The Blessing of Community

Inspiring Stories Amidst a Challenging Year

Teenage Merkaz student Samantha Renzulli coordinates a series of parades to raise the spirits of Jewish Senior Services residents and staff.
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The blessing of community has come from each of you

Indeed, it has been in these months – following virtual seders where many of us asked not only why this night is different from all other nights but also why these days are different from all other days – that we have truly recognized the blessing of community.

The blessing of community has come through a teenage Merkaz student with the vision and leadership to coordinate car parades that have raised the spirits of residents and staff at Jewish Senior Services and Hollander House in Bridgeport.

The blessing of community has come through volunteers who have met in synagogue parking lots wearing masks and gloves to assemble and deliver food packages on behalf of Shoke Jewish Family Service of Fairfield County.

The blessing of community has come through incredible congregations and clergy who have kept us feeling cared for and connected.

The blessing of community has come from each of you – friends and neighbors who have picked up the phone or logged on to the video conference to share a smile and a kind word.

In this issue of KALEIDOSCOPE, we hope to share with you some of the inspiring stories – those blessings - that have defined our community during this crisis.

While no one could have foreseen this year, it is, indeed, what we were built for.

The Torah tells us that God gave Noah very specific instructions to build an ark to provide shelter and safety for his family and the preservation of the animals of the world from a great flood.

Sometimes we know just what we’re supposed to be building and precisely what we are building it for.

Other times, we simply build, not knowing what the specific value will be but with the sense that it’s essential to our family and our future.

For the past four years, our Federation has focused on building an integrated Upper Fairfield County Jewish community - developing programming frameworks that have brought us together, fostering supportive relationships with our congregations, even launching projects like this KALEIDOSCOPE magazine.

We knew it was important to build such a community for a multitude of reasons, and yet we didn’t do so with any specific challenge on the horizon.

For all of us, this has been a year unlike any other we’ve ever experienced.

When the Covid-19 crisis hit in March, we were forced to retreat to our homes, unable to share physical space with our families and friends.

Some of us saw those in our circles get sick. Some of us – including me – got sick ourselves. And, tragically, some of us saw loved ones pass away.

Needs such as food insecurity that have often been hidden under the surface in our community rose into our view, and new needs, such as personal protective equipment for our front-line workers, became part of our daily conversations.

As a Jewish Federation, we took a breath to assess our role during this surreal moment in our history and quickly realized - this is what we’ve been building for.

The preservation of the animals of the world enabled our Federation to provide shelter and safety for his family and the Torah tells us that God gave Noah very specific instructions to build an ark to provide shelter and safety for his family and the preservation of the animals of the world from a great flood.

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The blessing of community has come from each of you.
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On behalf of the Board of Directors and Staff of the Federation for Jewish Philanthropy of Upper Fairfield County, we want to offer our deepest gratitude to our Rabbis and Cantors, our Jewish educators, our frontline workers, our partner organizations, our congregations, our agency professionals, our volunteers, our lay leaders, our early childhood educators, our medical professionals, our teens, our donors, all those who have helped assemble and deliver food packages to the homebound, all those who have participated in car parades, sent flowers, and made videos to raise the spirits of those in senior care facilities, all those who have led Zoom davening and created virtual programs to help us feel connected, all those who have dug deep to provide extra contributions for personal protective equipment and to fight food insecurity, those who have cared for children and parents alike, those who have cared for our sick and comforted the families of those who have lost loved ones, and all those who have – in the simplest and most important way possible – taken the time to reach out to others with kind words and a caring voice.

In this year of extraordinary and unprecedented challenges, you have been a continuing source of inspiration.

You are the blessing of our community.


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Merkaz Community High School for Judaic Studies was unusually busy over the summer, with the launch of Merkaz Mobile Mitzvot, a student-designed and led project to bring joy to Jewish Senior Services (JSS) and Hollander House in Bridgeport. (See cover article in this issue.)

Now, to welcome 5781, Merkaz is inviting everyone in the community to join in on THE GREAT SHOFAR BLAST! Check out this fun instructional video by Merkaz alumna Anna Gold, Shofar 101: Prep for the Great Shofar Blast: youtube.com/watch?v=KHnwL_JnMxg

Take a video of your own shofar process, or your family's, to be included in a New Year Blast montage. But remember: please do not share a shofar during this pandemic! Send your videos to Merkazmobilemitzvot@gmail.com.

Then gather on Wednesday, Sept. 16 at 4 PM for a Shofar Blowing Bonanza encircling the Harry and Jeanette Weinberg Campus (home of JSS) and the adjacent Hollander House. Come blow your own horn -- shofars, kazoos, trumpets, etc. -- as our Upper Fairfield County community welcomes the New Year together. Let's have a blast!

“Merkaz believes in giving teens the skills to be Jewish adults; shofar-blowing is one of them,” says Shelley Kreiger, head of school. “We believe in reconnecting teens to their clergy and introducing them to other professionals in our Jewish community. We also believe in family education. What a perfect way to learn something together for this New Year, which will be different in so many ways!”

Merkaz registration is open for the 5781 school year. Classes will be held online during the first semester. Join 100 other Jewish teens for discussions, dialog, deep thought, and fun! For class and registration information, contact info@merkazct.org.

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Come blow your horn!
When the Covid-19 crisis hit in mid-March, residents of Jewish Senior Services were unexpectedly confined to their rooms and families were prohibited from visiting. A month later, residents and staff members suddenly heard a ruckus outside the building. From their windows, they saw a parade of cars, festooned with colorful decorations and cheerful signs, with passengers calling out wishes and blasting music.

The joyous procession was the kickoff of Merkaz Mobile Mitzvot, the brainchild of students and staff of the Merkaz Community High School for Judaic Studies. Spearheaded by 16-year-old Samantha Renzulli, the project continued through the summer, including car parades; food drives for the Schoke JFS Kosher Food Pantry; collecting art supplies, books, games, and flowers for JSS residents and staff; video montages to entertain JSS residents; and more. In June, Samantha and Merkaz drew national attention when the Jewish Telegraphic Agency ran an article about young Jews around the country finding ways to connect with elders during the health crisis.

A sophomore at Fairfield Warde High School, Samantha is a member of the Drama Club, cross-country team, and Focus school newspaper. She is also involved in the school’s Best Buddies chapter, a global program that fosters friendships between people with and without disabilities. Outside school, she is a Teen Trainer with ADL Connecticut Region.

In July, Samantha met virtually with Sheri Warshaw for some mitzvah-talk. Sheri co-chaired Federation’s inaugural Mitzvah Hero Awards in 2018, an annual event celebrating extraordinary individuals nominated by Upper Fairfield County Jewish congregations. She was selected for the honor last December by TCS in Westport.

Sheri: Tell me about Merkaz Mobile Mitzvot and how it got started.

Samantha: I was part of the Merkaz-Jewish Senior Services Better Together program last year and I loved my time with the residents so much. When we were all isolated at home, the residents were on my mind. As lonely as I was feeling, it was hard to think of the residents being alone. I emailed the directors of Merkaz and Better Together and I said, “I miss my residents and I’m sure they’re feeling lonelier than I am right now and I want to see how I can bring them some joy.”

Sheri: It’s one thing to have the idea, it’s another thing to execute the idea. How did you become such a leader?

Samantha: My experience in theater and on stage has helped me become a more confident and outspoken person, but my whole life, I’ve felt really comfortable in a Jewish setting, raising my voice, so it was comfortable for me to reach out to my Merkaz leaders and say, “What can I do in the Jewish community?”

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Sheri: What’s been the most rewarding part of Merkaz Mobile Mitzvot?

Samantha: The amount of support from the community has been so inspiring. In our first car parade, residents of JSS and Hollander House were waving from their windows; more recently, they’ve been able to come out onto their balconies. We’ve made signs for them and they’ve made thank-you signs for us. Last parade, I saw one of the residents from Better Together for the first time in many months, on the balcony. Just bringing them love and joy is so special.

Sheri: What role has Merkaz played in your life?

Samantha: It has strengthened my connection to my Jewish community. To have this strong way to connect with other Jewish teens in the area has been such a support to my Judaism, especially after I graduated from Hebrew school and it was hard to know where to go with Judaism. I feel so supported by the leaders and my teachers. To say it’s been influential is a bit of an understatement!

Sheri: What would you tell a younger kid about the importance of getting involved and how to take a first step?

Samantha: What I’ve been telling my younger brother and other people when I reach out to them is that, especially in this time, I think it’s so important for us to help other people and get involved in the community, bring some light and joy. As daunting as it may seem to take the first steps, it can be as simple as the email I sent, just reaching out and asking, “What can I do?”

Sheri: Your empathy level is off the charts and it’s really rare for a person your age to be able to get into somebody else’s skin and understand how they feel. I really want to work with you, to get together and do something special. I think that we could make a dynamic team!
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A new way to celebrate

Our Federation’s 2020 Annual Gala, honoring Elise Meyer & Henry Feuerstein and Jane & Bob Hillman, was postponed from its original date of March 12 due to the Covid-19 crisis. When it became apparent that rescheduling an in-person gala in 2020 would not be feasible, the entire gala was re-envisioned as an online virtual event, held on June 11, with the same wonderful honorees, incredible list of special guests, and innovative surprises – from home-delivered gift packages for all "attendees" to the debut of a new children’s book published just for the occasion featuring our honorees as characters. The gala broke all previous records for Federation event fundraising, making tremendous impact in a year when it was so very much needed.

