

SHALOM *y'all*

A PUBLICATION OF THE GOLDRING/WOLDENBERG INSTITUTE OF SOUTHERN JEWISH LIFE

Here for you, always.



**PARTNERSHIP
HELPS US ALL
PERSEVERE**
p.7

**STICKING TOGETHER
ACROSS THE
SOCIAL DISTANCE**
p.14

**CULTURAL
CONNECTIONS NOT
GOING ANYWHERE**
p.24

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CONTENTS

Leadership Messages.....	4
Connection in the Time of Coronavirus.....	6
Education.....	7
Fellow Farewells.....	10
Fellow Alumni Network.....	12
Feature: Chai Club.....	13
Community Engagement.....	14
Feature: Matching Challenge.....	17
Meet the Donors: The Maers.....	18
Heritage & Interpretation.....	21
Programming.....	24
History.....	26
Rabbinical.....	28
Gifts & Gratitude.....	29

CONNECTION CONTINUES, NO MATTER WHAT

AS WE PREPARE THIS ISSUE IN THE SPRING OF 2020, TO ARRIVE IN MAILBOXES BY JUNE, the world is different. Most of us are sheltering in place, working from home, and wearing masks when we venture out into the world for groceries or other essentials. It's not what we imagined this year would look like, and it's hard to know what to expect.

That's why the team at the Goldring/Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life (ISJL) is emphasizing that, no matter what, our commitment is to maintain a sense of connection.

Even in uncertain times, there is certainty in our sense of community. There is certainty in tradition, such as gathering around the seder table (even if video conferencing made an appearance instead of Elijah this year), celebrating Shabbat, and checking in on our community members. We are continuing to do everything we can to carry out our mission of supporting, connecting, and celebrating Jewish life in the South.

That's why we launched a new area of our website, providing "Hebrew School at Home" lessons, virtual road trips through the Jewish South, playlists featuring southern Jewish artists and themes, and a host of other free, remotely-accessible resources.

That's why we have been calling our community contacts, friends, and supporters just to check in and see how everyone is doing and what they need.

That's why, despite working from home, our staff still virtually gathers for meetings—which have included Funny Hat Day and Team Spirit Day—to keep us smiling while we convene on screen.

In this issue, you'll hear about the ways, large and small, that we are readjusting. We've had to pivot quite a bit in order to put health and safety first while ensuring that our connections remain strong. We miss our community visits, our tour groups, and having our programming on the road; we will deeply miss holding our annual ISJL Education Conference in person this summer.

But we know that *gam zeh ya'avur*—this, too, shall pass. That's why in many of the articles, you will also see references to the strategic planning process we are kicking off this year. We are present and committed to seeing our communities through this very particular moment—but our eyes are also on the future, with hope, excitement, and strategic thinking. We cannot wait to be with you again, and in the meantime, we wish you good health and invite you to continue connecting with us across the social distance.

L'shalom,

The Board & Staff of the ISJL



FROM THE CEO

Michele Schipper
CEO

“PIVOT.” I DON’T THINK I’VE ever used or heard the word as often as I have this spring. The COVID-19 pandemic has been forcing all of us—in our work lives and our personal lives—to pivot.

In what seemed like mere moments, the ISJL went from an organization that brought dozens of programs and staff directly into our community partners’ homes, synagogues, public schools, libraries, and more to, all of a sudden, an entirely virtual office. It was a huge pivot: all staff working remotely, committed to staying connected, quickly determining how we continue to bring our staff and programming directly to our community partners.

I am so very proud of the ISJL staff and their creativity as we work throughout this period of pivoting. It’s no easy task, when the heart of one’s work is partnering directly with communities, to shift to all-remote support. However, the ISJL team is used to thinking outside the box, has strong relationships with our partners, and in many ways was uniquely poised for this unexpected pivot.

There is a long road ahead—quite

literally—on which our staff will eventually be able to travel. The ISJL staff will once again lead worship services in person, bring excellent performers to your community, visit our congregation partners, and bring our enthusiasm and creative programming directly to communities. I, for one, can’t wait!

And yet, we will not entirely pivot back to how we have always

“THIS PANDEMIC HAS REQUIRED US TO CONTINUE TO BE CREATIVE IN HOW TO DO THE WORK OF THE ISJL. IT HAS REQUIRED US TO ENGAGE IN STRATEGY, ALBEIT IN A STRANGE AND UNANTICIPATED WAY.”

done our work. This pandemic has required us to continue to be creative in how to do the work of the ISJL. It has required us to engage in strategy, albeit in a strange and unanticipated way. As we shared in the last issue of *Shalom Y’all*, the ISJL board and staff had planned to launch our strategic planning process setting goals for our next several years of service—a process

which will be directly influenced and informed by the results of the Listening Tour we conducted this past year, and the Survey of Southern Jewish Life (which is still available on our website; please take it if you have not already). We have continued to move forward with this plan. Engaging conversations with our board and staff, facilitated by the strategic planning consultant we hired, have already begun and are keeping us all motivated as we reimagine the ISJL. Our vision for 2020 and beyond will certainly include the lessons that we have learned from our shelter-in-place time period, as we are challenged to approach our work in new and different ways.

As we look ahead to a very bright future, we have also been given an exciting opportunity. We have been issued a matching-dollar fundraising challenge. For every two dollars raised, an anonymous foundation will match the donor’s contribution with an additional dollar, making every gift go 50% farther. Please help us in our mission to support, connect, and celebrate Jewish life in the South. If ever there was a time that we needed your support, it is now.

