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Shalom 05|20

The Journal of the Reading Jewish Community published by the *Jewish Federation of Reading/Berks*

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From the President's Desk

Coronavirus crisis helps us learn the value of a strong community

By William D. Franklin
President

Shalom. As we continue to deal with the coronavirus crisis, I believe we better understand the meaning and value of COMMUNITY:

Challenges — We, as individuals, families, employers, and organizations, face many challenges in positively shaping our new reality.

Opportunities — We have many opportunities to build stronger and deeper relationships with the time to connect and share jokes, favorite books, music and movies and just listen to each other.

Meaning — There is real clarity of what is truly meaningful in our lives -- family, friends, Tzedakah.

Morality — I am in awe seeing how much everyone is doing to help each other. I regularly see Sari, Carole, Richard, Brenda and others reach out to check on people, provide transportation and bring them food, medical supplies and other vital items.

Uh Oh — We know there are many 'uh oh' moments in this fight but we are banding together to succeed, which shows that the real 'U' word is unity.

Normal — Our normal gives us the time and chance to create a future new normal which we hope is better than before.

Ingenuity — All of the above requires us to create new solutions to the problems of quarantine, furlough, school closings, etc. Amanda, Adi and others continue to create and deliver new educational and entertaining programs to keep us interested and energized.

Tenacity — We resolve to beat this plague and we will come out better.

You — Our community is made up of all of you .You are the means and the ends to a better future.

You, the Federation and our synagogues are working to keep our Jewish community together, supportive and meaningful.

Many in our community are providing food, transportation and delivery services to those in need. Thank you.

We also thank the community's health care and emergency service providers for their bravery, sacrifices and hard work, which minimize the disastrous effect of the COVID-19 plague.

Kehillah — community — is a central tenet of our Jewish tradition. Thank you all for helping us preserve it.

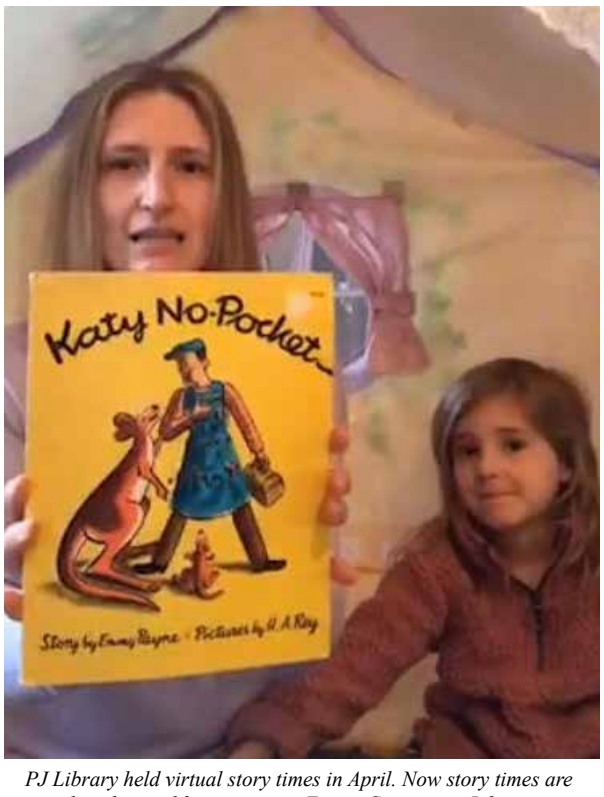
Keep smiling and keep safe!

Our work continues in challenging time

The Jewish Family Service Food Pantry at the Olivet's Pendora Park Fieldhouse is going strong in a time of acute need.

Adi Shalev and her mom lead a cooking class all the way from Israel. Classes continue this month. See inside for details.

Gabby Gurwitz's winning entry in our Passover-themed Lego contest. Family Seder table with Seder plate, and they left the door open for Elijah! See more on Page 4.



PJ Library held virtual story times in April. Now story times are done by our library partner Exeter Community Library

Hebrew letters yoga.

Development

Your gifts keep us connected in pandemic

By Richard Nassau
Development Director

It is your gifts to Jewish Federation's Community Campaign that have kept us connected throughout this pandemic. The importance of Federation's campaign is never more evident than now. Your current and past contributions to our campaign are providing programs and services for our entire community. Your gift is being used by Federation's Jewish Family Service and JCC to respond to this crisis and meet the ongoing needs within our community. Thank you.

If you can join with others to ensure we have the resources to respond, please donate at ReadingJewishCommunity.org.

Isolation reminds us how important community is. How services and programs offered by JFS and JCC are vital for our community. From the JFS Food Pantry that makes sure families are fed to the JCC's PJ Library virtual story time programs that are bringing people together.

I know that I, like many people, gladly support Jewish Family Service programs. JFS programs are critical for our community. I also hope that you will never need to use a JFS program service, such as its Food Pantry. During times like this pandemic, I am reminded of the importance of JFS and how glad I am to have their programs available to me.

I was 5 or 6 when I first realized my family was receiving help from our local Jewish Family Service agency. Their counseling helped my family through a very difficult time. It would not be the last time my family or I received help from Jewish Family Service.

Here in our Berks County community JFS continues to remain open and help. Your Community Campaign contributions to Jewish Federation of Reading/Berks are making sure they can. JFS staff is calling people, especially vulnerable seniors, to check on their status and find out what they may need. Staff is updating family members, especially those who are not in the area, about their elderly parents. JFS staff is arranging for volunteers to drop off groceries or medications. The JFS Food Pantry continues to operate. It is an essential service that remains open, especially for the many people who thought they would never need its service.

On behalf of the many lives you make better every day, thank you for supporting JFS and JCC through our Community Campaign. You make it possible for us to remain an active, vibrant and connected Jewish community.

If you can, please donate at ReadingJewishCommunity.org.

Making life better for Jews around the world

From Federation staff

Jewish Federation of Reading/Berks through Jewish Federations of North America supports the Jewish Agency for Israel (JAFI) and the Joint Distribution Committee (JDC.) We do this as part of our mission to make life better for Jews and Jewish communities throughout the world. Here are some of the ways our partners are responding during this pandemic.

JAFI is working closely with Israel's Ministry of Health and JAFI's local partners that are dealing with the thousands of olim (immigrants to Israel) and Shlichim (Israeli emissaries) to minimize risks. One way they are doing this is by preparing apartments in their residential programs for olim who need to be quarantined.

JAFI has also established an Organizational Coordinating Forum. This group convenes daily to assess changing developments related to the virus. JAFI is also a member of the wider Emergency Forum that deals with issues and questions from the field.

JDC volunteers in Mogilev, Belarus, delivered kits to 70 homebound elderly. These kits included disposable gloves and wipes, along with emergency contact information. In Egypt, ahead of Passover holiday, JDC shipped about 175 pounds of matzah and other holiday foods to Jewish community members. In Moldova, confined community members called homebound elderly to provide them with important information related to COVID-19 and learn about their needs.