Gala-rrific! Gala-mazing! Gala-once in a lifetime!!
—Andrea Gottschall

This year’s Gala was not what we were planning on – but it turned out even better than what we had planned! The online event was well produced. The program was fun and engaging. The honorees were exceptional and the FJP staff did an amazing job. All in all, it was a wonderful night!!
—Mindy Siegel, Federation Board Co-Chair

We especially enjoyed Michael Ian Black’s appealing and thought-provoking interview questions such as what food the interviewees associated with love. Who knew a food question would produce such intimate and introspective replies?
—Sharon & Brian Miles

Being part of the Federation 2020 Gala was a wonderful thrill. What a terrific event! Thanks to the Gala Co-Chairs, the Ruevens and the Lichtensteins, and the whole staff for thinking out of the box and innovating and implementing a fabulous program with amazing talent, and surprises all along the way. We were so touched.
—Elise Meyer & Henry Feuerstein

The tribute to Bob and Jane and Henry and Elise was spectacular under difficult conditions. The proof of its success is two-fold. First, the fantastic financial support of the community. Second, the responses of the honorees, who were thrilled and most satisfied. It was a pleasure to be part of the evening.
—Susan & Joel Lichtenstein, Gala Co-Chairs

We never knew if and to what extent we might have made our community “better.” The remote Gala and honor bestowed on us was far more than we could have ever imagined. The Federation is a special part of our communal family. Thank you so much for such a wonderful evening.
—Jane & Bob Hillman

Thank you, David Weisberg, and the Federation for Jewish Philanthropy for organizing a delightful evening exploring the power of the greatest connector, denominator and source of comfort – food.
—Melba Wilson, Owner of Melba’s Restaurant & Melba’s Caterings; President of the NYC Hospitality Alliance

Just as we thought that months of planning to honor Elise Meyer and Henry Feuerstein and Jane and Bob Hillman may have been lost, the dynamic team of visionaries at Federation re-created a dynamic online event. While the event entertained, connected, and enveloped our honorees in virtual hugs, we look forward to connecting in person as soon as possible. Mazel tov to all.
—Liz & Mony Rueven, Gala Co-Chairs

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—Melba Wilson, Owner of Melba’s Restaurant & Melba's Caterings; President of the NYC Hospitality Alliance

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TzedakahShop Finds Its Moment in Moment of Crisis

In August 2018, the Federation for Jewish Philanthropy of Upper Fairfield County launched TzedakahShop, a new online platform intended to encourage small, targeted giving by offering opportunities to purchase modest "units of charity" to benefit both local and international partner organizations.

Unique TzedakahShop giving opportunities range from adopting a dwarf goat at the Beit Singer therapeutic zoo in Afula, Israel, to purchasing sandwiches for children in need through the Afula Community Center Sandwich Club.

When the Covid-19 crisis began, Federation Co-Chairs Deborah Hochhauser and Mindy Siegel thought it important to create a page on TzedakahShop dedicated to giving opportunities that supported crisis-related relief to local and overseas partners.

A special category was added with new giving opportunities, ranging from sponsoring resources for the Schoke Jewish Family Service kosher food pantry to purchasing cookies to raise the spirits of Jewish Senior Services staff to buying personal protective equipment for United Hatzalah’s AmbuCycle drivers in Israel.

"This challenging time has proven to be TzedakahShop’s moment," says Federation CEO David Weisberg. "We’ve seen TzedakahShop purchases like never before." In April, TzedakahShop contributions exceeded $3,500, and there has continued to be a steady stream of activity, all focused on addressing urgent needs in a time of great crisis.

Those interested in making impact through the Federation’s innovative TzedakahShop platform can visit tzedakahshop.com.
When Covid-19 struck, Schoke Jewish Family Service of Fairfield County ramped up its core services to meet a growing array of newfound needs, from sudden unemployment and dwindling finances to the challenges of government directives to shelter at home. As a result of quick thinking and decisive action, Schoke JFS moved many of its services online and introduced new programming to manage the anxiety and stress surrounding the pandemic. However, the food insecurity that surfaced with the pandemic could not be handled online.

Schoke JFS was confronted with a 500% increase in the number of clients served through its Freedberg Family Kosher Food Pantry. An appeal to the community helped close the gap, and donations poured in, in the form of groceries, money, and gift cards. Volunteers descended on our offices to sort and distribute food to clients in need. Other community organizations, such as Merkaz Community High School, contributed to the cause by organizing a food drive that restocked our pantry shelves when they were almost bare.

But distributing kosher food to families in need while following health and safety protocols became a challenge for those unable to leave their homes. Through a program coordinated by TCS in partnership with Federation, and with the help of more than 30 volunteers, Schoke JFS has been getting monthly food packages – contact-free – to approximately 50 clients in Upper Fairfield County.

“I was humbled by the outpouring of appreciation from the dozens of families who would not have been able to get food on their own,” said Matt Greenberg, CEO of Schoke Jewish Family Service. “Knowing that these families now had the food they needed to sustain themselves and their loved ones was very comforting.”

Each month, a team of volunteers headed by TCS members Julia Marx and Sheri Warshaw organize the effort to ensure that Schoke JFS clients in Upper Fairfield County, including homebound elderly and families in need, have access to kosher food. Volunteer drivers arrive at the TCS parking lot and pop their trunks, where gloved volunteers, working at socially-distanced stations, load bags filled with canned goods, pasta, fresh fruit, vegetables, eggs, and kosher fish or chicken. The drivers, who are also provided with gloves, then deliver a bag directly to each client’s doorstep. The Federation provides challah to each client to round out the package with fresh bread.

“I cannot thank you enough for supporting my family through Covid-19,” shared Jessica*, a grateful client of the food pantry. “I am out of work, helping my kids with online school, and trying to put dinner on the table. Your recent delivery made it much easier for me to support my family when things are crazy at home.”

In May, students from Merkaz Community High School for Judaic Studies organized a drive to restock the food pantry shelves, not just with food, but with personal hygiene items and cleaning supplies. Community-members who couldn’t make the trip to the Congregation Beth El parking lot were encouraged to purchase items from the Schoke JFS Amazon.com wish list.

“The reach of Schoke JFS across the county would absolutely not have been possible without the support of Federation for Jewish Philanthropy and its efforts in facilitating partnerships and support from TCS, the Merkaz teens, and Jewish Senior Services, and providing special grant funding,” says Greenberg.

In addition to the food-delivery program, JFS’s Hirsch Kosher Home Delivered Meals Program has been providing a hot kosher meal every Friday afternoon to area Holocaust survivors, thanks to a generous anonymous donation. Not only does the food provide comfort, but the socially-distanced delivery-person is a friendly face (even though it is partially covered by a mask).

Since March, Upper Fairfield County community-members have also answered the Schoke JFS call for help by purchasing critical items online via Federation’s TzedakahShop. The need is still urgent. Learn about donation opportunities at TzedakahShop.com or the Freedberg Family Kosher Food Pantry Amazon.com wish list: https://amzn.to/2P6YPyO.

*Name changed to provide confidentiality.
Afula Sandwich Club
Shifts Focus to Address Urgent Community Needs

By Daniel Benn, Director
Afula Community Center

Through the Jewish Agency For Israel Partnership2Gether initiative, Federation for Jewish Philanthropy of Upper Fairfield County and fellow Jewish federations of the Southern New England Consortium (SNEC) enjoys a “living bridge” relationship with the Afula-Gilboa region of northern Israel. Daniel Benn is Director of the Afula Community Center, whose Crowns Sandwich Club program addressing food insecurity is supported by the Federation for Jewish Philanthropy.

In an interview with Zman Yisrael in early March, Israeli futurist David Passig remarked that the most important step in the fight against the current global crisis is organizing communities. In his opinion, only communities that pull together have a chance to defend themselves against the challenges posed by the Coronavirus.

“People must begin organizing around institutions – the community center, synagogues, the various organizations,” he said. “That’s where the community finds its self-expression. It’s not the government, but the larger community, that can care for people in the more advanced stages of the crisis. At the moment, local communal organization is what is absent.”

The new reality that has emerged at lightning speed has indeed taught us that this is a unique, previously-unknown challenge, which has consequently put the fight against the spread of the pandemic, and coping with its implications, front and center.

In Afula, the first question we community leaders asked ourselves when we were forced into lockdown was what we could do. The answers – and subsequent responses on the ground – were diverse and eye-opening.

One of the more fascinating examples is a cooperative initiative sponsored by the area community centers, the local Afula municipality, our community partners in the Southern New England Consortium of Jewish federations, and volunteers from the Sandwich Club – young people who, in the initial and complex days of extreme uncertainty, requested to volunteer and help.