With my sincere thanks,



FROM THE BOARD CHAIR

Jay Hesdorffer
ISJL Board Chair

IN OUR CURRENT “STAY-AT-home” virtual world, we’re all facing many challenges. But I am proud to say that the ISJL is up and running strong. At a time when it seems so many things are on hold, postponed, or cancelled, the ISJL is stepping up to ensure Jewish life and learning continue. Now more than ever we are here to offer connection and support for individuals, families, and communities.

As many of us struggle with how to manage it all, there’s one thing we now have more of: time at home. For seniors, this may mean more time alone. For families, this may mean more time with kids. These are unique new needs, and the ISJL hears your call.

Our rabbis are leading Shabbat and holiday services over streaming platforms, holding adult study

“AS MANY OF US STRUGGLE WITH HOW TO MANAGE IT ALL, THERE’S ONE THING WE NOW HAVE MORE OF: TIME AT HOME.”

sessions, and offering Bar and Bat Mitzvah support virtually.

Our educators haven’t missed a beat, creating lesson plans and using Facebook Live and YouTube to provide kids with lessons and projects they can do on their own or with their parents.

Our cultural programs may be delayed but not derailed. We’re maintaining continuity and our commitment to Jewish culture as we showcase speakers, presenters, and musicians through virtual vignettes—and in May, we even have a virtual programming circuit underway.

For those who had to postpone their Southern Jewish Heritage Tours, we’re creating virtual road trips. Our commitment to southern Jewish history also continues; more people are home with time to take our calls and help us update the Encyclopedia of Southern Jewish Communities.

For the larger community, including the families from the public schools with which we partner, we continue to provide online refreshers for conflict resolution and resources for literacy enrichment at home.

It has been said that great opportunities are born out of great disruptions. This is our time to deliver. As communities feel

“IT HAS BEEN SAID THAT GREAT OPPORTUNITIES ARE BORN OUT OF GREAT DISRUPTIONS. THIS IS OUR TIME TO DELIVER. AS COMMUNITIES FEEL DISCONNECTED, THIS IS OUR TIME TO LEAD.”

disconnected, this is our time to lead. Our staff is working hard, adjusting as necessary, and coming up with creative solutions to meet new needs. We’re in touch with all of our education partners. We are supporting, connecting, and, when appropriate, even celebrating Jewish life in the South.

As communities depend on us more now in new and evolving ways, we too depend on those who believe in our work. In whatever way or whatever amount you contribute to the ISJL, thank you for being part of the glue that keeps our communities connected. Thank you for being connected to the ISJL; your support is more vital now than ever.

This is our time to shine—and together, we are doing just that.

This is the ISJL.

SPECIAL FEATURE

CONNECTION IN THE TIME OF CORONAVIRUS

EVEN IN THE UNPRECEDENTED reality of a global pandemic, the ISJL has been unwavering in our commitment to support, connect, and celebrate Jewish life in the South. We have quickly shifted gears, reimagined our efforts, and worked hard every day to ensure that as we adjust to new realities, we remain in communication with our communities and adjust our programs and resources to meet their evolving needs. By doing so, we are proud to play a role in providing community, continuity, and connection for our partners.

In mid-March, we launched an entirely new area of our website, called **Connection in the Time of Coronavirus**, where we're hosting resources available to anyone (including those outside of our region). Thus far, those resources include:

- Easily-implemented Jewish learning at-home resources for families without access to Sunday school; lessons are divided into four age categories (3-6, 7-9, 10-12, and 13+), with more lessons underway
- Original Judaic coloring sheets and worksheets for elementary school students
- A Virtual Road Trip Through the Jewish South, including an interactive map with accompanying links, articles, playlists, and more
- A "How to Help" resource sheet with ways folks can make a difference even from home
- Playlists of music relevant to our departments, including a playlist from our programming department featuring ISJL Roster Presenters

We are also rolling out these resources on social media as they become available, and housing them on our website, accessible to all. We are also now doing a livestream on Facebook at 11am every weekday—a moment of connection that is sometimes specifically Jewish, and other times features staff members sharing another interest or passion and just providing friendly engagement. We also compiled a list of congregations throughout our region offering streaming services and worship opportunities.

If other resources would be helpful, please email information@isjl.org and let us know.

We're here for you, always.



EDUCATION

PARTNERSHIP HELPS US ALL PERSEVERE

BY RABBI MATT DREFFIN, MAJE
DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION
AND
BETHANY BERGER, MBA
ASSISTANT DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION

EVEN NOW—YES, EVEN NOW!—we're continuing our outreach efforts to new communities. Jewish education is still a vital need. No virus alters the value of educating our children.

When we're talking to communities who do not currently partner with us, we like to get a sense of who they are, so we can talk with them about all the different ways in which the Education Partnership is precisely that—a partnership. Depending on size, location, and a host of other factors, how exactly

we can help a congregation varies as much as the individuals who make up that community. That's why we call it a *partnership*, not just a *program*, because what works for one congregation may not work for them all. The best way in which we enact this partnership is by being in communication and continuous consultation with our partners.

Community needs are unique—and ever-evolving. For example, a few years ago, a once-thriving congregation closed down their religious school as their numbers

dwindled. After a few years and some demographic shifts, good news: they had several preschool-aged children once more! The congregation reached out to us to tailor six Jewish Education weekends for all of their families, using the ISJL curriculum as the foundation. We spent hours adapting activities, reorganizing lesson plans, and gearing up for a half-dozen full weekends of events (as opposed to the traditional model of a once-a-week religious school throughout the school year). (Cont. pg. 8)

NEXT YEAR IN JACKSON...

An update on the 2020 ISJL Education Conference

THIS YEAR, FOR THE first time since 2003, there will not be an in-person gathering of all of our education community partners for the annual ISJL Education Conference. However, we did not cancel the event—we mindfully restructured it, and this year it will be a virtual conference.

