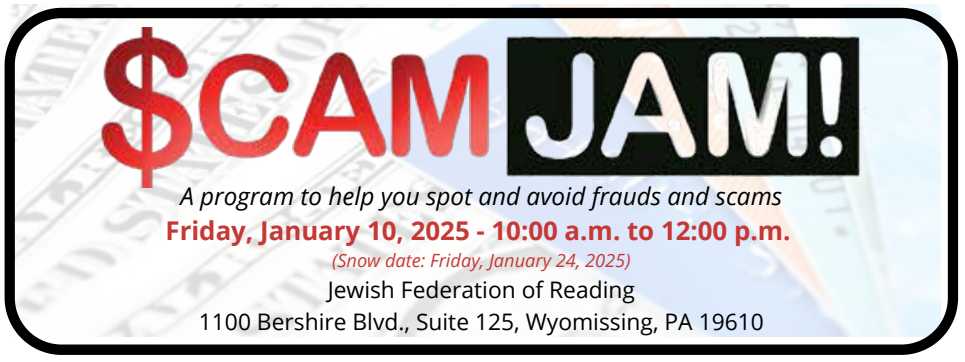
Senator to present program on avoiding scams

From Federation staff

Please join state Sen. Judy Schwank on Friday, Jan. 10, from 10 a.m. to noon at the Jewish Federation of Reading/Berks for a Scam Jam event! This free program is designed to help you recognize and avoid scams and fraud.

The event will include presentations on the latest scams along with light refreshments, fraud bingo, prizes, and more. Space is limited, so those who wish to attend are strongly encouraged to register online at www.senatorschwank.com/scamjam or by calling 610-929-2151.

Cost is $18 for adults and $10 for children ages 12 and under. Please RSVP at ReadingJewishCommunity.org.



Senator Judy Schwank invites you to hear from:

PA Department of Banking and Securities
Berks County District Attorney's Office
PA Office of Attorney General
Wyomissing Police Department

JOIN US FOR GREAT RESOURCES!

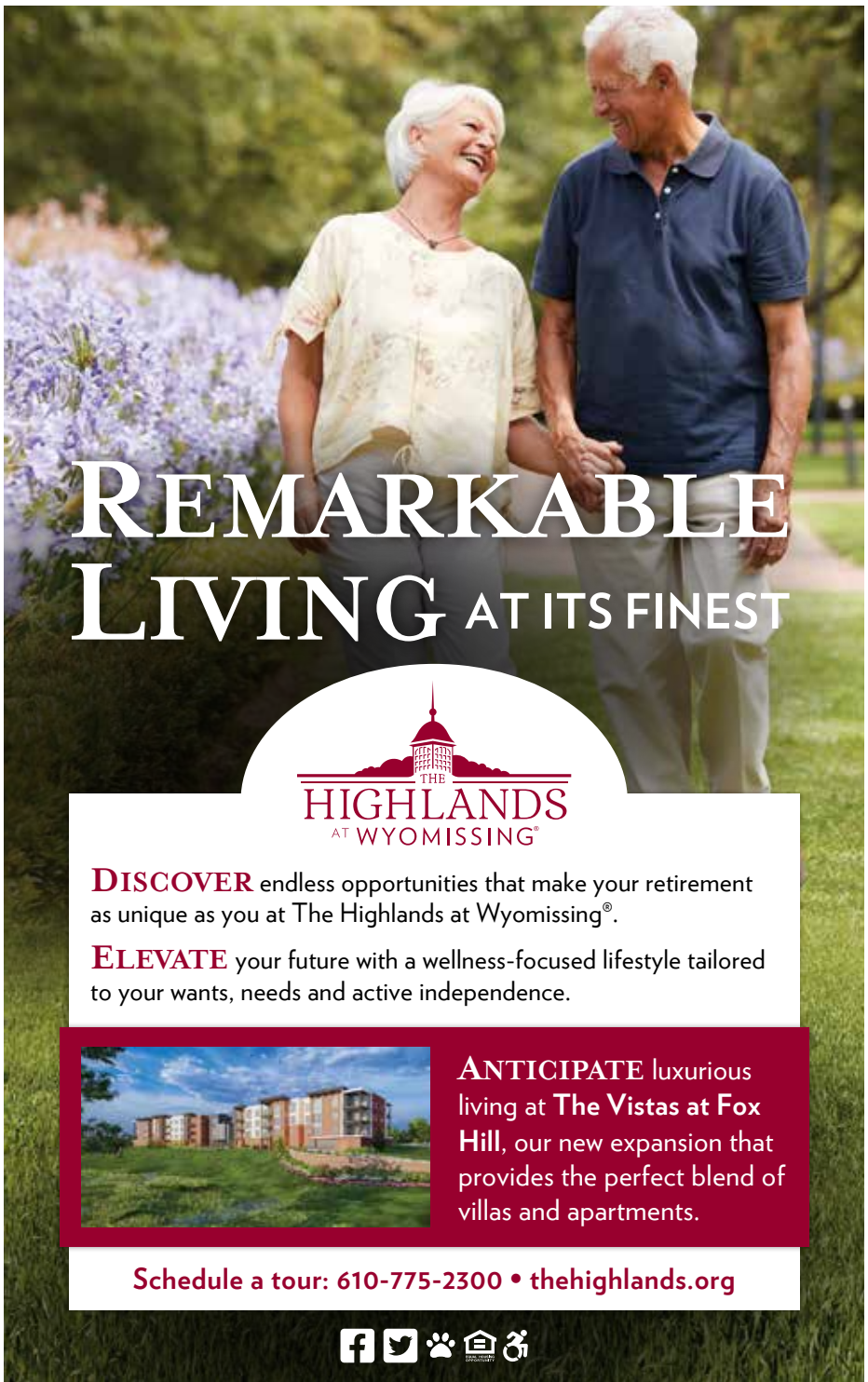
This is a free, non-commercial event and attendance is limited - registration is strongly recommended!