The Sandwich Club was established at the Afula Community Center in 2016 to provide a space where at-risk youth can volunteer in a variety of activities designed to benefit the community. Over the years, the club has become a center where volunteers prepare sandwiches for young children from economically distressed families – a simple item that provides big impact. Dozens of teens arrive every evening and, among other activities, prepare some 200 sandwiches to be distributed the next morning to area elementary schools where many students arrive without a snack or lunch.

The Sandwich Club is made possible by financial contributions from the Afula-Gilboa communities and several Jewish federations, including the Federation for Jewish Philanthropy of Upper Fairfield County. The program not only provides food for hungry children, but educational enrichment, recreational activity, and fun for some 200 area teen volunteers.

When schools were closed down and students moved into virtual classrooms, the Sandwich Club shifted focus to a different community need, just as crucial: addressing food insecurity among Afula’s elderly and needy families. Thanks to donations solicited from several entities, thousands of food packages and meals were distributed nearly every day from late March through late April by volunteers, public officials, and even IDF soldiers specifically enlisted for this task.

Recipients were just as glad to chat with the delivery-person as they were to receive the delivery. Knocking on an apartment door often led to surprising partnerships.

“This is a formative experience that will remain with us for many years,” said one of the employees of the Sports Department who accompanied several young volunteers delivering food in the Afula ‘Ilit neighborhood. “The highlight of each day was when we signed up more volunteers, some of whom were the young people we met in the homes where we distributed food packages and products.”

Members of the Upper Fairfield County Jewish community who wish to provide additional support for the outstanding work of the Sandwich Club and its teen volunteers can do so by visiting the Federation’s TzedakahShop platform at tzedakahshop.com.

“We are so grateful for our partnership with the Afula Community Center’s Sandwich Club,” says Federation CEO David Weisberg, “and particularly proud of the teens who give of their time to make a difference in the lives of their peers and of the community as a whole.”
Upper Fairfield County Jewish community helps to save lives at Emek Medical Center in Afula

Located in Afula in the Yizre’el Valley of northern Israel, HaEmek Medical Center is one of the biggest hospitals in the country, serving over 700,000 residents in the region. Widely known as a model of Arab-Jewish coexistence, the medical center became a hotspot for emergency care upon the emergence of the Covid-19 crisis in Israel.

The Federation for Jewish Philanthropy of Upper Fairfield County joins with 11 other Jewish federations in Connecticut, Rhode Island, and Massachusetts to form SNEC, the Southern New England Consortium of federations, which together maintain a supportive partnership with Israel’s Afula-Gilboa region.

In late March, SNEC federation leaders gathered together (virtually) to learn about the emerging needs of organizations in the Afula-Gilboa region. As Federation CEO David Weisberg recalls, “What most quickly rose to the surface was the need for equipment at Emek Medical Center. This was an opportunity to save lives, and a decision I felt we needed to make immediately.”

Together, the federations agreed to utilize reserve funds – which had been contributed by all the federations, utilizing support from annual campaign donors – and purchase a medical device known as an AirSeal, at a cost of approximately $32,000, something none of the individual federations would likely have had the capacity to purchase on its own.

According to its manufacturer, the AirSeal System is “the world’s only intelligent and integrated access system for laparoscopic and robotic surgery,” enabling doctors to “operate in a clearer field” during surgical procedures.

The week of June 22, 2020, the AirSeal arrived at Emek Medical Center, and on the morning of Wednesday, June 24, it was used for the first time in surgery.

The surgery was conducted by Dr. Michael Cohen, Emek’s Head of Urology, on a 62-year-old woman who was suffering from a tumor on one of her kidneys. Of the surgery, Dr. Cohen said, “The complex surgical procedure demanded the removal of part of that affected kidney, while underlying existing medical conditions made this procedure all the more difficult. The procedure had to be accomplished laparoscopically. The AirSeal System allowed me to successfully control the air pressure within the stomach during the surgery, and this greatly assisted in our efforts to monitor the patient during an intricate anesthesiology process and resulted in a significantly shortened surgery. I have no doubt that the AirSeal device was instrumental in our ability to perform this complex procedure successfully and to save her life. The device also prevented any gases from escaping into the air of the operating room, adding to our peace of mind. I am sincerely grateful to the donors for allowing us to acquire this life-saving device.”

Later that day, Emek Deputy Director Dr. Gil Hirschhorn invited the SNEC Board of Directors to a virtual meeting to show them the new AirSeal System that had helped to save a life just a few hours earlier. Dr. Hirschhorn was clear that he expected the device to save many more lives in the future.
A View

By Andrew Banoff, President & CEO
Jewish Senior Services

Many people have heard me refer to the experience of dealing with Covid-19 as a rollercoaster ride – way too many highs and lows, with twists and turns that you don’t see coming. When the train left the platform in early March, none of us knew what the ride would be like. We knew who got into the cars with us – both at home and at work – and generally, we were with people we wanted to take the ride with. We did not know how long the ride would last, or how hard we would have to hold on, or how loud we would scream, or how much it would hurt on some of the curves.

The first two months of the pandemic were generally horrific – throughout the region. New York was the epicenter in the country, and Fairfield County the epicenter in Connecticut. Hospitals were filled with Covid-19 patients and receiving much of the media attention, supplies, and accolades for their efforts in responding to the crisis. Nursing homes were a “concern” in that we would flood the hospitals with more patients if they became infected and we could not care for them.

Testing of residents, clients, and/or staff was only available if someone was symptomatic, and results took two to seven days. The capacity for testing had to be built up quickly, as testing kits were nearly impossible to obtain. We scrambled to find the necessary Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) – literally, from all over the world. Staff were great, showing up every day in spite of the risks, to provide care and services.

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Our ancillary businesses closed, including The J Fitness Center, Adult Day Program, Child Development Center, and Outpatient Therapy. Only “essential workers” were allowed to leave home. By late March, positive cases were being reported throughout the area, with five at JSS.

April was indeed “the cruelest month.”
Hospitals were overcrowded. Twenty-nine JSS residents tested positive, as did numerous staff and clients in the community. We experienced a number of deaths, and tried to comfort families when they could not be with loved ones at the end of life. The impact on our community was getting worse each day and testing was still mostly inaccessible. On the rollercoaster, it felt like being taken up to the precipice with no tracks on the other side. We reached the “peak” of the ride on April 22nd.

At that point, it was determined that most people dying from Covid-19 were residents of nursing homes and assisted-living communities. Focus shifted from acute-care hospitals to senior-living facilities and the battle cry became, “What happened in the nursing homes?” In mid-May, the State announced Point Prevalence Study testing for residents in Connecticut’s 215 nursing homes. At JSS, 45 residents tested positive in the study, a fewer having no new cases for two weeks. While many were asymptomatic, never developing symptoms, some did, and we delivered proper care and protected those around them by providing the necessary PPE through our Infection Control Guidelines. That was a wild turn that no one had seen coming.

In total, of the 300 residents of 4200 Park Ave., 92 contracted Covid-19; 22 sadly passed away. Sixty-two staff-members tested positive and, tragically, one lost a long battle in the hospital. We remembered them all at a virtual memorial service on July 31st. Rabbi Stephen Shulman and many others have offered support to residents, families, staff, and other community-members throughout the pandemic.

As we slowly managed to return to a new “normal” for those living and working at the Harry and Jeannette Weinberg Campus, we established electronic and outdoor, in-person visits for residents and families, and now accommodate family requests for celebrations. There are weekly rotating BBQ lunches in households, funded by our Women’s Auxiliary, and Therapeutic Recreation activities for all residents. Our clinical team has been extraordinary and now have been through seven unannounced Infection Control Surveys from the State Department of Public Health and the National Guard. For staff, we granted incentive pay and a General Wage increase, provided three free meals weekly (thanks to generous donors), and mailed $100 Target gift cards as a thank-you to their families. We recognize the efforts of these Healthcare Heroes as often as possible.

We have received an outpouring of love and support – locally and nationally – and are touched by the incredible engagement from Merkaz Community High School for Judaic Studies, donations from community- and family-members, Covid-19 grants, and support from Federation for Jewish Philanthropy of Upper Fairfield County.

May we all enjoy continued health and safety as the rollercoaster ride continues.
These days, we are spending a lot of time at home with our kids. One great way to pass time with your little ones is to read PJ Library books!

We’re with you every day. Follow us on Facebook facebook.com/pjlibraryct, where we post daily a packed schedule of community activities, crafts, and events. Plus, THREE live story-times every weekday!

pjlibrary.org has gathered a ton of links and information to help you and your family make the best of these big, unexpected changes. For everything from guidance in talking with your children about quarantines and pandemics to how to host a virtual dinner party for the High Holidays, pjlibrary.org is an amazing resource.

Do Your Kids Have More Time to Read? Well, We Have More Books for Your Home!

We have exciting news! Every child in your home under age 12 is now eligible for PJ Library! If you have more than one child in your home, make sure to sign everyone up at pjlibrary.org so that we can send each one their own age-appropriate book every month. If you have any questions, please email us at jblumenthal@jewishphilanthropyct.org.

So Much Stuff for Being Stuck Safe at Home

Check out these PJ Library digital resources!

Parenting Resources
8am and 8pm every day (Eastern)

Storytimes and Craft-Along
every weekday at 11am, 1pm, and 4pm (Eastern)

Virtual Field Trips
Noon every day (Eastern)

Follow for virtual author visits, classes, sing alongs and more!