There is no substitute for the annual time we spend together, but we worked hard to hone a meaningful, engaging, all-online conference. If you are attending the online event, we look forward to sharing time with you, and know that we will still find meaning in this moment, together.



"Partnership..." (cont.) The community's ISJL Education Fellow came to support the congregation in person on three of those weekends, effectively helping to jump-start this program.

The program was so successful, the community decided they wanted to increase their meetings to twice a month, meaning 16 sessions. This meant a new configuration of their program. We're used to shifting our approach to meet a community's new needs. In the case of this particular synagogue, we came up with a three-year plan for how to

adapt the ISJL curriculum and visits to make the partnership work best for them. Of course, at the end of those three years, we may need to come up with another plan—or they may approach us sooner than that with a new need. We will, of course, be happy to plan with our partners as much as possible!

As the COVID-19 crisis emerged, the ISJL Education Department was uniquely poised to adapt to the changing needs of religious schools and the families they serve. As communities decided it was unsafe

to meet in person, they reached out to the ISJL education team for guidance and support. Because our work so often involves supporting communities in unique circumstances, our department could nimbly pivot our work from in-person community support to digital support, using a variety of different platforms.

Our strategy, as always, is to meet people where they are. We create engaging Jewish programming that can be led by anyone. Taking our innovative teaching style online was a natural transition. We created Jewish education lesson plans that are easy for parents to implement with their children at home. We connect with community members on Facebook with our daily live sessions. Fellows lead programs on Zoom for community members of all ages.

Even though we can't connect in person, our department has stayed true to its promise of community support through creating meaningful Jewish moments—only for now, we're doing so with some help from the internet. Community support is the cornerstone of our work in the education department. Without partnerships with our communities, we would not be able to distribute much-needed educational resources and opportunities throughout the South. Thank you for continuing to partner with us, and we look forward to welcoming new communities into the fold.

Left: ISJL Education Fellow Margo Wagner leading services. Below: ISJL Education Fellow Rena Lubin led a fun yoga service with students in Galveston, TX.



To learn more about the ISJL's Education Department, email jewisheducation@isjl.org.

L'CHAYIM UV'RIYUT

TO LIFE AND HEALTH—AND NEXT YEAR IN JACKSON!

FELLOW FAREWELLS

THIS JUNE, WE GIVE OUR thanks and bid fond farewells to five ISJL Fellows whose two-year fellowships are coming to a close: Joshua Altshuler (Education Fellow), Carrie Bohn (Education Fellow), Mackenzie Haun (Education Fellow), Becca Leaman (Gutenstein Family ISJL Education Fellow), and Ava Pomerantz (Community Engagement Fellow).

Spring visits and planned literacy programs were cut short

due to health advisories, which means that many of our fellows didn't get to have final in-person farewells with the communities that mean so much to them. We invited them to share some of their favorite memories and parting thoughts in the pages of *Shalom Y'all*. Please join us in expressing our gratitude for the meaningful work they did in their immersive two years at the ISJL, and wish them *n'siya tova* (safe journeys) for their next adventures!

JOSHUA ALTSHULER
EDUCATION FELLOW



CARRIE BOHN
EDUCATION FELLOW



MACKENZIE HAUN
EDUCATION FELLOW



BECCA LEAMAN
GUTENSTEIN FAMILY
EDUCATION FELLOW



AVA POMERANTZ
COMMUNITY
ENGAGEMENT
FELLOW



FAVORITE ISJL MEMORY:

■ **CARRIE:** My favorite ISJL memory took place very early on in my time as a fellow. On one of my first days of work, I was chatting with Macy Hart about my new position, and all of the wonderful things that the ISJL does. He told me "don't blink" during the next two years because they will go quick! I think about that message often, and it has been a gentle reminder to me these past two years to enjoy life, and treasure all of the wonderful memories and relationships that I have created!

■ **AVA:** During an Our Reading Family session, I led a workshop for parents that exemplified the loving commitment our community has to learning and growing together. Each parent wrote down their child's hobby, then passed it around the table for others to brainstorm how they could connect that hobby to literacy. Watching these parents laugh, think deeply, build each other

up, and put such love into their collective growth demonstrated how much Our Reading Family is truly a family.

■ **MACKENZIE:** My favorite ISJL memory is more of a conglomeration of memories. The time I spent with my cohort both in and outside of work has been my favorite part of working at the ISJL. The friendships we built mean a lot to me, and I am so excited to see where we all go from here!

■ **BECCA:** I think my favorite ISJL memory would be on a fall visit during my first year. I was in Clarksdale, MS, and had just finished doing a program for two sisters (who also happened to be the only two students in the religious school). I was staying for dinner and it also happened to be one of the first nights of Chanukah. Before we had dinner the dad pulled me aside to thank me for doing what I do. He explained that without us, and without me being willing to come

up there, they would have very little formal Jewish education and that he was immensely thankful for what we do. It was so moving and meaningful to me, and something that I've reflected on a lot throughout my time as a Fellow. Every time I started to get tired of traveling I would think back to that moment and remember how much of an impact we have on communities just by being there.

■ **JOSHUA:** I was privileged to interact with so many special communities on education visits. During one particularly meaningful Kabbalat Shabbat in 2018, the Friday following the devastating events at the Tree of Life Congregation in Pittsburgh, I found myself surrounded by warm faces, supportive voices, and soothing music in Little Rock, Arkansas. I was a stranger to the synagogue, yet I immediately felt welcomed into the community as we observed tradition and connected to one another.

MY NEXT ADVENTURE:

■ **AVA:** Next year I will be moving back to Los Angeles, pursuing a Master's of Science in Applied Psychology at the University of Southern California.