JDC known as the global Jewish 9-1-1, launched a virtual 'Center for Independent Living' on Facebook. With thousands of followers, it provides information for people with disabilities, including special materials, podcasts and online support groups. It also features fitness courses and cultural/leisure courses, as well as training sessions for people who work with people with disabilities.

In the former Soviet Union, over 125 online Seders took place for children, teens, youth, families and the elderly. In Kharkov, Ukraine, more than 150 members participated and in Kishinev more than 250 participants from all ages came together.

JDC distributed more than 4,500 hygiene and activity kits to Israeli Arab and Bedouin families with materials on how to use them and how to practice social distancing. In Ethiopia, the first half of 18 foot-operated hand-washing stations were installed in Gondar and Addis Ababa. These were constructed locally in partnership with NALA, an Israeli NGO that works to break the cycle of poverty for those with limited access to clean water and sanitation.

Jewish Federation of Reading/Berks with our worldwide partners will always respond to emergencies impacting our global community. This pandemic is no exception. For the latest updates, visit our website, ReadingJewishCommunity.org.

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Make your gift today!

2020 Annual Meeting

Save the Date for Jewish Federation of Reading/Berks annual meeting

Date: **Sunday, May 31**

Time: **4:00 PM**

Check your email and our website for updates as the date gets closer.
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Report finds 18% spike in physical acts of anti-Semitism in 2019

From online news reports

Physical manifestations of anti-Semitism against people and property around the globe spiked by 18% in 2019 over 2018 figures, according to the annual report by the Kantor Center at Tel Aviv University.

In total, there were 456 such incidents in 2019, including 169 physical assaults against Jews, as well as 129 attacks against personal property, 77 against cemeteries and memorial sites, 53 attacks against synagogues, and 28 against community centers and schools.

Seven Jews were killed in anti-Semitic incidents in 2019, while physical assaults against Jews rose 22%. A researcher for the Kantor Center stated that it has a long-standing methodology for collating anti-Semitism data from various government ministries and bodies and that it uses this methodology every year to preserve consistency in its data.

During a virtual press conference conducted by the Kantor Center, Moshe Kantor, who established the center in 2010 and serves as president of the European Jewish Congress, also brought attention to the spike in anti-Semitism witnessed during the coronavirus pandemic.

Extremists on the far-right and far-left have used various internet and social media platforms to blame Jews and Israel for either responsibility for the spread of COVID-19, benefiting from it, or both.

"Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been a significant rise in accusations that Jews, as individuals and as a collective, are behind the spread of the virus or are directly profiting from it," Kantor noted.

"The language and imagery used clearly identifies a revival of the medieval 'blood libels' when Jews were accused of spreading disease, poisoning wells or controlling economies," said Kantor, arguing that this new phenomenon was "consistent rise of antisemitism over the last few years."

Kantor said that he was also concerned about the "the rise of populism and extremism that could result from the coronavirus pandemic.

"Alongside trying to control the spread of the virus and taking care to lessen the effects of the financial downturn, the international community should not ignore the societal and political crisis that is already starting to emerge," Dr. Kantor said.

Speaking at the press conference, Professor Dina Porat, head of the Kantor Center who also serves as the chief historian for Yad Vashem, noted that governments around the world are making efforts to combat the rise of antisemitism, but said that it was concerning that despite these efforts incidents of antisemitism amongst extremists elements in general populations continue to rise.

On 761 days, Anne Frank, and the circle of responsibility

By Ellen J. Kennedy

761: That's the number of days that Anne Frank was in hiding in that attic in Amsterdam.

761 days from April 1, 2020, is May 2, 2022.

Note the year: 2022. I am typing this at my kitchen table in my first month of self-quarantining. I have already cleaned out the closets, baked cookies, made cakes, organized the freezer, dealt with the pile of mail on the kitchen counter, and balanced my checkbook. This was after putting in eight-hour days, Monday through Friday, working remotely.

I also have talked on the phone, texted friends, visited my family in Montana and Maryland via Zoom, communicated with literally hundreds of people online, and read the newspapers and the Economist every day. I have been in touch with my synagogue, my fellow members of the Minneapolis University Rotary Club, and colleagues on various boards that I serve on.

I have gone for walks almost every day. My husband and I decided that the weekends should be demarcated from weekdays, so one Sunday we drove to St. Paul and walked along the Mississippi River. And instead of watching our usual binge-worthy TV shows on Saturday evenings, we watch movies.

Anne Frank had almost nothing and nobody except the seven other people in the Secret Annex. No Google, no Zoom, no phone. No walks, no Lund's grocery delivery, no New York Times in her email inbox at 3:20 every morning.

No fresh air for 761 days. Nothing.

But the Franks did have something very special. They had six friends who kept them alive for those 761 days with food and visits and love, six people who endangered themselves and their entire circle of loved ones by sheltering Jews under the eyes of Nazis and their collaborators.

We all imagine that we would be like those six helpers, especially like Miep Gies.

After Anne and the others were discovered and imprisoned, Miep went back to see what remained in their hiding place. She found Anne's diary and she took it for safekeeping, planning to return it to Anne after the war.

But Anne died of typhus in the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp at age 15. Her father, Otto Frank, was the only member of the family to survive the Holocaust. After the war and his liberation from Auschwitz, he returned to Amsterdam and lived with Miep and her husband, Jan, for seven years.

We know Anne's story because Miep gave the diary to Otto Frank, who saw to its publication.

Why did Miep and Jan Gies, and the four other helpers, risk everything for 761 days to save people who weren't even members of their own families?

It's a matter of how we define our circles of responsibility and caring.

Carl Wilkens was the only American who remained in Rwanda during the 1994 genocide, when 800,000 innocent people were slaughtered. At great risk to himself, he saved hundreds of lives. Christina Meyer, one of the alumnae from our Summer Institute for High School and College Students, met Carl at the Institute. She said, "It was the first time I understood that our circle of caring can go beyond the people in our own family."

That awareness changed her life. Christina has worked with Syrian refugees in New York and Jordan. Christina's circle became global.

We need our circles to be wider. I want everyone to care about everyone else, to have the compassion and the heart and the soul of Miep and Jan Gies.

That doesn't mean people have to be heroic, but it does mean I want them to care.

I have a very selfish view right now. My husband has Stage IV multiple myeloma, an incurable form of blood cancer. He was scheduled to have a stem cell transplant at the Mayo Clinic in a few weeks that might prolong his life for a few years. But that procedure has been postponed indefinitely because Mayo will be overwhelmed with critically ill COVID-19 patients. They will need blood transfusions, and there won't be any blood left for my husband's treatment. He is able to wait a while; they might die very soon.

We hear from the experts that those at greatest risk of death in this pandemic are people over 70 who have weakened

immune systems. My husband is in the bull's-eye for the virus.