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ENROLL NOW
@PJLibrary.ORG

Federation for Jewish Philanthropy
OF OFFICIAL PROGRAM OF THE

KALEIDOSCOPE | FALL/WINTER 2020
It’s been an interesting time for Jewish communal leaders, let alone those who only recently became chairs of an organization. Deborah Hochhauser and Mindy Siegel call the first months in their new shared position as Federation Board co-chairs a “unique experience.” Sworn in at Federation’s annual meeting on Jan. 13, they have helped Federation and the Upper Fairfield County Jewish community navigate Covid-19’s unrelenting advance – all while focusing on their personal charge to the Federation board (and to themselves): “Be excited, engaged, enthusiastic, and energetic.”

From the start of their tenure, Mindy and Deborah, along with Federation CEO David Weisberg, have kept in close contact with congregational presidents by way of regular group calls. These conversations are built on the foundation of several Federation-led communal workshops on how congregations can improve outreach and enhance synagogue security.

“Before Covid, when Mindy and I agreed to take this position, we talked about how great it would be to work together as a community,” says Deborah. “Since the beginning of the crisis, we keep searching for silver linings and one of ours is that we have successfully gotten congregational leaders together during a very difficult time.”

In the early days of the pandemic, the conversations became an invaluable tool for idea-sharing among congregations. Leaders discussed ways to keep their respective communities connected and cared for by reaching out to congregants, connecting them with social-service resources, and offering online programming.

“I think that, in recent years, the congregational presidents weren’t meeting regularly and we’re now realizing the potential of how much they can help each other,” says Mindy. “It’s been nice for us to watch.”

Both co-chairs credit the Federation board for keeping the Federation’s focus on the most relevant and essential needs. The Federation has “a wonderful group of very engaged and enthusiastic members,” says Mindy – whom the co-chairs rely on for input regarding community priorities. In March, as the severity of the pandemic became more apparent, the board agreed to focus much of the organization’s energy on the local community. Federation expanded its TzedakahShop online donation platform with a Covid-19 category, where donors can purchase Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) for Jewish Senior Services employees and critically-needed food items for the Schoke Jewish Family Service Kosher Food Pantry, and support Covid-19 relief in Israel. “That’s exactly what the Federation is for,” says Deborah: “to help our community, both here at home and around the world.”

The cyberspace was a surprising venue for another Federation program, as the Federation quickly pivoted to change its annual gala into an online affair. “Our virtual gala was an amazing experience; we got such wonderful feedback and it helped us to provide additional support to our local agencies,” says Deborah. “This year, we did something different with our allocations, as we set aside 15 percent of our allocable pool to address frontline needs during the crisis. We were able to really give where needed.”

Deborah also gives Federation CEO David Weisberg “a lot of credit” for steering the organization during an especially challenging time. “Mindy and I are doing what we can, but he’s an amazing leader; Federation has not skipped a beat and I really think it’s because he hasn’t let it – even when he was sick with Covid!” she says. “It’s a great lesson because this is a time when we all should be together as opposed to hiding under our rocks. Mindy and I took on this position so that we could keep our community together and grow it and keep it strong, and David has really helped.”

Looking ahead, the co-chairs anticipate an ongoing need to address food insecurity in Upper Fairfield County. In response, Federation is working with Schoke Jewish Family Service of Fairfield County, with the hope of purchasing a mobile kosher food pantry for the region.

In the spirit of continuity, Mindy and Deborah are also looking far past their own tenure. “Young leadership is very important to both of us,” says Mindy, who is the product of the UJA/Federation of Eastern Fairfield County young leadership program, along with her husband, Jeff. “That’s how we both came to be active in this Jewish community. I have kids living here and I want them to go through young-leadership development and learn how to engage in this community. It’s time for new, younger, 30- and 40-somethings to get in the mix.”

Despite the difficulties and the uncertainties, Deborah and Mindy continue to seek and find silver linings. “This is a very strange time in our lives that we will always remember, and I am so proud and grateful that Mindy and David and I can be part of the glue,” says Deborah. “It can be hard to stay motivated, encouraged, and excited, but being part of the Federation has helped us do that. We are so proud of how our Federation has risen to the challenge and is making incredible impact under the most difficult of circumstances!”
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The Westport Inn  |  1595 Post Road East  |  Westport, CT 06880  
203.557.8124  |  info@westportinn.com

A Conversation with Michael Ian Black
Monday, September 21, 2020 at 8 pm

In the days between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, join Federation for Jewish Philanthropy of Upper Fairfield County CEO David Weisberg for a special conversation with comedian and actor, Michael Ian Black (MTV’s The State, Wet Hot American Summer), to discuss his newest book, A Better Man: A (Mostly Serious) Letter to My Son, to be released on September 15.

REGISTER AT: JEWISHPHILANTHROPYCT.ORG/MIB

Jewish Community Resource Directory

SPIRITUAL LIFE

Bridgeport
Congregation Bikur Cholim
2365 Park Ave.
203-981-4458
Orthodox

Congregation B’nai Israel
2710 Park Ave.
203-336-1858 | welcome@cbibpt.org
cbibpt.org

Reform

Congregation Rodeph Sholom
2385 Park Ave.
203-334-0159 | info@rodephsholom.com
rodephsholom.com

Conservative

Jewish Senior Services
4200 Park Ave.
203-396-1001 | sshulman@jseniors.org

Fairfield
Congregation Ahavath Achim
c/o 92 Montauk St.
203-372-6529 | office@ahavathachim.org
ahavathachim.org
Orthodox

Congregation Beth El Fairfield
1200 Fairfield Woods Road
203-374-5544 | office@bethelfairfield.org
bethelfairfield.org
Conservative

Georgetown
Temple B’nai Chaim
82 Portland Ave.
203-544-8695 | tbc@templebnaichaim.org
templebnaichaim.org
Reform

Norwalk
Beth Israel of Westport/Norwalk–Chabad
40 King St.
203-866-0534 | bethisraelct@gmail.com
bethisraelct.org
Orthodox

Congregation Beth El-Norwalk
109 East Ave.
203-838-2710 | office@congbethel.org
congbethel.org
Conservative

continued on the next page
Local Twentysomethings Aim to Be Jewish Changemakers

Maintaining social distance makes traditional networking a challenge. The pandemic has rendered the job market stagnant. Recent college graduates are finding themselves back home with their parents.

What’s a young Jewish twentysomething with career and volunteer leadership aspirations to do?

For a group of young people in Upper Fairfield County, the answer this August was to participate in the Jewish Federations of North America’s Jewish Changemakers Fellowship, a three-week online leadership experience for Jewish students and recent graduates, focused on career development, networking, and making a difference in the community.

Designed and overseen by Jewish Federations of North America in partnership with local Jewish federations and more than 25 leading Jewish organizations, the Fellowship was designed to empower future “changemakers” to grow their skills and contacts needed for success in a competitive job market, while leaning into their respective Jewish communities and acting at a time of unprecedented crisis and challenge.

The Upper Fairfield County cohort of Jewish Changemakers included: Julia Arnowitz, Wilton; Rebecca Oestreicher, Stratford; Anna Sieben, Norwalk; Emma Stein, Weston; Rachel Garner, Weston; and Zoe Butchen, Ridgefield.

Rebecca Oestreicher grew up in Westport as a member of Temple Israel. A recent graduate of Stony Brook University with a degree in political science, she will soon be heading to the University of Connecticut School of Law. When asked why she chose to apply to be a Jewish Changemaker, she replied, “I’m looking forward to the opportunity to build a network of peers who have similar goals of participating in social justice through a Jewish lens.”

Rachel Garner, who graduated from the University of Maryland with a degree in communications, echoed the sentiment: “I’m excited to connect with other Jewish young professionals and learn how I may be able to positively impact my community.”

While many fellows were pooled with participants from across the U.S. and Canada, communities with a critical mass of participants were given the opportunity to create their own local cohort, which was the case in Upper Fairfield County. Each cohort was challenged to develop its own project to address a local challenge caused, or exacerbated, by the global health pandemic.

Seth Marion stepped in to coach the group. The spouse of Congregation B’nai Israel’s Rabbi Sarah Marion, Seth is himself a Jewish communal professional. He holds a certificate in Jewish Education Specializing in Adolescents and Emerging Adults from Hebrew Union College, and has worked as a young engagement specialist and program coordinator at several congregations.

Participants were engaged for 15 hours per week over three weeks, earning credits for each session completed, for volunteering, and for connecting with their small-group cohort and coach.

The curriculum was inspired by the three-part framework of a leadership tool known as “public narrative,” the stories that social-change leaders learn to tell: The Story of Self (personal and professional development), The Story of Us (global Jewish community), and The Story of Now (service and advocacy).

As part of the program’s volunteer component, participants were greeted each day with a podcast and a daily challenge tied to a big question or theme. Many of the daily challenges included simple acts of volunteerism such as calling homebound seniors or interviewing a Holocaust survivor.