■ **BECCA:** After much deliberation, I have decided to move back to Salt Lake City, Utah. My plan is to go back into secular education and teach elementary school. I'm beyond excited to get back into the classroom!

■ **CARRIE:** I am packing my bags and moving to California to pursue a Master's degree in Jewish Nonprofit Management at Hebrew Union College - Jewish Institute of Religion! I am so excited to see where my new adventure takes me, and to hang ten in Los Angeles!

■ **JOSHUA:** This summer, I will lead a 4-week bicycle trip around Lake Michigan called Tour La'Agam,

a program that is connected to the URJ summer camp Olin-Sang-Ruby Union Institute. Tour La'Agam is an incredibly fun and rewarding experience as we explore unique places, witness amazing sunsets, and indulge in the perfect amount of ice cream. After camp, I will return to my alma mater, the University of Illinois in Champaign-Urbana, to pursue a Master of Science in Library and Information Science. I am thrilled to be participating in a program that will develop my love of humanities education and the power of a good book.

■ **MACKENZIE:** I was lucky enough to be hired by Hillel International as their Senior Associate of Measurement. Hopefully, despite the uncertainty caused by the pandemic, I'll be starting there this summer.

PARTING THOUGHTS:

■ **JOSHUA:** Thank you for opening your classroom and synagogue doors to me, joining with me to savor the sweetness of learning and friendship, and providing me with an appreciation of the South through your diverse perspectives and personal stories—your gestures of kindness and capacity for empathy are truly a blessing.

■ **BECCA:** Thank you so much to everyone that I have worked with and met along the way. I will be forever grateful for how you all made me feel welcome throughout my time in your communities.

■ **CARRIE:** Thank you to all of the amazing educators, students, clergy, and families for adding so much joy to my life for the past two years!

■ **MACKENZIE:** Thank you so much to all of the amazing people I met on this journey and for all of the opportunities you gave me to grow and learn with you!

■ **AVA:** Thank you for welcoming me in and expanding my mind and connection to the South, a place and people I will always carry in my heart no matter where I go.



Thank you, 2018-2020 ISJL Fellows!

FELLOW ALUMNI NETWORK



A VERY SPECIAL FAN HAVDALAH

THE ISJL FELLOW ALUMNI NETWORK (FAN) held a very special virtual event this spring. More than two dozen participants gathered for a video-conferenced Havdalah, coordinated by FAN Chair Missy Goldstein Gleisser, with music provided by Lex Rofeberg. While FAN members are disappointed that discussions about a 2020 FAN Reunion had to be halted in the wake of the global pandemic, it was truly lovely for so many of us to be together to share some updates, check in from quarantine, and welcome a new week together.

We're also excited to welcome our newest FAN members into the fold as they complete their 2018-2020 fellowships:

- Joshua Altshuler (Education Fellow)
- Carrie Bohn (Education Fellow)
- Mackenzie Haun (Education Fellow)
- Becca Leaman (Gutenstein Family ISJL Education Fellow)
- Ava Pomerantz (Community Engagement Fellow)

The FAN group keeps growing, and every year we're thrilled to add new colleagues to our alumni cohort.

Enjoy the screenshot (above) of the FAN Havdalah, and we'll be sharing more FAN updates soon!



CHAI CLUB: HOW MONTHLY GIVING HELPS NONPROFITS

THERE ARE SO MANY WAYS THAT MONTHLY GIVERS HAVE A HUGE IMPACT ON NONPROFITS—something we're reminded of at this time in particular. Why is a monthly gift such an important contribution?

- Monthly gifts provide stability. Predictable support allows the ISJL to plan better and to be more efficient. While there are always more dollars to be raised, knowing there is a consistent base of support coming in each month is tremendously beneficial.
- Monthly gifts increase connection. Ongoing gifts are meaningful and convey your confidence and trust in the ISJL's work—something for which the ISJL is grateful, and also something that inspires other donors to give!
- Monthly giving can be more accessible for new donors. In particular, monthly giving gives opportunities to our younger donors, who may not have the capital yet to make larger gifts. All gifts at all levels are meaningful to us!
- Consistent contributions make a large impact over time. Your gift of \$18/month is an easy monthly amount to contribute—and also ensures \$216 in our annual budget, which helps shore up essential programs and support!
- Monthly giving is convenient. Once in place, monthly giving doesn't need much maintenance, and the records are always easy to track for donors and for institutions.
- Chai Club contributors truly shine. Monthly donors to the ISJL are highlighted and recognized as Chai Club donors in *Shalom Y'all* magazine, and we're interested in expanding the ways we celebrate our donors in the years ahead... feel free to share your ideas!

We would be delighted if you joined the ISJL's monthly giving society. It's easy—just visit www.isjl.org/donate and select "Join the Chai Club." Plus, new Chai Club members or those who grow their gift amounts in 2020 can count toward our ongoing 2020 Matching Challenge, making your gift go even farther!

Thank you!



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

STICKING TOGETHER ACROSS THE SOCIAL DISTANCE

BY RACHEL GLAZER
COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT
PROGRAM MANAGER

WITH THIS PAST SPRING AS proof, I think we can all safely say that things do not always go as planned. Before coronavirus and shelter-in-place, the Community Engagement Department was working at full force to put on our fourth annual spring break literacy day camp, the Literacy Achievement Bonanza (LAB). Three weeks before the start of the program, we received some unfortunate news: due to unforeseen circumstances, we would no longer be able to host the LAB at the local university that had been the program's home for the past three years.

Without missing a beat, our team switched gears and reached out to community partners ranging from schools and churches to community centers and libraries, trying to find a site that could accommodate a program of our size and scope at such short notice. In a testament to the strong relationships the ISJL has



built and thanks to the generosity of our partners in the Jackson Public School District, the LAB found its new home at Blackburn Middle School.