Register online at: www.senatorschwank.com/scamjam
or call: 610.929.2151

SNACKS & DRINKS · FRAUD BINGO · PRIZES

Pennsylvania Department of Banking and Securities

$camJam is organized through the PA Department of Banking and Securities' Investor Education and Consumer Outreach Office and Senator Judy Schwank.



HOW CAN YOU HELP?

Jewish Family Service is grateful to our committed volunteers!

Here are some ways that you can help:

Help Fight Hunger

Join us at a JFS Food Pantry to distibute food to our hungry neigbors.

Share your Professional Expertise

Present a program on travel, photography, or your unique interests or hobbies to our seniors.

Share your time

A small investment of your personal time can make a profound difference in someone's life. Visit a shut-in, shop for a homebound senior, or take someone to a doctor's appointment.

Donate your vehicle to JFS or donate clothing to CommunityAid

Enjoy tax benefits of donating a car or help our clients through our partnership with CommunityAid.

Contact Us
Carole Robinson at 610-921-0624

Jewish Federation of Reading/Berks

Jewish quarterback at Mormon university to serve as cultural ambassador

PRNewswire

Manischewitz has entered a Name, Image, and Likeness sponsorship deal with Jake Retzlaff, starting quarterback for Brigham Young University and a trailblazer as the first Jewish quarterback in the history of the Mormon college in Provo, Utah. This partnership is a landmark moment, celebrating Jake's unique role as a cultural ambassador and athlete at one of the most religiously distinctive universities in the country.

Retzlaff, affectionately dubbed "BY Jew", is one of only three Jewish students on BYU's campus. He has become a symbol of pride for Jewish communities nationwide. His story transcends sports, bringing visibility to Jewish identity in spaces where it is rarely represented. With the Cougars enjoying their best season in over 20 years, with a 10-2 record, Jake's leadership has not only elevated his team but also captured national attention.

Manischewitz will be offering limited-edition, commemorative matzo boxes celebrating Retzlaff and his accomplishments. He will share his story through online video content, including nostalgic recipes, cultural anecdotes, and holiday traditions.