My selfishness? I see people being careless, not listening to Dr. Michael Osterholm and others about what we must do to protect ourselves — and to protect those at gravest risk, like my husband and so many others who are already grievously ill. I see pictures every day of people throughout the country — partying at Florida beaches, gathering by thousands at New Orleans church services, even a group crowding together at my local park, all denying the contagion and the danger — and putting every one of us at risk.

Consider this: China has four times more people than the U.S. yet there are now more COVID-19 cases in the US than in China, more cases here than anywhere else in the world.

Miep and Jan Gies did everything they could to save the most vulnerable in their midst. Kuno van der Horst, a 23-year-old student, refused to sign a declaration of loyalty to the Nazis, which meant death. He went into hiding — living with the Gies family from 1943 to the end of the war. Their circle of responsibility was indeed large.

Think about 761 days without fresh air and daylight.

Where will you be on May 2, 2022? What will you have done to help others stay alive until that day? Make your circle of responsibility a big one.

Ellen J. Kennedy, Ph.D., is the executive director of World Without Genocide at Mitchell Hamline School of Law. April was Genocide Awareness and Prevention Month.

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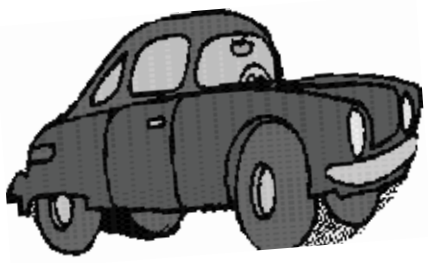

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Shalom

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Jewish Federation® OF READING/BERKS

We are together

By Adi Shalev

Shalom dear community.

I assume most of you know that I came back to Israel (temporarily!) because of the COVID-19 situation.

Although I'm 5,715 miles away, it's important to me to stay in touch with you and continue doing all my different programs, but in a different way.

What have we done so far?

We've moved a wide range of activities online, including Hebrew classes, lectures, Hebrew word of the day, Israeli playlists, cooking classes, cooking videos, recipes, interactive games, crafts and games to do at home, Hebrew high school, movie and tv show recommendation and updates from Israel.

If you missed anything, you are more then welcome to go to JFR website (www.ReadingJewishCommunity.org) and click on "Adi's events" (under "build a virtual community" button) or look on my Facebook account "Adi Shalev Shlicha" with all the programs and activities.

I'll continue with a variety of programs and activities online. Stay updated on the weekly emails and social media.

If there is anything specific you would like me to share with you- please do not hesitate to let me know.

May we all stay healthy and this situation will be over soon.

Miss you all,

Adi, your Shlicha

Celebrating Passover with Legos

We challenged young people in the community to make Lego creations inspired by the story of Passover. Clockwise from top: "Moses Coming Down The River" by Abraham Graff; "Pharaoh and the Plague of Wild Beasts" by Isabella Gurwitz; "Baby Moses in a Basket Going Down the River" by Maxwell Kabakoff.

Yom HaShoah through the years

Adjusting to these times, we commemorated Yom HaShoah this year using virtual technology. Over 100 community members took part. Similarly, Jews in the former Soviet Union also had to be adaptive to observe Yom HaShoah and other holidays. Here is a picture of Moisey Schneider wearing a Tallit and leading a secret underground minyan to commemorate Yom HaShoah.

All Around the Town

Mazel Tov to **Will Levin**, son of **Adam and Margo Levin**: After competitive tryouts, Will Levin, a 10th grade student-athlete at Wyomissing High School, was selected to represent the Jewish Federation of Philadelphia as a member of the U16 soccer delegation, which had been scheduled to participate in the 2020 Maccabi games in San Diego in August. Will took part in the games two years ago when they were held in Irvine, Calif. Unfortunately the games have been postponed, but the members of Team Philadelphia will have the opportunity to virtually connect with each other as part of a teen task force and possibly play soccer locally depending on the circumstances.

Will Levin

***

Mazel tov to **Debbie Cieplinski** on the birth of her grandson Phoenix Edward to Stephanie and Kevin Sutorius.

***

Mazel tov to great-grandmother **Sylvia Wenger** on the birth of Tali Singer, daughter of Tara and Tal Singer and granddaughter of Janet and Arthur Wenger.

***

Mazel tov to grandparents **Arlene and Irving Ehrlich** on the birth of Jacob Ethan Sachs, son of Melissa Ehrlich and Garret Sachs.

***

We love good news about members of our community! Please share it by emailing Marknem@aol.com or calling the JCC office at 610-921-0624.

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Kimberly Shank with her dog, Bailey, cheering on the Eagles way back when we could all enjoy football.

KIMBERLY SHANK is a Seventh- and Eighth-grade English teacher at Allen Middle School in Camp Hill, PA. She grew up in Bernville and graduated from Tulpehocken High School in 2005 along with her classmate Peter Gernsheimer, grandson of Hilde Gernsheimer.

In early 2018 Kim contacted Peter's dad, Jeff, to ask if he and Hilde might visit her school to share their family's story with her eighth-graders who were studying the Holocaust. Hilde and Jeff visited her school and spoke to several hundred students in mid-February of 2018.

Hilde and Jeff met with Kim's class again in mid-March of 2019, just two weeks prior to her passing. This would be the last of many visits Hilde made in the latter years of her life to share her family's all-important story. Following Jeff's presentation, Kim informed them that she had collected over $500 from her students, their parents, and the faculty of Allen Middle School and donated the money to the Holocaust Awareness Museum and Education Center in Philadelphia.

Jeff was again invited to speak to Kim's class this spring but was unable to do so as a result of the coronavirus closure of all schools in the state. However, Kim collected over $300 again this year from her students, their parents, and the faculty of Allen Middle School and donated it to the **Edwin & Alma N. 51 Lakin Holocaust Library and Resource Center** with the note: "Thank you for sharing your mother's story with us each year. Even though we were unable to have you visit Allen Middle School this year, we still wanted to pay tribute to your mom. We are donating in her memory to the Holocaust Library."

THANK YOU to all those students, parents, and teachers of West Shore School District's Allen Middle School for their most thoughtful & generous donations. We, the Jewish Community of Reading/Berks, sincerely appreciate this mitzvah and indeed consider them to be FRIENDS OF OUR JEWISH COMMUNITY.

We also want to wish Kim and her husband, Brandon, all the best as they await the arrival of their first child, Carter, this spring.

If you have know a person or group that you'd like to have recognized in this column for their act of kindness toward our Jewish community, please submit their name, a brief summary of their mitzvah and, ideally, a photo to: jeffgerns@icloud.com

Friends of our Jewish Community

Our Jewish Community is blessed with many friends. In most cases we aren't even aware of the many good deeds they've done on our behalf. Here's one such deed we acknowledge with sincere appreciation and thanks.

Keeping things in perspective

By Rabbi Yosef Lipsker
Chabad Center of Berks County

Something invisible came and put everything in its place.

Suddenly the gasoline went down, pollution went down, people started to have more time — so much time that they do not know what to do with it — parents are spending time with their kids as a family, work is no longer a priority, or traveling or social life either.