With two weeks' notice, we adapted the entire day camp to the new location, adjusting activities, materials, and processes to the new space while maintaining the integrity of the camp culture we had worked hard to build over the past four years. Thanks to the hard work of our staff and volunteers, the participants arrived on the first day of the LAB to a camp that had the familiar buzz of excitement in a space magically transformed to fit our needs.

We are so fortunate to have partners willing to work with us to bring these services to our community; with their help, we were able to implement the program to its fullest extent without our participants ever knowing the whirl of behind-the-scenes machinations that made it happen. Perhaps luckiest of all, all of this happened just before the reality of COVID-19 reached Mississippi. Just days before we began implementing social distance guidelines, we were able to come together for our celebration of literacy.

We had no idea that this unconventional LAB had actually set us up to succeed in the unprecedented times to come. Suddenly, everyone needed an unconventional solution to everyday issues. The ISJL team jumped into action to do our part. As digital events popped up all over the internet (Webinars here! Google Docs there! Listicles for days!), we compiled resources that would be most pertinent to our partners across the region.

Schools, libraries, and other community partners were one challenge. We also knew that many of our congregational partners would want to know how they could help their neighbors while maintaining everyone's health and safety. We published a list of ways to help from home—digitally and down the road. All of these resources are available on our website!

Next, the Community Engagement team reached out to participants from our various literacy programs to see what kinds of support they needed. Many responded that they were overwhelmed by the prospect of distance learning and home-schooling and were not sure where

to begin to look for reputable resources. We, in turn, began to adapt literacy activities and parent workshops from the Our Reading Family program so that families could engage over Zoom together and then replicate the activities at home with children of various ages. Staff and volunteers rotated through live-streamed read-alouds on social media to continue to connect with participants from afar.

Our partnerships only strengthened from there. We connected with the local school district to see how we could deliver literacy activity packets for families to pick up during meal distribution times. We were also able to find good homes for boxes of books that would have otherwise sat in our office until the next in-person programs were able to take place.

We were not "prepared" for this; none of us were. But our community's resilience and creativity has helped our partners continue to flourish. I look forward to seeing how we can apply these innovative strategies and meaningful connections to better serve communities across the South as our ever-changing world enters this next phase.

To learn more about the work of the ISJL's Community Engagement Department, email engagement@isjl.org.

MAZEL TOV TO RACHEL GLAZER!



IN MARCH 2020, RACHEL GLAZER became the ISJL Community Engagement Program Manager. Rachel first joined the team as an ISJL Community Engagement Fellow (2016-2018). She then served another two years as Community Engagement Associate, helping to grow the department and its programmatic footprint. When the department's leader, Dave Miller, was offered another opportunity to work in the nonprofit sector, Rachel was the natural choice to step up and lead the department as its work continues. Please wish her a hearty mazel tov, and reach out to her with any questions about the work of the ISJL Community Engagement department! We also want to thank Dave for his five years of leadership, and wish him all the best in his next professional journey.



TAKE THE SURVEY OF SOUTHERN JEWISH LIFE

IN MARCH, WE LAUNCHED our 2020 Survey of Southern Jewish Life. Of course, the survey was quickly buried as global events took over everyone's news feeds. Originally, the survey was only going to be featured through the end of March. However, we are now keeping it live through the summer, to enable as many people as possible to participate.

We hope everyone with an interest in Jewish life in the

South will take the survey, so your thoughts, hopes, concerns, and ideas will be part of a continuing exploration of how best to serve southern Jewish communities. Your input will help inform our strategic planning process. The survey should take you approximately 10 minutes to complete. Answers will be compiled anonymously, and we will share insights from the survey once the responses have all been collected and analyzed.

To access the survey, simply visit www.isjl.org. You will find a survey link on the main page of our website.

Please take the survey and share your thoughts. We want to envision the future with you. Thank you!



SPECIAL FEATURE

2020 MATCHING CHALLENGE STILL ONGOING

EARLIER THIS YEAR, WE BEGAN a new matching challenge as part of an organizational leadership program for which the ISJL was recently selected. We were excited for the promise of this matching challenge; for every two dollars we raise, the challenge donors will donate an additional dollar—making every contribution go so much farther!

However, with the onset of COVID-19, we were initially hesitant to continue touting the challenge. We know some households are struggling, and everyone's focus should rightfully remain on health and wellness. Thus, while the

challenge continued, it continued quietly.

As we all adjusted to the unexpected realities this spring brought our way, we realized more and more that life does indeed go on—and Jewish life, resources, and support are still vital to keep our communities connected and thriving. The work we do is meeting a challenge head-on, and the matching challenge is still on the table.

So if you are able to make a contribution to the ISJL in 2020, we hope you will do so, knowing your dollars will be matched—and will be vital to our organization's ability to continue delivering services and support.

Contributions must be made toward general, operating, and organizational sustainability expenses, not earmarked for a specific program. General contributions, new or increased Chai Club monthly giving memberships, and family foundation allocations are just a few of the examples of ways your gift can count toward this challenge. As long as it is a new gift, or increased due to the inspiration of the challenge match, it will help us reach our challenge goal of \$500,000 in donations, to then be matched with a \$250,000 contribution from the challenge donor.

Your Gift Goes Farther.

Support the ISJL by making a new or increased contribution in 2020 and an anonymous donor will match every \$2 with an additional \$1



Peter and Elizabeth Maer in Budapest. Right: Elizabeth and Peter Maer with their beloved grandchildren.