Reflecting on his partnership, Jake shared, "Manischewitz has always been part of my life. I grew up with matzo with peanut butter as my favorite snack, and every Passover, my family and I made matzo pizza together. At Chanukah time our tradition was making potato latkes. Now, at BYU, I'm able to share these traditions with my teammates. This partnership is about more than football — it's about creating connections and celebrating Jewish pride in ways I never expected."

The partnership was made possible by Eitan Levine, a New York-based writer, comedian, and cultural connector whose work has been featured on "The Daily Show," "Late Night with Stephen Colbert," "Jimmy Kimmel Live" and *The New York Times*. Levine, known for his viral "Jewish Man on the Street" videos and work with brands like Amazon Prime Video Sports and Sony, saw Jake's story as an incredible opportunity to spotlight a rare, uplifting narrative in the Jewish community.

In addition to the national impact of this campaign, Jake's presence on BYU's campus has impacted the local Jewish community near the school. From wrapping tefillin in the BYU stadium to leading Provo's first public Hanukkah menorah lighting, Jake has embraced his role as a leader and ambassador for Jewish culture in a state where only 0.2% of residents identify as Jewish. His visibility has inspired others, including Jewish youth athletes, who now see him as a role model both on and off the field.

"Jake Retzlaff is a story we rarely see—a Jewish athlete thriving in one of the least likely environments for our community. His success is a reminder of the power of representation and pride," Eitan Levine said. "Partnering with Manischewitz was a perfect fit, and it's been amazing to see how his story has resonated nationally. This isn't just a sponsorship; it's a moment of cultural celebration."

Federations, Israeli partners promote Jewish day schools

Jewish Federations of North America

The fallout of the Oct.7, 2023,Hamas attacks on Israel has sparked a strong interest in Jewish communal life, especially when it comes to growing Jewish day schools — places where children can become confident young Jews — by making them more affordable and accessible.

That's why Jewish Federations of North America are so proud to be partnering with the Israeli Ministry for Diaspora Affairs and Combatting Antisemitism, UnitEd, and Prizmah to launch Project Aleph Bet — an unprecedented philanthropic initiative focused on increasing day school enrollment.

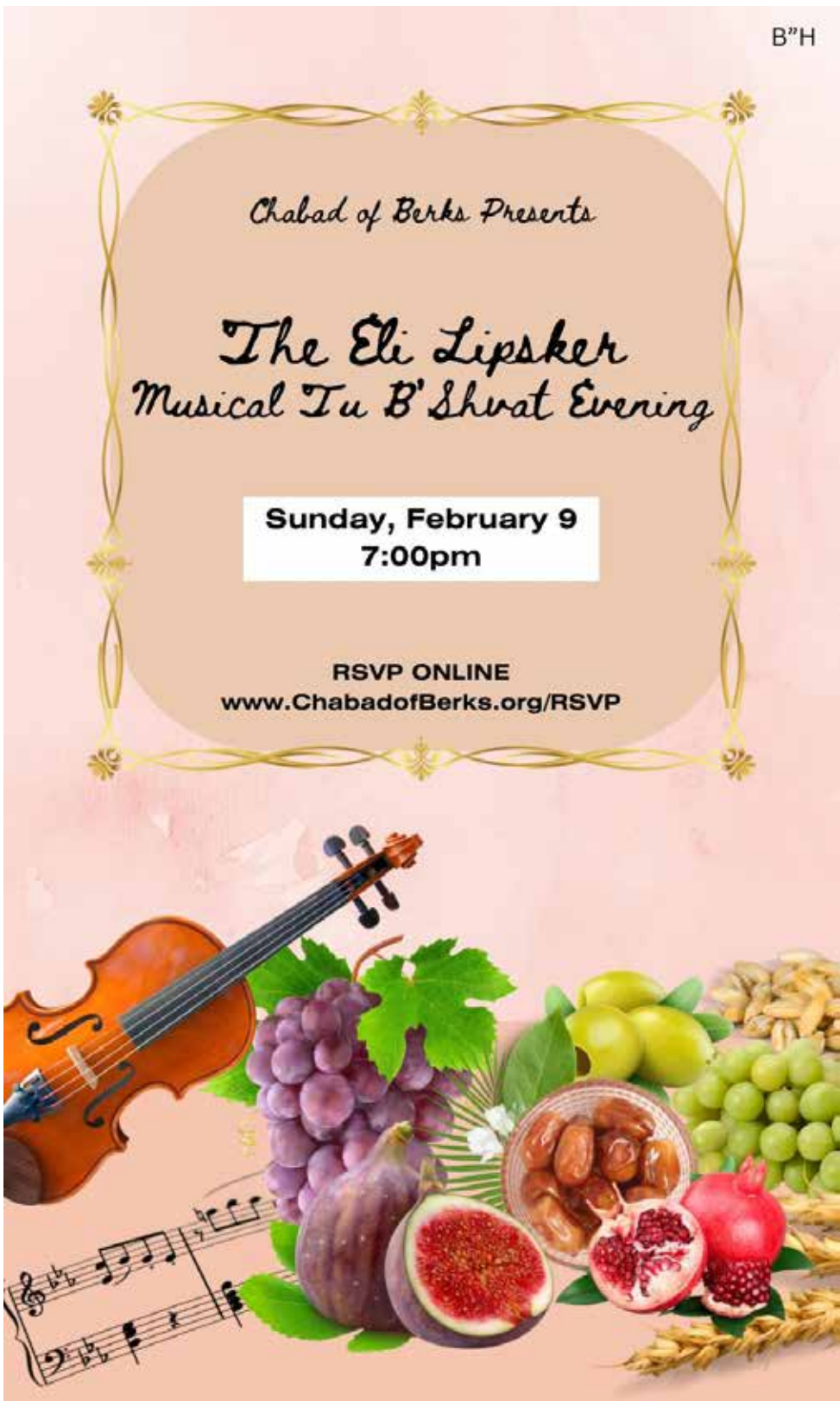
"Jewish day schools are incubators for Jewish leaders who strengthen their Jewish communities, have strong relationships with Israel, are equipped to stand up to antisemitism, and are committed to raising their own children with a strong Jewish identity," said Jewish Federations President & CEO Eric D. Fingerhut. "Jewish Federations are proud to collaborate on such an impactful initiative."