Suddenly we silently see within ourselves and understand the value of the words "solidarity," "love," "strength," "empathy" and "faith".

In an instant we realized that we are all in the same boat; rich and poor. That the supermarket shelves are empty and the hospitals are full.

New cars and old cars are in garages, simply because nobody can get out.

With empty streets, less pollution and clean air, the land also breathes.

The human returns to his origins, realizing that with or without money, the important thing is to survive.

Today, HEALTH is the main thing,

Our overthrown gods:

- Money
- Sports
- Fame
- Politics

What the coronavirus is teaching us:

- Our best protection: GOD
- Our best refuge: HOME
- Our best company: FAMILY
- Our wealth: HEALTH
- Our real time: TODAY
- Nature's call: STOP US
- Its message: WAIT, RESPECT

We are not gods, we are not kings, we do not have the power of controlling everything.

We are part of a whole, fragile, brittle and vulnerable something.

What would those who lived through the Holocaust have to say about what we are all living through now — the locking down of schools and synagogues and stores, the staying in our homes, etc.

What follows is what each one of us should feel only in relation to himself but absolutely not in relation to the general suffering and pain of people

What might they say if they were here today?

You are restricted where to go and how many people can congregate but you can stay at home and be in your own bed. No bunker. No ghetto. No sleeping with animals in a barn. You can go to sleep at night and expect to find yourself and your family safely in the same place in the morning.

You have enough food in your home to survive for a few weeks. No rationing of a few grains of barley per person per day. You have fresh water to drink and don't need to limit it. You don't have to boil it first.

You can go to a bathroom and flush away and don't need to use a pail in a corner with other people around. You can go outside to get food and there is food to be gotten. You can get food and you won't be shot dead if discovered.

You can take a shower. With soap. Warm water too.

You could pray as long and as loud as you want and not be afraid of being discovered. You can have a Shabbat meal and have real chicken soup — not a little salt in water and leave the rest to imagination. Real fish. Challah and bread — soft and chewy, not hard and moldy. White and not coarse black. You can get more than one slice a day. You don't have to hide it from other people.

You can think about making plans for next month or even next year and have a reasonable chance of keeping those plans.

You can feel your fingers and toes when you wake up.

You have air conditioning and heat. You don't feel suffocated by the heat and stench. You have shoes. No holes in them.

You have books to learn from. All types of books. So you can be locked up for weeks and months and won't die of boredom! You have access to classes by phone and/or by computer.

You have a way to keep in touch with the outside world and at least know that there is an outside world. You can actually know what is happening out there. You can be in touch with family and see how they are doing.

You never have to think that maybe you are from the last ones alive.

If you need medicines, you can actually get them.

Let's keep things in perspective.

And as His creations, let us beseech our G-d to stop all of the pain and disease in the world and bless it with peace and good health.

CARES Act has impact on charitable giving

At the end of March, the Coronavirus Aid Relief and Economic Security Act (CARES) was passed and signed into law.

Key items included direct payments to individuals, economic stabilization funds for industry, and support for states and localities. The legislation also contained provisions to support the nonprofit charitable sector, including the expansion of incentives for individuals and corporations making a charitable gift.

Non-Itemizers

To help bolster charitable giving for taxpayers who do not itemize their returns, the Act provides an "above-the-line" charitable tax deduction of up to $300. If you claim the standard deduction and do not itemize, you will be able to claim a deduction for up to $300 for your charitable cash donations on your 2020 tax return. This is not a permanent provision, and it expires at the end of the 2020 tax year. Please note that contributions to donor-advised funds or certain supporting organizations would not qualify for the deduction.

Itemizers

The CARES Act raises charitable contribution deduction limits for taxpayers who claim the charitable contribution deduction. IT lifts the current 60% adjusted gross income ceiling, which limited the amount of the deduction a taxpayer could claim. This 60% limit has been suspended for cash donations made in 2020. The limit is now 100% of adjusted gross income. This allows taxpayers who itemize to deduct more of their charitable cash donations this year. For corporations, the taxable income limitation on deductible contributions is increased from 10% to 25%. Please note that contributions to donor-advised funds or certain supporting organizations would not qualify for the deduction.

To learn more, contact Richard at 610-921-0624 or RichardN@JFReading.org

Disclaimer: The Jewish Federation of Reading/Berks does not give legal advice. The views expressed here are for informational purposes only and are not intended or written to be used, nor may they be used, as legal advice. In particular, and without limiting the foregoing, donors seeking tax or legal advice on which they may rely should consult their own professional advisors.

Obituary

Frances Mendelsohn, 96, of the Highlands, Wyomissing and formerly of Pennside. Fran was a graduate of South Philadelphia High School and the School of Industrial Art, and was a member of Kesher Zion Synagogue. She was a lifelong artist whose home was filled with her original watercolors and her true passions were dark pretzels, chocolate and Phildelphia Sports teams. She is survived by her children; Jacob, Louise, Barbara, Steve and Elaine and her 14 grandchildren and 12 great-grandchildren.

May Iyar-Sivan

Shabbat Candle Lightings	Torah Portions
May 1 7:42 p.m.	**May 2/8 Iyar** **Acharei Mot/Kedoshim** (Leviticus 16:1-20:27)
May 8 7:49 p.m.	**May 9/15 Iyar** **Emor** (Leviticus 21:1-24:23)
May 15 7:56 p.m.	**May 16/22 Iyar** **Behar/Bechukutai** (Leviticus 25:1-27:34)
May 22 8:02 p.m.	**May 23/29 Iyar** **Bamidbar** (Numbers 1:1-4:20)

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Hilarious family drama next for Literatour Berks

By Amanda J. Hornberger

A family cruise brings out the humor and the long-ignored truths in one family in the hilarious novel "The Floating Feldmans" by Elyssa Friedland, the next author in our inaugural Literatour Berks season.

Friedland describes the book: "Sink or swim. Or at least that's what Annette Feldman tells herself when she books a cruise for her entire family. Between the troublesome family secrets, old sibling rivalries, and her two teenage grandkids, Annette's birthday vacation is looking more and more like the perfect storm. Adrift together on the open seas, the Feldmans will learn that the people they once thought most likely to sink them are actually the ones who help them stay afloat."

Although Friedland is unable to travel here from NYC, she is joining us virtually on Monday, May 4, at 7 p.m. for an interactive conversation about "The Floating Feldmans". Online registration is available in our weekly email, website and Facebook.

Friedland's appearance in Literatour Berks is presented by Jewish Federation of Reading/ Berks in partnership with Exeter Community Library and Sinking Spring Public Library. Thank you to the sponsors and patrons of Literatour Berks for making this event possible.

Understanding the key to bearing witness

By Amanda J. Hornberger

In April the JCC women's book club met to discuss our latest read, "Witness: Lessons from Elie Wiesel's Classroom" by Ariel Burger. Burger was due to come to Reading for Yom Hashoah as part of Literatour Berks (and we hope to still bring him this fall) but our book club read the book in anticipation of his visit.