“I am excited to collaborate with the other fellows to contribute towards bettering the current state of our world, while simultaneously developing my own leadership skills and aspirations,” said participant Zoe Butchen, a member of Congregation Shir Shalom in Ridgefield and a recent University of Connecticut graduate. “I see the Fellowship as an opportunity to become a more active global citizen and member of the Jewish community.”
Temple Shalom
259 Richards Ave.
203-866-0148 | admin@templeshalomweb.org
templeshalomweb.org
Reform

Ridgefield
Chabad Jewish Center of Ridgefield
27R West Lane
203-403-5372 | chabadridgefield@gmail.com
chabadridgefield.com
Congregation Shir Shalom of Westchester and Fairfield Counties
46 Peaceable St.
203-438-6589 | office@ourshirshalom.org
ourshirshalom.org
Reform

Trumbull
Congregation B’nai Torah
5700 Main St.
203-268-6940 | office@bnaitorahct.org
bnaitorahct.org
Conservative

Westport
Beit Chaverim Synagogue of Westport/Norwalk
85 Post Road West
203-227-3333 | office@beitchaverim.com
beitchaverim.com
Modern Orthodox/Traditional
Congregation for Humanistic Judaism of Fairfield County
P.O. Box 82
Westport, CT 06881
203-293-8867 | info@humanisticjews.org
humanisticjews.org
Temple Israel
14 Coleytown Road
203-227-1293 | info@tiwestport.org
tiwestport.org
Reform
TCS
30 Hillspoint Road
203-454-4673 | execdir@tcs-westport.org
tcs-westport.org
Conservative

continued on the next page
How Is This Year Different?
Keeping High Holiday Spirit Alive

There are no days on the calendar when synagogue pews are more crowded than Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, as worshipers check their tickets, put on their best clothes, reconnect with others, and – most importantly – engage in some of the most meaningful and introspective religious services of the year.

If there is one word to describe Jewish life in 2020, a fitting candidate is *chidush* – an ancient Hebrew word for “innovation.” All summer long, Upper Fairfield County Jewish congregations have thought up creative ways to keep community-members connected, comforted, and engaged – and High Holiday programming is no exception.

How will our community’s congregations keep the spirit of the most sacred time of the Jewish year, when wearing a mask is as holy an act as wearing a kippah and kissing the Torah has become a matter of public health?

“Like so many other congregations, Congregation Beth El-Norwalk has been planning for months and we’ve decided to hold our High Holiday services exclusively online,” says Rabbi Ita Paskind. “We simply could not – and would not – create a service model that excluded at-risk individuals and families, or encouraged folks to come into the building when it wasn’t safe. Our congregants’ health is of supreme importance.” In addition to online services, Beth El-Norwalk will offer yoga, preschool sing-along and stories, Torah study, a High Holiday musical experience, and a Zoom “Lobby” where congregants can just hang out.

Over more than a half-century, Congregation for Humanistic Judaism of Fairfield County has offered meaningful celebrations to anyone identifying as Jewish. “We know that many Jews rely on CHJ’s annual High Holiday services for connection and meaning in a way that aligns with their personal beliefs,” says CHJ president, Steven Getz. “Many of our attendees seek out a like-minded community to share the High Holidays’ meaning and traditions.” CHJ’s services, incorporating music, prose, and poetry, will be available via YouTube.

From the start of the pandemic, Congregation B’nai Israel in Bridgeport has relied on a set of Jewish values and principles to guide decision-making around community practice and gatherings.

“There are the values of *pikuach nefesh* (saving a life), keeping the community together, offering pastoral care and counseling, and ensuring the safety and well-being of our entire staff,” says Rabbi Evan Schultz. “We have created a High Holy Day experience that we hope will honor those principles as well as the High Holy Day experience our congregants know and love. The experience itself may look different, but we hope that the spirit of what we’re doing will feel familiar and meaningful to everyone in the B’nai Israel community.”

Temple Shalom in Norwalk has adapted in many creative ways, offering connection and a wide array of uplifting spiritual, educational, and service opportunities both distanced and online.

“We have seen tremendous engagement of our congregation during this challenging time – a testament to the fact that renewed involvement in Jewish life feeds our souls and restores our hope for the future,” says Rabbi-Cantor Shirah Sklar. “The rhythms of the Jewish calendar bring so much depth and meaning to our lives, and we all need these moments of inspiration and connection now more than ever.” This year, Temple Shalom will offer a variety of both virtual and safe outdoor and drive-in High Holiday programming.

Some congregations are only offering in-person services, especially those where *halacha* precludes the use of streaming technology on Shabbat and certain Jewish holidays.

“At Beit Chaverim Synagogue in Westport, we have been conducting outdoor services seven days a week, and we will be having joyful High Holiday services in person in the safest way possible,” says Rabbi Greg Wall. “This will probably translate into multiple shorter, limited-attendance outdoor services.” Non-members are invited to request guest tickets, available based on safe space considerations.

Other congregations, like Rodeph Sholom in Bridgeport, have been planning for all scenarios. “If, due to safety concerns, we are unable to run our services in person for anyone wishing to attend, we will have a minyan of essential personnel in addition to livestream broadcast staff,” says Rabbi Richard Eisenberg. The synagogue offers pickup and delivery of prayerbooks and will hold shofar-blowing in its parking lot (weather permitting) on the second day of Rosh Hashanah, after morning services. On Yom Kippur, Rodeph Sholom will hold a second, late-afternoon *Yizkor* service option in the parking lot (weather permitting).

At a time when those participating in High Holiday services are praying for themselves and their circles to be inscribed in the Book of Life for a year of good health, congregations are making every effort to play their vital roles in ensuring that good health is of the highest priority.

To learn about High Holiday offerings at a specific congregation, see the Jewish Community Resource Directory in this issue for contact information.
Jewish Community Resource Directory

COMMUNITY AGENCIES & ORGANIZATIONS

- **Anti-Defamation League**
  Connecticut Regional Office
  connecticut.adl.org | 203-288-6500

- **Federation for Jewish Philanthropy of Upper Fairfield County**
  shalomct.org | 203-226-8197

- **Israelis-in-CT**
  israelisinct@hotmail.com
  facebook.com/israelisinct

- **Jewish Family Service of Connecticut**
  jfsct.org | 203-366-5438

- **Jewish Federation Association of Connecticut (JFACT)**
  jfact.org | 860-727-5701

- **Holocaust Child Survivors of Connecticut, Inc.**
  hcs-ct.org | 203-226-3092

- **LifeBridge Community Services, Bridgeport**
  lifebridgect.org | 203-368-4291

- **Schoke Jewish Family Service of Fairfield County**
  ctjfs.org | 203-659-3601

- **The Jewish Community Foundation, Serving Upper Fairfield County**
  dwveisberg@jewishphilanthropyct.org | 203-226-8197

- **Voices of Hope – Holocaust and genocide education**
  ctvoicesofhope.org | 860-470-5591

LIFECYCLE

**Mohel**
Rabbi Yitzchok Adler
860-798-9555

**Mikvah**
Mikvah Israel
1326 Stratfield Road, Fairfield
203-274-2191

**End of Life**
Abraham L. Green and Son Funeral Home, Fairfield
greensfuneralhome.com | 203-255-8993

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Jewish Community 
Resource Directory

Jewish Cemetery Association of
Fairfield County
203-452-1221

Loyalty Cemetery Association, Fairfield
203-452-1221

Martin H. Green Memorials & Lettering
203-452-1221

**YOUTH & EDUCATION**

**Early Childhood**

PJ Library & PJ Our Way: Free Jewish-themed books for kids to age 11
Federation for Jewish Philanthropy of Upper Fairfield County
fjp@jewishphilanthropyct.org
jewishphilanthropyct.org | 203-659-3602

Aleph Bet Early Childhood and Daycare Center, Westport
myalephbet.org | 203-635-4118

B’nai Torah Nursery School, Trumbull
bnaitoreacht.org/nursery | 203-268-0227

Bonim Preschool
Congregation B’nai Israel, Bridgeport
chibpt.org | 203-335-5058

Carol Schoke Early Childhood Center
Temple Israel, Westport
tiwestport.org | 203-227-1656, ext. 312

Gan Yeladim Preschool
Temple Shalom, Norwalk
templeshalomweb.org | 203-866-0148

K’tanim Preschool
Congregation Beth El, Fairfield
bethelfairfield.org | 203-374-5544

Nitzan Nursery School
Congregation Beth El-Norwalk
congberthel.org | 203-838-6019

TCS Preschool, Westport
tcs-westport.org | 203-454-4673

**Dayschools**

Bi-Cultural Hebrew Academy
(Pre-K – 12th Grade)
2186 High Ridge Road, Stamford
bcia-ct.org
Lower School: 203-329-2186
Upper School: 203-883-8970
A merger of Bi-Cultural Day School and Jewish High School of Connecticut

Ezra Academy
75 Rimmon Road, Woodbridge
ezraacademyct.org | 203-389-5500

Southern Connecticut Hebrew Academy
261 Derby Ave., Orange
schacademy.org | 203-795-5261

Hebrew

Alef-Tav Hebrew for Children & Ulpan Habait
An Israeli program for learning Hebrew
israelisinct@hotmail.com | 203-434-7705