Project Aleph Bet's first initiative is a $4 million allocation that will support and enhance efforts focusing on critical areas affecting enrollment: affordability, strategic marketing, academic excellence, new school creation and strengthening early childhood entry points. Phase one also includes an emphasis on professional development around Israel education for school faculty and staff.

"We decided to launch Project Aleph-Bet specifically now, despite the challenges facing the State of Israel and the budgetary difficulties — because now is the moment to reinvest in Jewish education, from early childhood to college. With our partners, we will succeed in providing quality Jewish education and shaping the future generation" said Minister Amichai Chikli.

Central to this initiative is the chance for grantees to regularly convene as a network to strengthen relationships, identify and share best practices, better understand their impact on Jewish children and their families, and disseminate learnings throughout the broader day school ecosystem.

"UnitED is proud to lend its global perspective and expertise in Jewish education to this new and innovative initiative aimed at enriching Jewish learning in North America" CEO Hana Dorsman said. "Israel has chosen to continue investing in Jewish education abroad, while Jewish communities around the world are mobilizing to support Israel. This reaffirms the deep bond that unites our eternal people."



Federation Honorarium-Memorial Card Information

Please mail your payment with complete information to the Jewish Federation, PO Box 14925, Reading, PA, 19612-4925 or bring to the Jewish Cultural Center, 1100 Berkshire Blvd., Suite 125, Wyomissing. You may set up a "savings account" for the purpose of sending cards. Please contact the Federation at 610-921-0624 for further information.