Burger's book describes his 20-year relationship with Elie Wiesel as his student and then teaching assistant. The book was a unique perspective of Wiesel as teacher, a role that he loved and felt most accurately described him. As always, our group felt we had a much better understanding of the book and Wiesel after reading "Witness".

Our key take ways for bearing witness from Wiesel:

- Listen.
- "The choice is to listen, or not. I hope that you listen, really listen, not to find the other's weakness but to find his strength. To disagree, to engage with controversy, does not mean to refuse to listen. On the other hand, to agree with someone does not mean to merge with the other."
- Stand up against denial of facts.
- The body is not eternal but the soul is.

We highly recommend "Witness" by Ariel Burger for anyone who wishes they too could have been a student of Wiesel. Copies of "Witness" are available online from Reads & Company Bookshop, our official book vendor of Literatour Berks and other major book retailers.

Why do Israelis love to travel? How did it become something so meaningful in our culture and how does the army service have an impact on that?
From "Shvil Israel" (Israel National Trail) to Asia, Africa, Europe, South and North America and more.
Every week we'll host a guest that will share with us their story and experience.
This is a great chance to create your own "Bucket List" to use as soon as possible with recommendations, special tips.
Zoom ID: 403944704

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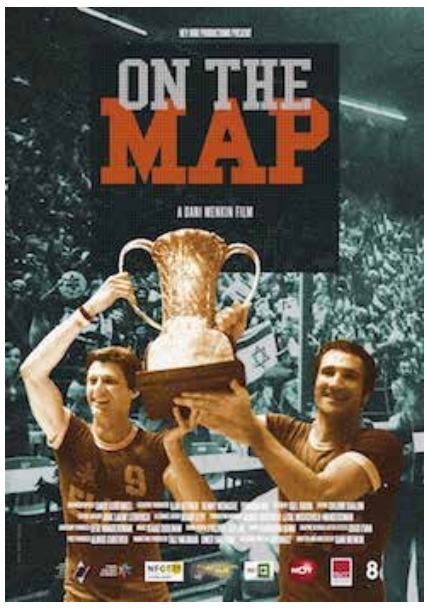
Yom Hazikaron
Art Exhibits
Yom Hashoah
Annual Meeting & Picnic
Purim Carnival
Richard J. Yashek
Memorial Lecture
Kristallnacht Remembrance
Youth Events
Purim Masquerade Party
Bridge
Chevra
Mahjong
Trips to NYC/Philadelphia
Lakin Holocaust Library
& Resource Center
Shabbat B'yachad
Community Calendar

Basketball underdog story final film in this year's series

By Amanda J. Hornberger



Two favorite American pastimes, basketball and movie theatres, remain closed but our last film in the 2020 Reading Jewish Film Series combines both for an inspirational afternoon.

On Sunday, May 17, at 3 p.m. we will screen "On the Map" and have an intimate conversation with filmmaker Dani Menkin.*

"On the Map" tells the against-all-odds story of Maccabi Tel Aviv's 1977 European Championship, which took place at a time when the Middle East was still reeling from the 1973 Yom Kippur War, the 1972 Olympic massacre at Munich and the 1976 hijacking of an Air France flight from Tel Aviv.

Through the of lens of sports, "On the Map" presents a much broader story of how one team captured the heart of a nation amidst domestic turmoil and the global machinations of the Cold War.

The documentary combines the pulse-pounding action of a high-stakes thriller with an incendiary political backdrop to deliver a film that will mesmerize basketball fans and captures the spirit of a nation triumphant against all odds.

Winner of more than a dozen awards from Jewish film festivals, "On the Map" has been an audience favorite.

Our community is lucky to have the filmmaker, Dani Menkin, join us for our screening for a post-film discussion.

Look for registration links on the website (www.readingjewishcommunity.org), Facebook and in the weekly emails in May.

Escape reality and join us for an afternoon of basketball and Israeli spirit in this inspiring film.

**Please note that Menkin's film "Picture of His Life" is unable to be screened virtually, so Menkin offered "On the Map." We plan to screen "Picture of His Life" at Fox Theatres in the fall.*

JFS still serving community in this unusual time

By Sari Incledon, M.Ed.

Greetings from Jewish Family Service. During these unusual times our routines and work, like that of so many of you, have changed. We can no longer see clients in person, whether in homes or our office. Nor can we visit community members in nursing homes, the hospital or in retirement communities.

We are however, still in our office and trying to keep in touch with as many people in the Jewish community as possible.

So far, (I am writing this in mid-April) most of the people we have reached out to are coping remarkably well. Yes, they miss spending time with friends and family, and they miss all the activities they usually enjoy. But we are fortunate that for the most part our community is doing well. If you or someone you know needs assistance please call us. In addition to our social workers, we are fortunate that we have several volunteers who are willing to help people in need.

We were able to hold our April 1 food pantry at the Olivet's Pendora Park Clubhouse as scheduled. We distributed more than 6,000 pounds of pre-packed fresh, frozen and nonperishable food items to 132 households. Our clients drove up to the building, and masked-volunteers placed the bags and boxes directly in their cars, minimizing contact. We also provided food for 50 residents of B'nai Brith apartments. We filled their van with food packages so none of the residents had to leave their apartments. Thanks go to Ellen and Paul Schwartz, Oleg Umanov, Raymond Gehring, Mike Robinson, Sam Kabakoff and John and Aidan Incledon for their hard work. Thanks also to Solange Mintz and Karen Kabakoff for making masks for the volunteers.

We delivered food pantry parcels to clients in the Jewish community and delivered Passover food orders to people who made requests. As we do every year, Jewish Family Service donated Passover provisions to Jewish inmates at the Berks County Prison. We work with BCP Chaplain Larry Mast to make sure all who want to observe the holiday can do so.

Like all of you, we look forward to the resumption of our regularly scheduled programs, and we will be sure to let you know as soon as Friendship Circle and Movie Monday can resume. In the meantime, please feel free to call with your program ideas, menu suggestions, or just to say "hello". It is lovely that many of you are reaching out to your friends with phone calls and emails. Let's stay connected! Hope we can be together soon.

Important U.S. Government Info

The Treasury Department and the Internal Revenue Service are providing special tax filing and payment relief to individuals and businesses in response to the COVID-19 outbreak. The filing deadline for tax returns has been extended from April 15 to July 15.

Many in-person tax preparation sites including Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) have closed to protect the public and volunteers from COVID-19.

IRS Free File provides free tax preparation and e-filing online for those making $69,000 or less in 2019.

Economic Stimulus Check: Seniors who receive Social Security benefits will receive the $1,200 rebate as long as they make less than the maximum income (adjusted gross income up to $75,000 for individuals and up to $150,000 for married couples filing a joint return) without any further action on their part. Recipients will receive these payments as a direct deposit or by paper check, just as they would normally receive their benefits.