**Youth Activities**

BBYO Connecticut Valley Region
Fairfield, Ridgefield, Westport Chapters
bbyo.org | 203-389-2127

Circle of Friends Connecticut
circleoffriendsct.org | 203-293-8837

Friendship Circle Fairfield County
friendshipct.com | 203-329-0015, ext. 131

Kesher Project for Developmentally Challenged Adults
Congregation B’nai Israel, Bridgeport
chibpt.org/kesher.html#kesher | 203-336-1858

Merkaz Community High School for Judaic Studies
4200 Park Ave., Bridgeport
merkazct.org | 203-450-5303

Westport USY
The Conservative Synagogue, Westport
tcs-westport.org/communities/youth-groups
203-454-4673

**Summer Camps**

Camp Gan Israel of Westport,
Weston & Wilton
ganisrael.com | 203-226-8584

JCC of Greater New Haven Day Camps
jccnh.org/jcc-summer-day-camp
203-387-2424, ext. 253
Contact Federation for Jewish Philanthropy to learn about subsidized bus transportation from Upper Fairfield County: 203-226-8197

Mishkan Israel Day Camp
mishkanisrael.com | 203-268-0740

Ramah Sports Academy
Held at Fairfield University
ramahsportsacademy.org | 855-577-7678

Lifelong Learning
Fairfield University Carl & Dorothy Bennett Center for Judaic Studies
fairfield.edu | 203-254-4000, ext. 2065

Israelis-in-CT Hebrew Conversation Group
Meets every other Monday at The Westport Library
israelisinct@hotmail.com

Kesher Project for Developmentally Challenged Adults
Congregation B’nai Israel, Bridgeport
chibpt.org | 203-336-1858

Schneerson Center for Jewish Life, CT
schneersoncenter.org | 203-635-4118

**CULTURAL**

Connecticut Jewish Ledger
jewishledger.com | 860-231-2424

Jewish Film Festival of Fairfield County
stamfordjc.org/filmfestival | 203-487-0941

Jewish Historical Society of Fairfield County
jhscf-ct.org | 203-321-1373, ext. 150

**YOUNG PROFESSIONALS**

Greater Bridgeport Jews (20s & 30s)
eschultz@cbibpt.org | 203-336-1858

Jewish Twenties & Thirties
tajs.org | 203-921-4161

Young Jewish Professionals, CT
yjpct.org | 203-354-3090

**WOMEN**

 Hadassah, The Women’s Zionist Organization of America, Inc. Connecticut Region
hadassah.org/regions/connecticut
203-307-1319

**SENIORS**

Jewish Senior Services
Harry and Jeanette Weinberg Campus, Bridgeport
jss.org | 203-365-6400

Seymour I. Hollander Apartments
Greater Bridgeport Jewish Housing Corp.
hollanderhouse.org | 203-374-7868
Keeping us all close in the face of social distancing

This pandemic is unprecedented in our day, but plagues are unfortunately all too familiar to the Jewish people. From biblical times and throughout our history, the healthy response has always been a return to our spiritual essence.

At Beit Chaverim, we moved services online the moment the building closed, and offered communal prayer opportunities three times a day, six days a week.

Today we are happy to offer outdoor services, maintaining a social-distancing protocol that surpasses state and local guidelines. We also host our area’s only outdoor morning minyan seven days a week, sheltered from sun and rain. Please join us if you have a yahrzeit or just need to connect in person, and safely.

At Beit Chaverim, we instill the importance of lifelong learning, and many of our members enjoy participating regularly in at least one of our many weekly classes. Since the pandemic, we have increased our offerings and gone virtual, inviting people outside our community to learn and grow with us. Our online classes in parsha, tanach, talmud, Jewish history, philosophy, mysticism, Jewish law, prayer, women’s spirituality, and sessions on cooking, yoga, and Jewish pop culture are attracting new participants every day from around our area and beyond!

To explore personal growth through any of our popular virtual classes, please sign up for our mailing list at BeitChaverim.com.

For the High Holidays, we are planning multiple abbreviated, in-person, social-distanced services, including shofar-blowing. Guest tickets are available, space permitting. Please email office@beitchaverim.com to request tickets.

Wishing everyone a joyous and healthy holiday season, and hope to see you soon at Beit Chaverim, “The House of Friends!”

A New Yavneh

Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai was one of the most important rabbis and Jewish leaders in the 1st century CE. At that time, Jerusalem was under siege by the Romans, who wouldn’t let anyone in or out of the walled city. Jews were suffering greatly under Roman oppression, not allowed to celebrate Shabbat, circumcise newborn boys, ordain rabbis, or study Torah. Alarmied by this situation, Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai decided to act. He asked his disciples to smuggle him out of the city in a coffin and bring him to the Roman general, Vespasian. The students followed his instructions, and Rabbi Yochanan emerged from the coffin as soon as he was in the general’s presence.

After introducing himself, he announced that Vespasian would soon become the new Roman emperor, and asked for one favor. Pleased with the prediction, Vespasian asked the rabbi for his request. “Please give me the city of Yavneh and its sages,” said Rabbi Yochanan.

After a short time, Vespasian was indeed named emperor of the Roman Empire and Rabbi Yochanan was granted permission to move to the city on Israel’s southern coastal plain, along with his fellow sages. There, after the destruction of the Second Temple, Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai recreated Judaism for the Jewish people’s new circumstances. He had the vision, the drive, and the wisdom to adapt Judaism to a new world. His courage enabled our religion to thrive and survive until today.

In the wake of the global Coronavirus pandemic, I believe we are experiencing a new Yavneh. The spread of this virus is changing the way we are living our Judaism today. As Rabbi Jeff Salkin wrote in The Forward, we are witnessing the rise of a “modern e-Yavneh.” Through this crisis, Judaism is moving online to stay relevant and to keep our members engaged and connected.

We’ve had hundreds of people following our virtual morning minyan, classes, and activities. I am a firm believer that nothing will replace the personal, physical experience of gathering in our sanctuary. Hopefully, that will happen soon! But in the meantime, I invite you to be part of our online congregation -- to pray, to study, and to connect with us in the cyberspace.

As we pray for the ending of this pandemic, may God bring healing and strength to the people who are suffering physically and spiritually at this time.

L’shalom,
Rabbi Marcelo Kormis
The New Paradigm – Elbowing as an Expression of Friendship
By Rabbi Yehoshua S. Hecht, Spiritual Leader
Beth Israel Chabad celebrated its 121st anniversary in March 2020 with a benefit concert by the world-renowned jazz violinist, Alexander Markov, and his father, Albert Markov. It was a sensational evening of music, good food, and community. On March 10th, the annual Purim Megilloth reading and Hebrew-school celebration drew a large crowd.

By mid-March, the Covid-19 pandemic was raging throughout the tri-state area and Beth Israel Chabad shifted all its activities, Torah classes, and Hebrew School onto Zoom and social media.

Since then, virtual Torah classes have been a mainstay for residents of Fairfield County and beyond. Nearly 100 classes have been presented by Rabbi Yehoshua S. Hecht on Wednesday morning and evening and by Rebbeztin Freida Hecht on Thursday morning.

For Passover, the Shul personally delivered distributed hand-baked shmurah matzah and for Shavuot, we ran an extraordinarily successful Shavuot in a Box gift packages including challah, wine, cheese blintzes, and educational material about the holiday. Well over 50 families were involved in this project.

After two months of Zoom classes, the Hebrew School Program ended in May. Students received end-of-year gifts and educational packets in the mail and enjoyed a special graduation celebration on Zoom.

The Circle of Friends Program serving children with special needs conducted two magnificent Sunday Circle Programs via Zoom, with the many participants excitingly greeting each other online as they joined in the special fun activities.

Beth Israel Chabad reopened the Shul with the Shavuot holiday on May 29-30 and has been conducting Shabbat-morning services uninterrupted at 10 a.m., followed by a limited Kiddush. Of course, all health protocols, masks, etc., are adhered to.

The highlight of the summer was the hugely successful Circle of Friends End of Year Parade and Closing Ceremony held at Beth Israel on July 8th. The car parade, with police escorts, began in Westport and concluded at Beth Israel Chabad’s parking lot.

Close to 150 teen volunteers, participants, and family members attended this safe, yet exciting, evening event that honored the teen volunteers serving children with special needs within our community.

A closing thought: In the world of sports, elbowing another player is considered an act of aggression and called a foul. Today, with Covid-19, we have learned that even elbowing one another may be transformed into an act of greeting and peace.

For the High Holidays, Beth Israel Chabad is planning a series of services that takes into account the new reality of the pandemic. In addition to a full High Holiday service, condensed services will be held both indoors and outdoors. The community is welcome to attend all services; face-masks are required. The Shul does not require tickets to attend, and a contribution is always welcome.

What a wild few months it has been!
As we continue to pray for those who are ill, and for a speedy resolution of this crisis, we also give thanks to the Almighty for healing the sick, keeping us safe, and guiding us through this most unusual period.