Contributions as of Dec. 13

Jewish Family Service

In memory of:

Sidney Bratt - Shirley Boscov, Alan and Marjorie Leisawitz, Janis & Bruce Milstein
Sandra Miller - Alan and Marjorie Leisawitz, Doris & Elliott Leisawitz
Jennifer Koosed' s stepfather - Debbie & David Goldberg

In honor of:

The birth of a granddaughter to Myron and Karen Kabakoff - Jan and Jonathan Simon
The birth of granddaughter Charlotte Trobman to Lisa and Alan Levine - Jan and Jonathan Simon

Honorariums and Memorials

Contributions may be made to the following Funds:

Federation Jewish Community Campaign
Jewish Family Service
Leo Camp Lecture Fund
JFS Food Bank
JFS Taxi Transportation Program
Holocaust Library & Resource Center
Doris Levin Fund
Sue B. Viener Memorial Fund for PJ Library
Harry & Rose Sack Adult Education Fund
Evelyn Thompson Fund

Jewish Family Service Food Pantry

In honor of:

The bar mitzvah of Betsy and Al Katz's grandson - Jan & Jonathan Simon

January ✡ Tevet-Shevat

Shabbat Candle Lightings

January 3
4:31 p.m.

January 10
4:37 p.m.

January 17
4:45 p.m.

January 24
4:53 p.m.

January 31
5:02 p.m.

Torah Portions

January4/4 Tevet
Vayigash (Genesis 44:18-47:27)

January/ 11/10 Tevet
Vayechi (Genesis 47:28-50:26**)**

January 18/18 Tevet
Shemot (Exodus 1:1-6:1)

January 25/ Tevet
Va'eira (Exodus 6:2-9:35)

Cookie Decorating

Adult Women Invited
Members: $36
Non-members: $45

Event Limited to 30 Attendees
RSVP by Friday, January 17 by check or www.ohebsholom.org

Enjoy a sweet afternoon decorating cookies with a Tu B'Shevat plant inspired theme. Decorating will be joyfully led by local community member and Food Network contestant Sami Weisberg-Hatt and her fellow Cookies Cakes & Bakes instructor Cheryl Frost.

Sponsored by RCOS Sisterhood and the Membership Committee. In the event of snow, event to be held Sunday, February 9th.

Sunday, Feb. 2nd
RCOS Social Hall
2:00 - 4:00 pm

Pediatric and Adult Patients
Treating Ear, Nose, Throat Problems
Thyroid Nodules, Neck Masses & Sinusitis

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HEAD & NECK
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Physicians:

James P. Restrepo, M.D., FACS, ECNU
Jeffrey S. Driben, M.D., FACS, ECNU
Scott J. Cronin, M.D., FACS
Adam P. Vasconcellos, M.D., FACS
Chetan Y. Safi, M.D.

Nurse Practitioner:

Rosemarie Montgomery
MS, CRNP, FNP-C

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Audiologists:

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Matthew R. Bonsall, AuD, FAAA
Jenna L. Galan, AuD, CCC-A

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SAVE THE DATE

Mediterranean Nights

Join your friends at RCOS for an evening of music, fun, and great mediterranean cuisine!

SATURDAY, APRIL 5 @ 6:30 pm

Cocktails, Dinner, Music
& Balis Volunteer Appreciation Award Presentation to Carol Cohn

REFORM CONGREGATION OHEB SHOLOM

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Jeffrey S. Stefanick, OD
Stephen J. Shalamanda, OD
Leslie B. Miller, OD

24/7 MEDICAL EYE EMERGENCIES

DOUGLASSVILLE
1050 Benjamin Franklin Hwy. W.
Douglassville, PA 19518
610-385-4333