CARES Act and Required Minimum Distributions: During this time of economic hardship the CARES Act and Retirement Protection Act temporarily suspends the RMD for defined contribution retirement plans, allowing individuals to leave that money in their accounts and avoid a penalty and paying tax on the distribution.

Do you remember?

By Tootie Moyer

- Only having a radio, a deck of cards or a board game for entertainment.
- When you said a cuss word you got soap in your mouth; now swear words are very common.
- We had to go to the public library for references — we even had to walk there.
- There were few cars so we could play basketball, skate and go sledding on every street.
- We walked to Hampden Park to go sledding, we had a lookout on every corner — few cars could drive in heavy snow.
- Bedrooms were completely dark at night, — no light from computer, TV, cellphone or humidifier.
- Cars had wind-up windows and no air conditioning.
- We did not have throw-away diapers; we had laundry service or washed them ourselves.
- Stores were in business "forever" such as Croll and Keck, Woolworths, Kresge's, McCrory's, and Pomeroy's.
- Friendship Circle went to a different city every year for a day, we had a luncheon, received goodie bags and had a program. Some of the cities were Harrisburg, Lancaster, and Lebanon.
- You could call a doctor and talk to him personally — no machines.
- When you woke up in the morning and nothing hurt you – now every morning something new hurts.
- Few people lived as long as 90 years. Thank goodness for science.
- You had loads of relatives, now we only have a few left.
- How about these names? Irene Dunn, Dolores Del Rio, Fredric March, Fred McMurray, Paul Muni, Anthony Perkins, Mary Pickford and Spencer Tracy.
- We were happy and healthy. Most families lived near each other, so there was always someone to see and talk to.

Stay well – we will see each other soon and make up for lost time.

Jewish Federation honored for Life and Legacy program

Jewish Federation of Reading/Berks recently received a grant and recognition for its Life and Legacy program from the Jewish Community Foundation of Central Pennsylvania.

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

New Israeli COVID-19 treatment shows signs of success

Israel21c

The first two patients who were treated with a new Israeli treatment for the novel COVID-19 after testing positive have shown significant improvement, with one of them even being removed from the intensive care unit within days of treatment.

Israeli biopharmaceutical RedHill Biopharma Ltd. administered the experimental drug Opaganib for the first time early in April. The first two patients treated, according to the company, demonstrated significant improvement through clinical trial within mere days of treatment.

"We are very encouraged by the preliminary findings showing clinical improvement in the first COVID-19 patients treated with Opaganib, which further supports its safety and potential benefit to patients," said Dr. Mark L. Levitt, medical director. "Our hope is that the unique mechanism of action of Opaganib, with both anti-viral and anti-inflammatory activity, will help COVID-19 patients by reducing lung inflammation and thus preventing the disease from progressing to a stage which requires mechanical ventilation. Importantly, Opaganib is targeting a critical host factor that the coronavirus is unlikely to evade via mutation in possible future outbreaks of the pandemic."

After the treatment, the patients needed less supplemental oxygen as well as C-reactive protein, the latter of which is an "inflammatory biomarker correlated with lung lesions which could reflect disease severity."

An additional condition of the coronavirus is lymphocytopenia, meaning an abnormally low level of lymphocytes in the blood, which both patients started off with. A few days after the treatment, however, both patients showed significant improvement in that regard.

One of the two patients was in the ICU and even considered for intubation, but within days of the experimental drug being administered, they were released.

The patients received the opanagib treatment while receiving the standard care for coronavirus, which includes hydroxychloroquine as background therapy.

Opanagib is a "new chemical entity" that is administered orally and performs "anticancer, anti-viral and anti-inflammatory activities."

"We are committed to expanding the availability of Opaganib under compassionate use to additional hospitals and countries and are hopeful that this treatment could potentially benefit COVID-19 patients with life-threatening manifestations," Dr. Levitt said.

The company received the green light from the Italian National Institute for Infectious Diseases to administer the drug in the virus-ridden country. Meanwhile, discussions have been ongoing in other countries as to whether they may administer opanagib as part of "compassionate use program authorizations" and "potential emergency clinical development programs."

Israel's Pluristem also developed a treatment for coronavirus: A placenta-based cell-therapy treatment which has proven successful on numerous patients upon which it was tested so far.