While our usual routine of synagogue life has been greatly interrupted, in a certain sense, the past few months have been some of the most productive in our congregation’s long and storied history. We have banded together in a bond of loving-kindness, calling one another on the phone to check on each other’s welfare, shopping and running errands for the elderly and vulnerable in our community, and sharing words of Torah and prayer via email and Zoom. The myriad stories of our congregants looking out for each other and for people outside of our immediate community during this time of crisis are truly heartwarming.

As a faith-based community that strives to attain a meaningful relationship with the Almighty through the act of prayer, we are proud to offer safe, social-distancing minyanim on a daily basis. We continue to enjoy a wonderful partnership with Jewish Senior Services, and we hold weekday morning services outdoors in the courtyard of the Harry and Jeanette Weinberg Campus in Bridgeport. Shabbat-morning services are held in congregants’ back yards in Fairfield.

For more information regarding our warm and welcoming congregation, please do not hesitate to reach out to us at office@ahavathachim.org.

Looking forward to meeting you,
Rabbi Peretz Robinson
Congregation B’nai Israel has been a gathering space for Reform Jews of all ages and backgrounds in the Greater Bridgeport area for over 160 years, blending sacred traditions with new and creative ways of expressing Judaism that resonates with all generations. We aim to foster meaningful Jewish conversation, vibrant Jewish worship and music, engaging Jewish learning, and impactful social-justice work both within our community and in the world around us.

Following the recent retirement of Cantor Sheri Blum, Congregation B’nai Israel is so pleased to welcome Cantor Michelle Rubel, formerly an associate cantor at Temple Emanu-el in Westfield, N.J. She joins the dynamic clergy team of Senior Rabbi Evan Schultz and Assistant Rabbi Sarah Marion. Cantor Michelle brings a joy, openness, and warmth to the diverse community of Congregation B’nai Israel. As the new cantor, her vision is to make music something all can experience and share together. Her energy and vitality match well with that of our rabbis, who are relatively new in their roles after the retirement of Senior Rabbi James Prosnit.

This strong clergy team and our talented Bonim Early Childhood and Education directors, Alexa Cohen and Ira Wise, are working together with our very active congregants to safely and effectively navigate these very challenging and uncertain times using Jewish values as guidance. All involved strive to bring ever more meaning, more life, more excitement, and more joy to B’nai Israel.

Please consider reaching out to Congregation B’nai Israel through our website cbibpt.org or by calling (203) 336-1858 to learn about our new membership opportunities. L’Shalom!

Staying connected through our values during difficult times...

CHJ places a major emphasis on 
Tikkun Olam, “repairing the world,” a CHJ core value that keeps us all connected. Embedded within this worldview is social action, the DNA of Humanistic Judaism which plays a critical role in how we, as Humanistic Jews, see the world and our place in it.

As we move through these uncertain times, CHJ is contributing to the community in several ways, including monetary donations. So far this year, our membership has donated $1,000 to each of four organizations.

“We chose organizations from a preliminary list of those recommended by the Connecticut Covid-19 Charity, Connection, and the Connecticut Council for Philanthropy,” says Steve Ulman, CHJ Social Action Committee chair. “We looked for organizations that could alleviate the impact of Covid-19 in and around the communities where CHJ’s members live. We also checked each organization’s ratings by agencies that monitor the effectiveness of charities.”

The Connecticut Food Bank provided 22.5 million meals in 2019 through partnerships with local food pantries, soup kitchens, shelters, and other organizations across Connecticut.

Operation Hope of Fairfield works to reduce food insecurity and homelessness through its food pantry, affordable housing, homeless response shelter, and community kitchen programs.

Inner-City Foundation for Charity and Education supports organizations providing food, clothing, shelter, counseling, and education to at-risk children and adults across Fairfield County.

Federation for Jewish Philanthropy of Upper Fairfield County partners with community organizations to provide food, personal protective equipment, and financial assistance. Through a matching-grant opportunity, our $1,000 donation was doubled!

Through targeted donations, CHJ is doing its part to help others cope in these difficult times, and fulfilling our mission of Tikkun Olam.
By Rabbi Richard Eisenberg
In a famous segment from one of my favorite movies, Lawrence of Arabia, T.E. Lawrence is leading a band of fighters in an impossible trek across the Arabian Desert to conquer the Red Sea port of Aqaba when one of the men goes missing, having slipped off his camel while in a heat-induced stupor. Lawrence decides to go back and retrieve him, against the objections of Sherif Ali, who tells him that the missing man must already be dead and any attempt to rescue him is doomed from the start. Then another fighter, referring to the one who is missing, chimes in: “Gasim’s time has come, Lawrence. It is written.” Lawrence answers, “Nothing is written.” Ali, accusing him of blasphemy, warns Lawrence that the mission to take Aqaba will never happen, especially after Lawrence tries to rescue Gasim. Lawrence replies, “I shall be at Aqaba. That is written… (pointing to his head) …in here!”

On the High Holy Days, we ask to be written in the Sefer He-Hayyim, the Book of Life. In the U’Netaneh Tokef prayer we recite: “On Rosh Ha-Shanah it is written, on Yom Kippur it is sealed… Who shall live and who shall die… who by fire and who by water…who by earthquake and who by plague…” How many of us will contract Covid-19 and how many of us will be spared? How many of us will suffer financially? When will we ever get out of this pandemic?

And: Do we and should we leave this up to God? We didn’t cause this plague but we have it in our power to do our utmost to contain it. We can’t wait for God to make it go away. The response is in our hands. The resolve must be written, as Lawrence indicated, in our minds and in our hearts.

Our synagogues, Federation, and other agencies are doing their best to provide vital services to the Jewish community and to do so in a safe and responsible manner. Thanks to Zoom, the internet, and the wonders of technology, we can ensure that the pandemic won’t shut down Jewish life. We can still worship, study, and celebrate together. We can do so while avoiding risky exposure to one another and to Covid. We take this resolve, imprinting it in our minds, while praying for the day when we can safely gather together like before. But until the emergence of effective treatment and a vaccine, we will keep pikuah nefesh, the preservation of life, front and center.

This dark period will not last forever. Doctors and scientists will help us find a way through. Though they may not all agree, I believe God’s wisdom will drive their persistence and ingenuity. Better days are coming. That is written.
At TCS, we have remained spiritually close, even while physically distant. We have begun a daily *minyan* that has met via Zoom for over four months, providing a lift and a surge of energy to help get us through these difficult times.

The Hebrew verb to pray—*l’hitpalel*—also means to judge oneself. When we pray each morning, we look in the mirror and evaluate how we are doing as compassionate and ethical human beings—and as a caring community.

During the Covid-19 crisis, doctors, nurses, and all healthcare workers have been working around the clock on behalf of our community and saving lives every day, fulfilling the mitzvah of *pukuach nefesh*, saving a life. TCS thanks them from the bottom of our hearts as well all grocery workers, delivery drivers, maintenance and cleaning staff, and everyone who is dedicated to keeping us safe and healthy—sacrificing so much on our behalf. As a synagogue, we have been highlighting and honoring the work of our own TCS Frontline Heroes through weekly Shabbat announcements. We are so proud of their dedication and bravery. We are also proud of our TCS mitzvah heroes who have been making masks and delivering food to those in need.

We have begun to gather for Shabbat and Sunday-morning services, outside and distanced. On Friday nights, KabbaLOT in our parking lot and surrounding grass area has been a safe and inspiring way to welcome in the Shabbat. As we look ahead to the High Holidays, we will be offering cutting-edge virtual programming while providing safe and responsible options for some in-person spiritual experiences.

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**Temple B’nai Chaim**

82 Portland Ave., Georgetown | 203-544-8695 | templebnaichaim.org

Temple B’nai Chaim (TBC) in Georgetown is a modern Reform congregation inspired by over 3,000 years of tradition. At TBC, our passion for Jewish life permeates every aspect of our community!

TBC recently welcomed Cantor Harriet Dunkerley as our senior clergy. Working in partnership with the congregation, she strives to connect today’s Jewish families to ancient traditions while making these traditions relevant to today’s world.

TBC is offering a virtual High Holiday experience for our congregants. We began preparing for the High Holidays with special Shabbat services during Elul.

Cantor Dunkerley will lead High Holiday services from our sanctuary, accompanied by her husband, John, who is a professional pianist, using a combination of livestream, Zoom, and pre-recorded segments to keep congregants engaged. We are also planning a drive-in Shofar service in our parking lot on Rosh Hashanah, as well as a socially-distanced in-person community Tashlich service.

For Yom Kippur, our afternoon service will be a restorative Avodah healing service with creative and expansive liturgy. We are also considering a drive-in Ne’ilah Havdalah.

Come see TBC! We offer:

- Meaningful and creative worship experiences
- Social Action activities in the wider community where we can live our values
- Diverse families celebrated and honored
- A Caring Committee that helps support congregants
- Family programming that brings parents into their children’s educational journey
- Interfaith partnerships with local congregations that bring strength and joy to our community.

At TBC, Judaism is something that we live and love. To learn more about TBC, please call 203-544-8695 or visit templebnaichaim.org.
Temple Israel
14 Coleytown Road, Westport | 203-227-1293 | tiwestport.org

Temple Israel of Westport is proud to share its vision of the future of K-12 Jewish learning – Kesher: The Center for Jewish Life.