DEVELOPMENT

WHY WE GIVE: A CONVERSATION WITH ELIZABETH AND PETER MAER

BY RISA KLEIN HERZOG

DIRECTOR OF DEVELOPMENT



AS THE ISJL'S DIRECTOR OF Development, it is my honor to get to directly connect with our supporters. I am always interested in their stories, their perspectives, and their inspiration for giving. I recently had the fortune of asking Elizabeth and Peter Maer of Fairfax, Virginia, about their involvement with the ISJL—which takes more than one form! I hope you'll enjoy hearing from this couple, whose commitment to Jewish life is commendable.

What is your connection to the ISJL?

Peter, a longtime journalist, is proud to be a part of the ISJL's Cultural Programming Roster. He shares his non-partisan stories about Jewish adventures as a network correspondent who covered six presidents. So we have long been aware of the ISJL's fine work, but it was really brought home to us last year when Rabbi Aaron Stucker-

Rozovsky visited our synagogue, Congregation Olam Tikvah in Fairfax, Virginia. We were impressed by the various missions undertaken by the ISJL, and wanted to deepen our commitment to the organization.

Why do you choose to donate to the ISJL?

Elizabeth is from Nashville, but her family's roots go back to Murfreesboro, Tennessee. When her family lived there many decades ago it was a very small town. Peter grew up in southern Illinois, where he was the only Jew in a high school graduating class of more than 800 students. We know what it is like to live as Jews in small towns. We know the importance of having the kind of educational and community support offered by the ISJL.

What does giving look like for you?

This was a highly personal decision made by Elizabeth and her brother Dr. Emanuel Doayne,

administrators of a family charitable fund based in Nashville. While they grew up in a large congregation, some of their friends came from small town Tennessee. They understood the challenges those families faced. They wanted to make a substantial contribution to further the ISJL's work. Peter and Elizabeth also made a separate donation. We feel fortunate to be able to support the work in these ways.

How does ISJL differ from other causes you support?

We appreciate the ISJL's grassroots efforts throughout the South, especially what it does for young people growing up in small communities. We also appreciate the work of ISJL Fellows. The fellowship program is undoubtedly developing future Jewish community leaders.

And just for fun, what's your favorite Jewish food?

Elizabeth: Mandel Bread
Peter: Since this is being written right before Pesach, I'll say matzobrei.

I am grateful to Peter and Liz for their contributions, and also for sharing their insights with us in the midst of these strange times. Our supporters enable us to do the work we do for our communities, every day, and these conversations always help to reinforce the value in what we're able to achieve, together.

If you're interested in sharing why you support the ISJL, please feel free to reach out—I'd love to hear from you!

To learn more about ISJL development efforts or how you can support our work, email development@isjl.org.

BECAUSE I BELIEVE

IN THE FUTURE OF SOUTHERN JEWISH LIFE

LEGACY is more than what we **LEAVE BEHIND**.

It's what we **SEND AHEAD** to those we love.

It's how we **IMPACT THE FUTURE**, starting today.

What is a "legacy gift" or "planned giving"?

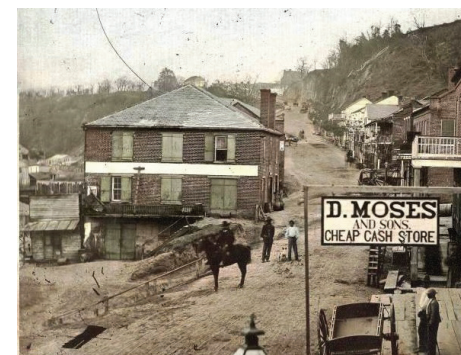
A planned gift is a charitable gift that you decide now to make at some time in the future as part of your estate planning. A planned gift can benefit you and loved ones that you name. At the same time, it stands as a lasting reminder to your children and succeeding generations of the values and charitable works that are most important to you. Wills, trusts, and endowments are all examples of planned giving and legacy gifts.

How can the ISJL help?

Whether it's preserving southern Jewish stories, putting rabbis on the road to small towns, furthering Jewish education, or making our world a better place through literacy and life-changing community engagement initiatives—whatever touches your heart and resonates with your legacy will shape the conversation of how together, we can plan for a meaningful future.

The ISJL's Legacy Giving program can help you meet your planned giving goals.

To learn more, visit www.isjl.org/planned-giving or email rherzog@isjl.org.



From top: View of the Temple B'nai Israel dome and roof—they were recently repaired; I & S Moses Store in Natchez; Jane Wexler, queen of the Natchez Pilgrimage in 1935; Natchez Under-the-Hill, site of many of the town's early Jewish businesses.

HERITAGE & INTERPRETATION

INTERPRETING COMPLICATED HISTORIES, SHARING DIVERSE STORIES

BY NORA KATZ

DIRECTOR OF HERITAGE & INTERPRETATION

“THE STORY OF NATCHEZ, Mississippi, is a story of matzah balls and magnolias, the Civil War and synagogues, King Cotton and merchant life Under-the-Hill.”

That's how we often begin histories of Natchez's Temple B'nai Israel, home to the oldest Jewish congregation in Mississippi. It's a good line, and one that reflects the cognitive dissonance that some folks feel when they bump up against that big question: “There are Jews in the South?!”

Temple B'nai Israel has long been an interfaith space. Within a few blocks are churches like Trinity Episcopal and St. Mary's

Basilica, congregations that have held services for almost 200 years. Also close by are dozens of Black churches, including Rose Hill Missionary Baptist Church, the oldest Black Baptist congregation in the state.