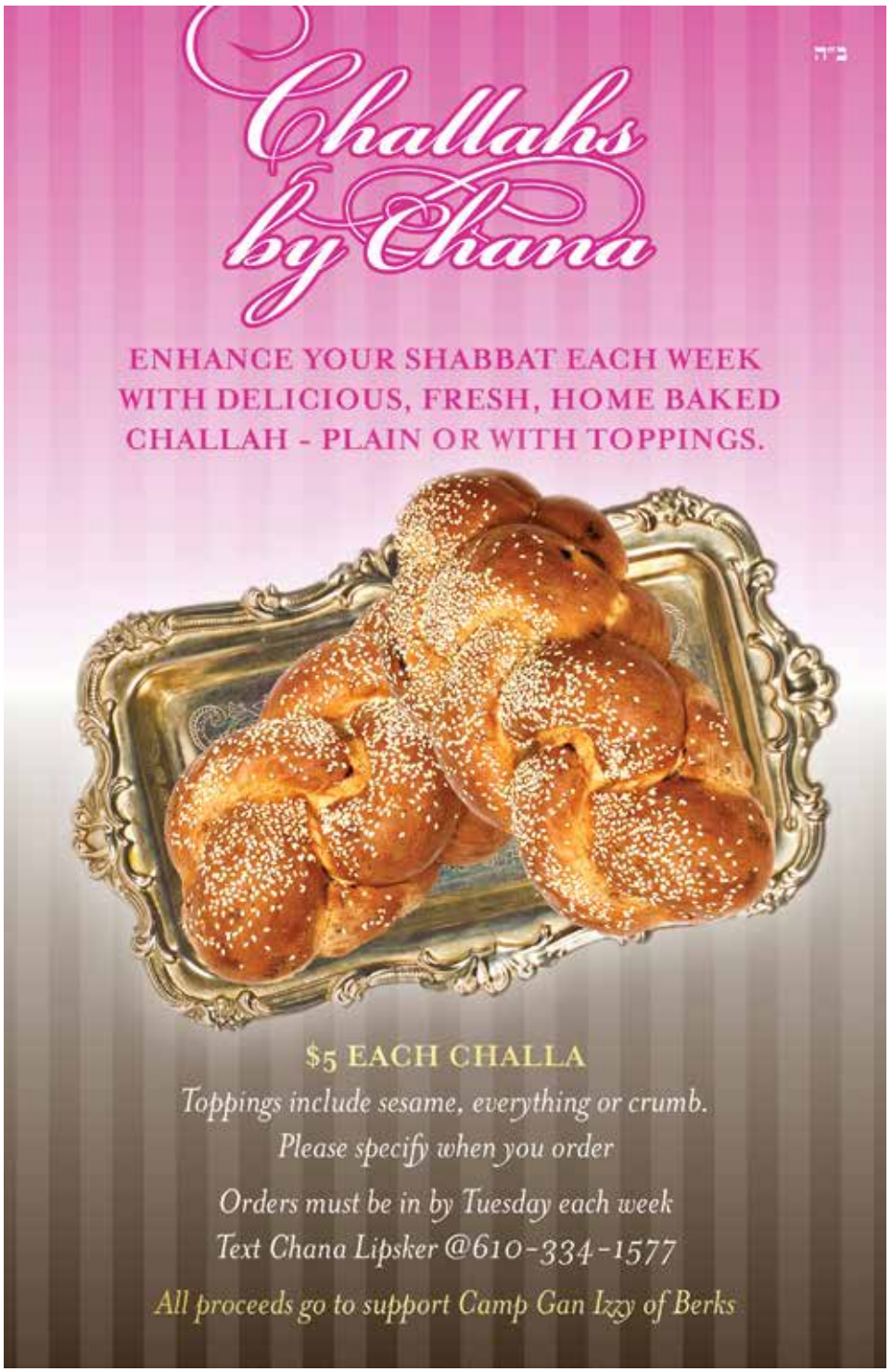
It's Simcha Supplement time

If you had or are having a bar/bat mitzvah or graduation (high school or higher) in your family this Jewish year, share the good news with the community. Please submit a few sentences about the person and their accomplishment, along with a photo.

Text and photos can be sent to Marknem@aol.com or to the Federation office.

DEADLINE IS HERE. PLEASE SUBMIT MATERIAL IMMEDIATELY

Congratulations to our Shlicha, Adi Shalev, who will be working as a supervisor this summer at the Union for Reform Judaism's Camp Harlam in Kunkletown, Pa.



Virtual learning goes on at Chabad

Chabad's Hebrew school has continued to run virtually, starting from the first week of school being closed, and will be continuing after the Passover break too. To add excitement to our students' seders, which were so different this year, all students received a Mah Nishtana magic box so they could answer the Four Questions with a few magic tricks. Each family received a video of a magician performing and teaching the tricks. After watching it, the kids were able to enhance their seders and bring some fun at this difficult time.

RCOS school still fully engaged

The Reform Congregation Oheb Sholom Religious School is fully engaged in digital learning. Classes have continued via Zoom videoconferencing, phone calls and emails, and students have had constant contact with their teachers. Much of the focus has been on maintaining relationships among the students and with their teachers. The highlight of the past month was a Passover program with the entire school, featuring a lesson in making matzo pizza. Families have been "attending" services together. On one recent Shabbat the K/1 class lit candles together.

Wanted: Good News!

Share your simchas with the community.
Just call the Federation office
or email Marknem@aol.com.

Meet RICHARD

"Manor is a wonderful place to live!
I truly don't want to be any place but here!"

Richard hasn't let age slow him down. At 90, Richard finally retired from his office job and became an Independent Living resident at Manor at Market Square. You can find him directing the choir, playing the piano or a game of bingo, or catching the bus for a day trip.

Call 610-624-1299 to schedule a lunch & tour!

Israelis invent colorblindness-correcting contact lenses

Israel21c.com

Two Israeli researchers report that they can correct deuteranomaly, a form of red-green colorblindness, with customizable contact lenses. As reported in the Optical Society journal Optics Letters, Tel Aviv University's Sharon Karepov and Tal Ellenbogen incorporated ultra-thin optical devices into off-the-shelf contact lenses.

Test subjects saw their color perception improve up to a factor of 10. "Problems with distinguishing red from green interrupt simple daily routines such as deciding whether a banana is ripe," said Karepov, from the university's department of physical electronics. "Our contact lenses use metasurfaces based on nano-metric size gold ellipses to create a customized, compact and durable way to address these deficiencies."

This marks the first time tiny optical devices have successfully been fused to curved surfaces. Although clinical testing would be needed before the contact lenses could be marketed, the researchers believe that manufacturers could embed the metasurface during the molding stage of contact lens fabrication or thermally fuse them to a rigid contact lens.

They plan to keep studying and improving their unique metasurface transfer process and test it for other applications.

"Glasses based on this correction concept are commercially available. However, they are significantly bulkier than contact lenses," said Karepov. "Because the proposed optical element is ultrathin and can be embedded into any rigid contact lens, both deuteranomaly and other vision disorders such as refractive errors can be treated within a single contact lens."

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Honorials and Memorials

Contributions may be made to the following Funds:

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Jewish Family Service
Leo Camp Lecture Fund
JFS Food Bank
JFS Taxi Transportation Program
Holocaust Library & Resource Center
Doris Levin Fund
PJ Library Fund
Harry & Rose Sack Fund
Evelyn Thompson Fund

Corona Counting

Meet 16 women breaking barriers in Israel

Israel21c

Israeli women from all walks of life are challenging stereotypes and showing they can do it. We're taking the opportunity to introduce and celebrate 16 Israeli women from all walks of life who challenge stereotypes in the most inspiring ways. Ladies, you rock.

1. Ada Yonath

Professor Ada Yonath is a true groundbreaker. A biochemist, she won the Nobel Prize in chemistry in 2009, becoming the first Israeli woman to win the prestigious award and the first woman in 45 years to receive it in her field. Now 80, Yonath has become a role model in Israel.

2. Talleen Abu Hanna

Talleen Abu Hanna, a model and media personality is not only one of the few Israeli-Arab celebrities in the Holy Land but the proud winner of Israel's first transgender beauty pageant.

3. Gal Lusky

With all due respect to the fabulous Gal Gadot, it's Gal Lusky who's a real wonder woman. The founder and CEO of Israeli Flying Aid, Lusky leads aid missions in war-torn and disaster-struck countries, often risking her own life to help others.

4. Karnit Flug

For those who still believe that economics (or anything to with numbers) are best left to a man, let us please introduce Professor Karnit Flug, former governor of the Bank of Israel. Flug led Israel's central bank from 2013 to 2018. She was considered a stellar governor, garnering worldwide attention and praised for her work.

5. Pascale Bercovitch

Challenging stereotypes is a way of life for Pascale Bercovitch, a professional Paralympic athlete. The French-born Bercovitch lost her legs in a train accident as a teen, but didn't let that get in the way of her big dream — to make Aliyah to Israel and serve in the IDF. Once she completed her army service, Bercovitch embarked on a journalism and media career. Bercovitch also decided to take up athletics, competing at rowing at the 2008 Beijing Olympics at the age of 40 before branching out to climbing and hand-biking.

6. Kira Radinsky

Kira Radinsky, 33, who was born in Chernobyl, left Ukraine for Israel as a small child. She lived in Nesher with her grandmother, mother and aunt. Radinsky started studying at the prestigious Technion at the mere age of 15 before serving at an elite technological unit. Radinsky then carried on with her studies, developing an algorithm capable of predicting future events, co-founding a startup and becoming a leading figure in Israeli tech.