Rabbi Educator Elana Nemitoft-Bresler, along with guidance from Senior Rabbi Michael S. Friedman, the Temple Israel clergy, staff and community, have restructured our religious school program to enable the exploration of one’s evolving Jewish self, grounded in connection, community, holiness, and love.

This fall, our learning will be online in a small group format which encourages maximum opportunities for our students to engage with their clergy, teachers, and classmates. For students in grades K-7, the Jewish Life portion of our program will encompass experiential learning, social-emotional learning, tefillah, and vocabulary through art, movement, games, song, stories and a connection to Israel. Our Hebrew learning sessions for students in grades 3-7 will continue to offer flexibility for families as they take part in goal-focused online learning. One-on-one learning is also available.

The focus for teens in grades 8-12 is on Jewish values, learning about other religions, social action, and social justice. Highlights of our teen program are trips to the Religious Action Center in Washington, DC, and to Boston to engage with local Jewish organizations.

Kesher: The Center for Jewish Life reminds us that no one thing we do represents all of Jewish learning and community. So many components of living a Jewish life come from living and learning, together.

tiwestport.org/kesherwelcome

Connect with Rabbi Elana Nemitoft-Bresler: enemitoftbresler@tiwestport.org

Temple Shalom
259 Richards Ave., Norwalk | 203-866-0148 | templeshalomweb.org

Challahs for Happiness
By Rabbi Jason Greenberg

One Friday afternoon in quarantine, I got a call from our administrator, Cindy Flynn: “Rabbi, I’m driving through your neighborhood and I have a special delivery just for you!” Oh boy! I thought. What could it be?

Cindy pulled up to our house with her mask on, called out a friendly “Shabbat Shalom!”, and dropped off a nice package with a note that read, “I hope this challah and juice bring you joy in these uncertain times. Wishing you a sweet and happy Shabbat! From Jason Przybiski & Your Temple Shalom Family” Aw... how nice! Jason is a bar mitzvah student of ours.

Later, I learned that my delivery was part of Challahs for Happiness, a school kindness project that Jason came up with. For the first two weeks, he solicited donated challahs from Challah Connection in Norwalk and DiMare Pastry Shop in Stamford. For every challah donated, Jason’s parents purchased an additional challah, and Jason purchased the grape juice with his own money.

After the first week’s deliveries, the outpouring of appreciation was overwhelming! There were phone calls and thank-you cards. “One of our Temple friends was so moved by receiving one of Jason’s Shabbat bags, they offered to help fund the challahs for Jason to continue his mission over the next several weeks,” says Jason’s mom, Jodi. The family purchased challahs from wholesale bakeries. Elated that he was able to bring so much joy to people, Jason ramped up his deliveries. With help from Temple Shalom’s president, office staff, and his sister, Samantha, Jason has now delivered over 120 Challahs of Happiness to members of our community!

Yasher Koach, Jason!
These last months have been trying for all of us, in all aspects of our lives—personal, professional, communal. After we first checked in with every member of our Beth El community, we—like others—found ourselves a new rhythm. We transitioned to Zoom for daily minyan, Friday-evening services, and Saturday-night Havdalah. And about four weeks into our Covid-19 quarantines, we began Zooming on Shabbat and holiday mornings. The warm responses, from congregants and visitors, have confirmed this was the right way for our community to go.

As the new year approaches, we have spent the summer imagining where our society will be. One thing was clear: We would not be able to gather in person. And so we decided to keep the community together... online.

Congregation Beth El-Norwalk will host Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur services digitally, and the stream will be open to the public from our website, congbethel.org. Our High Holiday experience will contain the parts most meaningful to our members, and we will take the opportunity to enhance our services with different online modules of study, discussion, and socializing. While we wish we could be in the same physical space, along with family and friends, we take comfort in knowing that we’ll all be sharing these highlight experiences together from the comfort and safety of our homes.

We look forward to the successful development of a vaccine for Covid-19 and the triumphant return of our entire community to our beautiful sanctuary in time for Rosh HaShanah 5782.

Congregation Beth El-Norwalk
109 East Ave., Norwalk | 203-838-2710 | congbethel.org

A Place to Learn for Every Child
Congregation B’nai Torah is proud to announce that its Talmud Torah program (K-12) will be tuition free to all members in good standing beginning this year.

Here’s how we got to this decision. Last winter, B’nai Torah made extensive renovations that included new carpet, fresh paint, new furniture and a redesign of the offices. During this physical transformation, and while exploring decorating ideas, we found many 8th-grade class graduation photos dating back to the 1970s and ’80s that used to be displayed in our school wing. We decided to redisplay these pictures to honor our commitment to, and history of, education.

The advent of Covid-19 interrupted our ability to finish designing and implementing our new decorations, but we discovered new meaning, strength, and community when our Talmud Torah classes went online with nearly 100% participation. As we all have experienced, a different kind of community thus evolved. This community now includes small groups celebrating Kabbalat Shabbat by grade, led by Talmud Torah teachers, and even a midnight learning class for high school aged kids (who told Rabbi Colin that midnight actually was a convenient time for them).

At the same time, we decided to broadcast our services on Facebook Live and hold online adult Talmud classes and other social events. By doing so, like many synagogues, we opened our “virtual” doors to everyone. And, we have had viewers from around the world, including alumni, which has given rise to yet another community – this one a sacred community. We also have many unaffiliated Jews tune in and we began exploring ways to reconnect them to Jewish experiences.

We learned that the single greatest impediment for unaffiliated members of the community to providing a Jewish education for their children is cost. In an effort to support the Merkaz Community High School for Judaic Studies, we currently run our Tichon High School program tuition-free and provide scholarships for Merkaz.

So, to further our goal of supporting Jewish education, to provide a new place for unaffiliated Jews, and to further the 60-year commitment to our Talmud Torah, the Board of Directors found a way to offer tuition-free Talmud Torah to all members in good standing.

Cost should not be a barrier to Jewish education. And now that our Talmud Torah has changed from a bustling building on a Sunday and Tuesday, to a Zoom classroom with equal digital enthusiasm, we have an even greater responsibility to ensure that EVERY child receives the Jewish education they deserve.

Congregation B’nai Torah
5700 Main St., Trumbull | 203-268-6940 | bnaitorahct.org

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Bennett Center for Judaic Studies | Fall 2020

A SEMESTER OF VIRTUAL LEARNING AND SPECIAL EVENTS

Complimentary Webinars and Events:
See below for registration through the Bennett Center

2020 – 2021 Adolph and Ruth Schnurmacher Scholar-in-Residence Lecture:
Tuesday, September 29 at 7:30pm
“People of the (Printed/Digital) Book: Printing and the Birth of the Jewish Bookshelf”
Joseph A. Skloot, PhD, Rabbi Aaron D. Panken Assistant Professor of Modern Jewish Intellectual History, HUC-JIR, New York City

Celebrating the 100th anniversary of the 19th amendment to the US Constitution:
Wednesday, October 14 at 7:30 pm
“Speaking in a Political Voice: Jews and the Fight for Women’s Suffrage”
Judith Rosenbaum, PhD, historian and CEO of Jewish Women’s Archive

14th Annual Lecture in Jewish-Christian Engagement:
Thursday, October 22 at 7:30 pm (rescheduled from Spring 2020)
“Loving the Jews: Philosemitism and Judaizing in Contemporary Christianity”
Rabbi David Sandmel, PhD, Director of Interfaith Affairs, Anti-Defamation League (ADL), Co-sponsored with the Center for Catholic Studies

Daniel Pearl World Music Days Concert:
Wednesday, October 28 at 7:30 pm
“Cantor Azi Schwartz in Concert: From Bimah to Broadway”
Cantor Azi Schwartz, Senior Cantor, Park Avenue Synagogue, NYC; performer and recording artist

Adolph and Ruth Schnurmacher Lecture in Judaic Studies:
Thursday, December 3 at 7:30 pm (rescheduled from Spring 2020)
“Cotton Capitalists: American Jewish Entrepreneurship in the Reconstruction Era”
Michael R. Cohen, PhD, Stuart & Suzanne Grant Chair in the American Jewish Experience, Tulane University

Tickets Required:
See below for registration through the Quick Center

“Göring’s Man in Paris: The Story of a Nazi Art Plunderer and his World,”
Tuesday, November 10 at 7:30 pm
Jonathan Petropoulos, PhD, John V. Croul Professor of European History, Claremont McKenna College
Open VISIONS/espresso in affiliation with the Bennett Center and the Judaic Studies Program

Jacoby-Lunin Humanitarian Lecture:
“Flint’s Fight for America’s Children”
Wednesday, November 18 at 8:00 pm
Dr. Mona Hanna-Attisha, pediatrician, public health advocate; whistle blower on the Flint, Michigan water crisis.
Co-sponsored with Open VISIONS Forum

Registration required for 9/29, 10/14, 10/22, 10/28, & 12/3 events at fairfield.edu/bennettprograms
Register and buy tickets for 11/10 and 11/18 at quickcenter.com, stay connected with Quick for further info
For questions, contact the Bennett Center at bennettcenter@fairfield.edu or 203.254.4000, ext. 2066