But alongside the inspiring historical buildings dwell more difficult histories. Near the temple is the Natchez Museum of African American History and Culture, which interprets the African American history of Natchez and the South from slavery to the present. Natchez is also the site of the Rhythm Club Fire, a 1940 fire in an African American dance hall that killed 209 people



and devastated Natchez's African American community. Among the victims were Walter Barnes and his Royal Creolians, stars of what was known as the "Chitlin' Circuit," a collection of Black-owned clubs across the United States (the name was a play on the Jewish "Borscht Belt" in the northeast). The story of the fire and its widespread impact is the story of African American music and the deep inequities and lasting effects of Jim Crow.

On the way out of town is the Forks of the Road, once one of the largest slave markets in the South. Thousands of people were bought and sold on that site between 1808

and 1863, providing the labor that sustained the American economy for hundreds of years. Outside of downtown is the Grand Village of the Natchez Indians, once the main ceremonial center of the Natchez people, who dominated what is now southwest Mississippi for over a thousand years—from c. 700 to 1730. The Natchez Indians established complex political systems that are often overlooked in stories of American history that begin with European colonization. The story of the Natchez people is the story of Mississippi, and our country's silenced histories.

Why do these stories matter? We need to tell these stories because they shed light on the diversity and complexity of the American story. Elevating stories of Natchez's non-white, non-Christian residents and truthfully interpreting the city's often-painful history challenges us to re-think our assumptions of what it means to be American.

In 2020, the caretakers of these historic sites work together to tell complicated, nuanced, and rich stories of Natchez's history that resonate in the present. At Temple B'nai Israel, we welcome supporters from around the region to learn about Jewish history and

experience music and theatre in the synagogue's historic sanctuary. We embark on renovation and rehabilitation projects to ensure that the building is preserved for future generations. We tell the story of Jews in Natchez, because their story is the story of the Jewish South, and the American Jewish experience.

Our strategy—and opportunity—for Heritage and Interpretation will be all about access and engagement. We want stakeholders from across the South and across the country to engage more deeply with southern Jewish history, and understand how the southern Jewish story intersects

with other southern stories, including stories of Native American history and culture, slavery, the Civil War, Reconstruction, Jim Crow, and the Civil Rights Movement.

How do we make that happen? We make sure that our programs are accessible to the widest possible audience by using tools that have become familiar to all of us during the COVID-19 pandemic: online content, livestreamed lectures and performances, videos, music, podcasts, and so much more!

Have an idea for making the Jewish South accessible to all? Get in touch. We can't wait to hear your story.



Top: Community Chanukah celebration, December 2018. Left: audience members at Cabaret Under the Dome, January 2019.

Right, from top: Tour group on the steps of Temple B'nai Israel; Hosea Griffith performs "Old Man River" at Cabaret Under the Dome, January 2020.

To learn more about Heritage and Interpretation, email heritage@isjl.org.



PROGRAMMING

CULTURAL CONNECTIONS: NOT GOING ANYWHERE

BY ANN ZIVITZ KIENTZ
DIRECTOR OF PROGRAMMING

Left: Saul Kaye. Below: Joel Hoffman speaking in Lynchburg.



THIS PAST FEBRUARY, AGUDATH Sholom of Lynchburg, Virginia, hosted Dr. Joel Hoffman for their Arthur Freedlender Scholar-in-Residence weekend. He spoke Friday night, Saturday morning, Saturday evening, and Sunday morning. The congregation, led by Rabbi John Nimon, were thrilled to have him. Feedback was phenomenal; as community member Kaye Chandler reported, “Everyone raved about our choice of speaker!” The lectures and book signings were a huge success. Knowing that Dr. Hoffman would be available to extend his tour, as soon as he was booked in Lynchburg, I contacted several synagogues in that area of the country to share in this terrific tour opportunity. On Sunday evening, Dr. Hoffman spoke and signed books at Temple Emanuel in Winston-Salem, North Carolina. Rabbi Mark Cohn said: “We had a great time with Joel. He was so engaging and his teaching is so vital for us as Reform Jews as we strive to both have a clarity of the text and an understanding of the various meanings behind the

text. His lecture on the meaning behind the prayers took us through the siddur, the bible, ancient history, mistranslations, and greater appreciation for our people’s tradition. I am so grateful that the ISJL opened the door for us to have Joel come to visit.” This last stop on Dr. Hoffman’s ISJL tour that time around was a visit to Temple Emanuel in Roanoke, Virginia. This congregation is led by Rabbi Kathy Cohen. The Monday evening lecture and book signing at Temple Emanuel was as successful and exciting for them as the other congregations! Rabbi Cohen was thrilled to be a part of this shared-expense tour, as their congregation would not otherwise have been able to independently bring Dr. Hoffman to their community. Said Rabbi Cohen: “Joel Hoffman was tremendous. He was scholarly, engaging, humorous, and interesting. He is a top-notch speaker and an excellent scholar. We cannot wait to invite him back!” Our past year was full of so many visits—so many tremendous

opportunities for learning, entertainment, and enrichment. It was difficult this spring to see so many programs postponed, as we all abide by shelter-in-place and social distancing precautions to slow the spread of COVID-19. But we truly see these programs as delayed, not canceled. Our communities are eager to host presenters again, and our presenters cannot wait to hit the road and once more visit our southern Jewish communities. In the meantime, we are exploring options for virtual presenter experiences—including a virtual shared-expense “tour” for multiple communities featuring Joel Hoffman, as well as concerts from another popular ISJL presenter, the tremendous Jewish blues musician Saul Kaye. We are reaching out to communities and staying in touch as we adjust and move forward, knowing that when gathering together is possible once more, we will have excited, energized Jewish presenters ready to bring the best of Jewish cultural programming into our communities again.

To learn more about the ISJL’s Cultural Programming, email programming@isjl.org.