7. Lucy Ayoub

The past year has definitely been a great one for Lucy Ayoub. The 27-year-old TV presenter shot to nationwide fame when she co-hosted the Eurovision Song Contest. Born to an Arab-Christian father and Jewish mother, Ayoub grew up in Haifa and served in the Air Force. Her career took off when she participated in the Israeli Poetry Slam contest and started working for the Israeli broadcasting authority. Ayoub became a household name – and one of the few representatives of Israel's Arab community on TV – following the international Eurovision event.

8. Netta Barzilai

Netta Barzilai has taught fans worldwide about challenging stereotypes. The winner of the 2018 Eurovision contest is smart, sassy and quirky. Her song "Toy" became an international hit, resonating with women worldwide.

9. Dina Porat

Professor Dina Porat is a leading Israeli academic and the chief historian of the Yad Vashem Holocaust memorial, whose long and prestigious career is proof that women can make it to the very top in the ivory tower that is Israeli academia.

10. Karin Elharrar

Karin Elharrar is perhaps best-known for being a member of the Knesset, but the parliamentarian has had an equally impressive career challenging stereotypes while fighting for the rights of people with disabilities while dealing with muscular dystrophy herself.

11. Naifa Mulla

Chef Naifa Mulla grew up in the northern Druze village of Yarka, where she learned to cook. But that remained a private passion for her for many years, as she moved to central Israel and embarked on a career as a banker — already challenging stereotypes about Druze women's roles and Israeli society's views of them.

12. Beatie Deutsch

Beatie Deutsch, an ultra-Orthodox Israeli-American mom of five, is an award-winning marathon runner. She's won the Jerusalem Marathon, the Tiberias Marathon and numerous half marathons, most recently in Miami.

13. Ester Rada

Singer Ester Rada was born to parents who made Aliyah to Israel from Ethiopia, grew up in a small religious community and only became familiar with the kind of music she'd be creating one day as a teen. Yet Rada grew up to be a critically acclaimed singer headlining shows all across the world, incorporating Ethiopian music, jazz and funk.

14. Sabrin Saadi

Sabrin Saadi is making history. A youth detective with the Israel Police, she's now the first religious, hijab-wearing female Muslim police cadet. She's the sole youth detective at a police station in the north where she focuses on online and violent crimes. While Saadi enjoys great support from her family and community, she's also received threats due to her chosen career path.

15. Deganit Paikowsky

Dr. Deganit Paikowsky is one of the leaders of a prestigious space advocacy organization that promotes scientific dialogue and international space cooperation. An academic, she specializes in space policy and security, and is very much in charge of developing the space policy research field in Israel.

16. Sanaa Mahameed

Sanaa Mahameed is the first female Muslim volunteer EMT in the United Hatzalah of Israel voluntary first-responder network and the first religious Muslim woman to drive an ambucycle in the country. Mahameed got into the rescue services after tragedy struck her family. When she was 16, she found herself helpless and not knowing what to do when her uncle suddenly died. She resolved that never again will she be unable to help in such emergency situations and has since trained as an EMT and ambulance driver.

Israel&Overseas

Jewish Agency for Israel

Yemin Orde

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Meir Panim

IDF members grateful for community's cards

During Purim the Religious School kids from Reform Congregation Oheb Sholom got together to write letters to IDF soldiers. Roi, brother of our Shlicha Adi Shalev, delivered them personally to his friends from the search and rescue unit

Meir Panim helping during pandemic

American Friends of Meir Panim

As the entire world is adjusting to the new reality of the coronavirus pandemic, Meir Panim has quickly pivoted in order to continue providing foods and other necessary items for our clients.

We have taken innovative steps to ensure that the new government limitations won't leave anyone in Israel's impoverished community without a warm meal.

For example, new government restrictions have banned gatherings of 10 or more people in public spaces. So Meir Panim is responding by providing hot meals from their Restaurant-Style Soup Kitchens as takeaway meals. The takeout containers are prepared and are packed up for their clients to come and pick up their meals.

We have been asked by many local municipalities to add thousands over and above our usual patrons as Meals-on-Wheels recipients across Israel due to the coronavirus pandemic. Our Meals-on-Wheels program has become the exclusive free meal provider in many regions over Israel.

Therefore, our Meals-on-Wheels program has significantly expanded its meal delivery program to meet the growing demands of our patrons who are confined to their homes, individuals in quarantine, as well those citizens that are now unemployed or on furlough.

In addition, Meir Panim's Tzefat branch manager was approached by the welfare ministry to help distribute meals to the homebound people of Tzefat. Due to the Coronavirus outbreak, more people than ever are homebound and not able to go out to get food. Since Meir Panim has been delivering food to needy people already for a long time, it was chosen as the community partner to deliver the meals.

In solidarity, the mayor of Tzefat, Shuka Ohana, visited the Meir Panim center to see for himself the work that is done by Meir Panim. He visited the center and met with the people for whom delivering meals is a daily routine. He also put his own gloves and face mask on and went door to door to deliver the meals to the people who are homebound due to the virus.

Meir Panim is supported with local dollars through the Jewish Federation of Reading's Israel Now program.

Yemin Orde deliveries make lives brighter

ImpactIsrael

Our staff has made the necessary adjustments in order to meet the emotional and educational needs of the adolescents there. The Yemin Orde Youth Village staff has delivered study materials and care packages for every teen living outside the Village and distributing them across Israel. For those without sufficient internet access, we are supplying SIM cards as well.

The 340 who are not in the Village have returned to their nuclear or extended families, and many are faced with difficult situations. They are experiencing loneliness and lack of confidence as they are stuck inside, generally in small apartments with multiple family members, in low-income communities. Many of their parents have lost their jobs or have been laid off.

The emotional connections to our youth who are outside the Village are made on a daily basis, as youth are in touch with staff; informal educators, teachers, social workers or national service volunteers. They use platforms such as WhatsApp, Zoom, or by telephone, holding either group meetings or individual sessions. Our staff check in to see how things are going, allowing for the youth to vent, laugh and keep up their spirits. This consistent communication is important to reminding teens that we want them here but that because of the coronavirus situation, it is not possible right now.

Yemin Orde's efforts are supported by donors to the Jewish Federation of Reading.

Youth who are in the Village are divided into small family units and remain together. They have learning materials, schedule of activities and engage in remote learning with their teachers. The daily schedule includes scheduled distance learning with teachers along with extra-curricular activities to help alleviate stress, such as music and art.

For those at the Village, their hopes are high and they have been very cooperative with all of the regulations in place. They trust their educators and know that we are together with them in this.

As we look towards next school year, we are making the necessary plans to ensure our strong educational environment is maintained; providing a normative high school education, promoting Hebrew language acquisition, enriching extracurricular activities, life-skills training and much needed therapeutic care.

We want our youth to know that when they come back to the Village, they will have the same supportive and caring community as before, providing them continuity and security to help them continue their journeys from at-risk youth to self-reliant.