WYOMISSING
50 Berkshire Court, Wyomissing, PA 19610
610-374-3134
wyo-opto.com

MYERSTOWN
356 West Main Avenue
Myerstown, PA 17067
717-866-1400

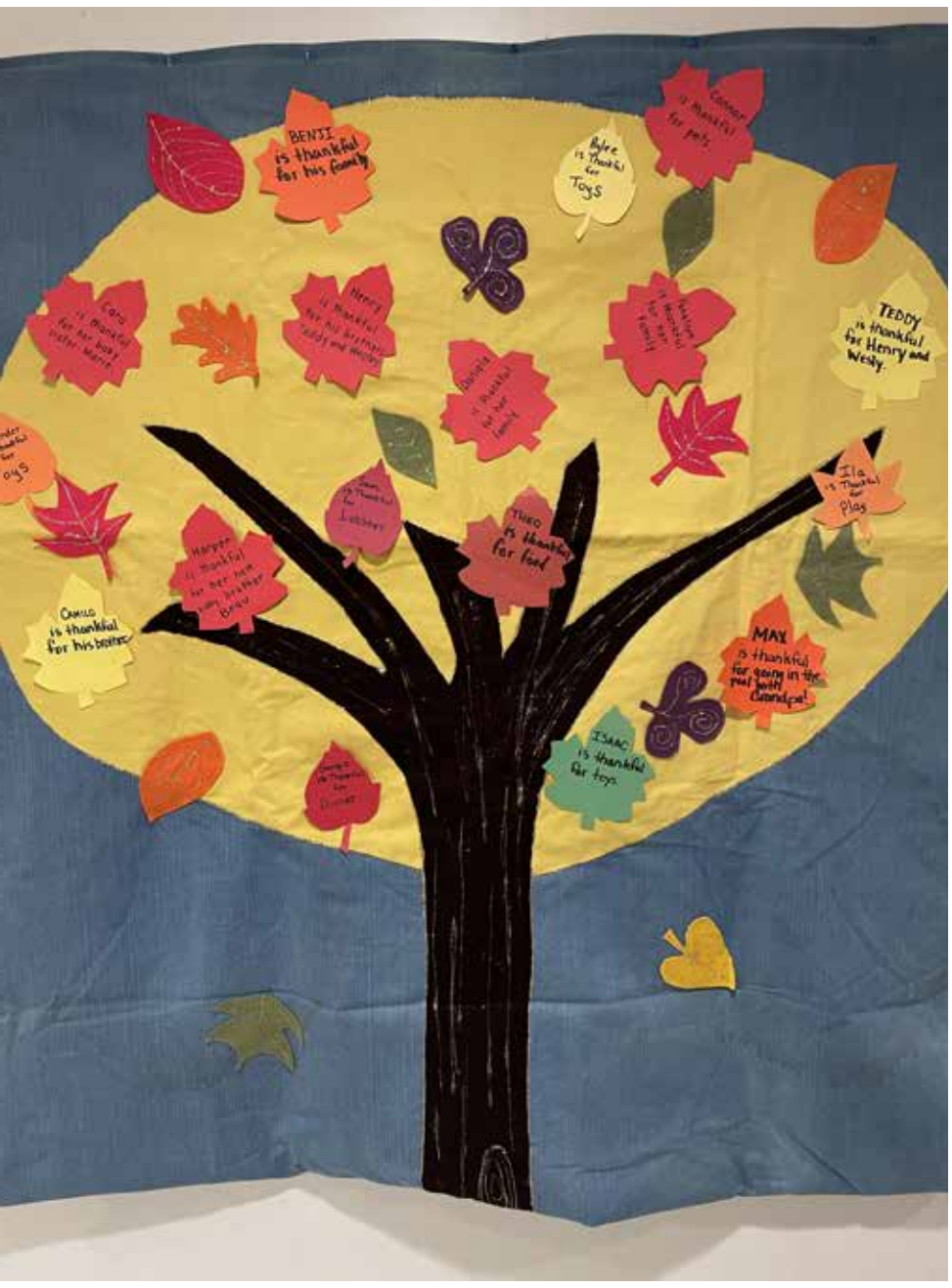
Celebrations abound at Lakin Preschool

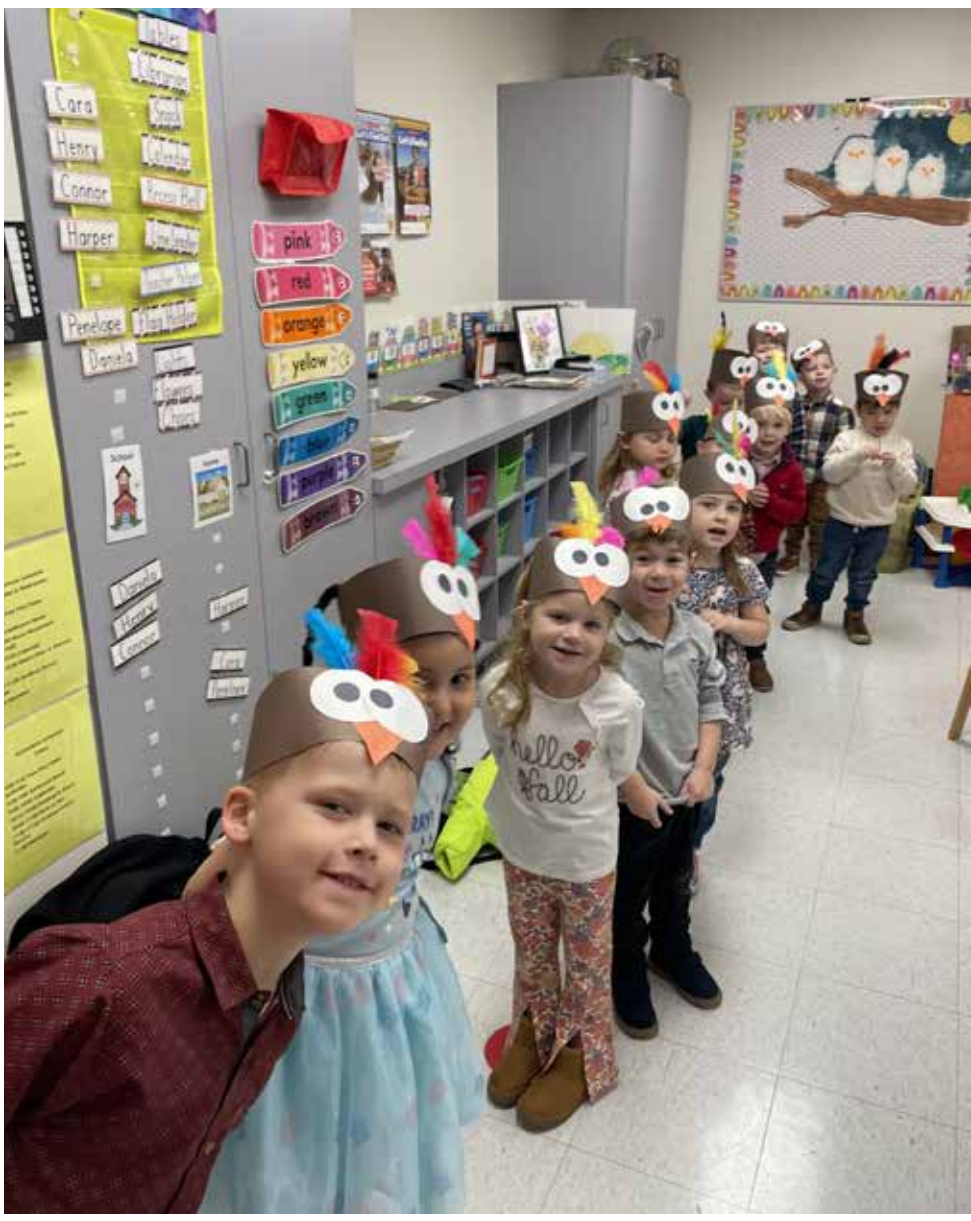
By Wendy Bright & Judy Lefante

Happy New Year!!! Thanksgiving was a special time at Lakin Preschool! Fall Festival was a super fun morning! The children got to travel to each center and participate in different activities and games at each one. Parents also donated lots of fall snacks and drinks to make the day extra special.

Our Fall Musical Program was enjoyed by parents, family and friends. We were happy to welcome parents, family and friends for our performance. We worked hard to learn five songs and it was a wonderful, heartfelt program. Families enjoyed being in the company of fellow students and meeting new friends. Thank you to all of our generous parents who donated the refreshments and decorated the social hall for the children's event.

December began with our themes of hibernation and winter while reading many titles related to these topics. We also learned the history about Chanukah and the different traditions of the holiday season. We played dreidel, made a menorah and Star of David suncatcher, ate latkes and made our own edible dreidels!





IT'S MOMENTS LIKE THESE

WHEN YOUR FEDERATION NEEDS YOU
AND YOU NEED YOUR FEDERATION

DONATE TODAY!

Jewish Federation
of Reading/Berks