HISTORY

AN INTERESTING MOMENT IN HISTORY

BY DR. JOSH PARSHALL
DIRECTOR OF HISTORY

I HAVE AN INTERESTING JOB. As the Director of History for the ISJL, I am privileged to conduct original research on Jewish life in the South and have a responsibility to share Jewish stories from the southern past in ways that are both accurate and accessible. With the Encyclopedia of Southern Jewish Communities, the ISJL provides an engaging, public-facing historical resource that generates thousands of page views each month. Discovering new ways to share the Encyclopedia and its rich content is

something I'm eager to explore in our strategic planning process. In line with the ISJL's mission statement, we do "celebrate" Jewish life in the South, but the History Department also helps to commemorate and analyze the wide range of southern Jewish experiences. Our hope is that the Encyclopedia and our other offerings inspire readers to learn more about their own families and communities, to celebrate and commemorate Jewish life in the region, and to grapple with some

of the hard truths of southern and American histories. The ISJL's multifaceted relationships to Jewish communities and individuals throughout the region provide one of the most important tools for the History Department's work, and being embedded in a community-oriented Jewish organization differentiates my work here from much of the research conducted by college- and university-affiliated scholars. When we get something wrong, I tend to hear about it directly

from the community. When there is something I need to know, the ISJL's extensive network of supporters and partners usually leads me to the right place. Sometimes, I don't even have to ask.

Most recently, I received a collection of photographs taken by Tallahassee resident Bob Canter of the historic B'nai Israel synagogue in Thomasville, Georgia. Thomasville is north of Tallahassee, just over the state line, and in early March, Canter joined a number of other members of Tallahassee's Temple Israel to celebrate the Bar Mitzvah of congregant Jacob Lowe in the small-town synagogue. The event reflects a long-standing relationship between the congregations, and Lowe's Bar Mitzvah project focused on restoring the B'nai Israel building's doors. Canter's photographs will help to illustrate our yet-to-be-written history of the Thomasville Jewish community, and other Tallahassee contacts will help guide our research.

The photos of B'nai Israel in Thomasville are just one example of the strategic advantage that comes from conducting historical research as part of the ISJL. Our broad variety of programs, wide geographic reach, and commitment to serving any Jewish community in our region creates a robust network that connects me to Jewish stories from across the South. So when it's time to start a new research project, the ISJL History Department can always start with our local contacts. Even in moments of disconnection, the connections we strengthen and utilize daily underlie everything we do—a nice reminder at this time of the power of interconnected community.



To learn more about the ISJL's History Department, email history@isjl.org.

RABBINICAL

AN INSPIRING BEGINNING TO A RABBINICAL CAREER

BY RABBI AARON A. STUCKER-ROZOVSKY

DIRECTOR OF RABBINICAL SERVICES



IT SEEMS STRANGE TO ALREADY be writing my final message for *Shalom Y'all*, but, indeed, my time at the ISJL draws to a close this June. I have thoroughly enjoyed my time at the ISJL; from davening in fascinating historic communities to meeting wonderful people with unique stories and lives across our region, it has been an incredible way to begin my career as a rabbi. I feel truly blessed. Although every rabbi who has had the privilege of holding the position of ISJL Director of Rabbinical Services—Batsheva Appel, Debra Kasso, Marshal Klaven, Jeremy Simons, and myself—performed the same core functions (visiting communities without full-time clergy, conducting remote b'nei mitzvah and conversion

tutoring, writing the weekly Taste of Torah, and officiating at life-cycle events for Jews in rural areas), each of us has been fortunate enough to make our own individual mark on the Rabbinical Services department as well.

During my time at the ISJL, I was grateful to also continue serving in the Army National Guard as a Jewish Chaplain. I led Yom HaShoah services at a naval base in Gulfport, Mississippi, and provided overviews of Judaism to enlisted Navy and Air Force Chaplain Assistant trainees at Meridian's Naval Air Station as well as Keesler Air Force Base in Biloxi.

The meaningful moments throughout my time here have been plentiful. In October 2019, I delivered the closing benediction

at the Mississippi Coalition Against Domestic Violence's annual candlelight vigil. I was privileged to give lectures on Judaism to Methodist and Episcopal churches in Oklahoma and Mississippi. I am very proud of these opportunities to share our Jewish heritage.

An Army mentor once told me, "Always leave a place better than you found it." I strove to do that every day of my tenure at the ISJL, not just with these projects, but also by connecting with communities across the region, focusing on those who had not been in touch with the ISJL in some time, and as reaching out to synagogues with which we did not have a prior relationship.

Baruch HaShem (thank God), I am able to leave feeling confident that the ISJL's new Director of Rabbinical Services will continue our sacred work. Rabbi Caroline Sim, ordained this spring from Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, joins the ISJL team right as I leave it. Although Rabbi Sim will have many set duties and responsibilities, she will also have the chance to chart her own course and develop her own plans. I hope her ideas and vision are new, innovative, and most importantly her own, because that is truly the beauty of this position and this organization.

It has been an honor to serve the congregations that partner with the ISJL. All of you, the congregants and supporters who keep the light of Judaism burning so brightly, will continue to inspire me.

GIFTS & GRATITUDE

THANK YOU TO OUR SUPPORTERS

IN THESE PAGES, YOU CAN SEE THE IMPACT OUR EDUCATION, history, heritage and interpretation, cultural, community engagement, and rabbinical programs have on thousands of people just like you. With deep appreciation, the Goldring/Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life extends thanks to everyone who made a contribution or pledge from January 1 - April 15, 2020, to enable our important work.

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To learn more about the ISJL's Rabbinical Services Department, email rabbi@isjl.org.



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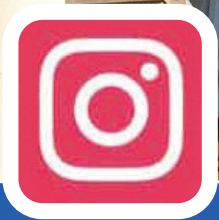
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