

# KALEIDOSCOPE

JEWISH LIFE IN UPPER FAIRFIELD COUNTY

SPRING/SUMMER 2021

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**KALEIDOSCOPE:** *Jewish Life in Upper Fairfield County* is published semi-annually by the Federation for Jewish Philanthropy of Upper Fairfield County (Conn.).

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**Editor:** Cynthia Mindell

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## From the Lens of David Weisberg



The challenge of writing a column in a semi-annual magazine is that writing the column six weeks before the magazine reaches our community's mailboxes, I have no idea how the world may have changed at that point – let alone how it might change in the six months prior to the next issue.

Never was that more evident than with last year's spring/summer *KALEIDOSCOPE*, where I focused my article on the expanding size of our magazine, completely unaware that, by the time the magazine had reached your kitchen tables, each of our lives would be feeling somewhat less expansive, quarantined in our homes amidst an emergent pandemic that we collectively prayed would be no more than a fleeting (albeit already tragic) moment in our lives.

As I write today – filled as I often am with optimism and hope – one of the few things I'm certain about is uncertainty. Uncertainty about when we'll all be able to return to offices and schools and congregations and theaters and beaches and more. Uncertainty about when we'll be able to come together and exchange handshakes and hugs again. Uncertainty about when we'll be able to take off our masks, see each other's faces, and return to a normal that, just over a year ago felt, frankly, ordinary.

What feels like an irony to me – and part of the reason that I am so filled with optimism and hope – is that whenever we do return to that new-old normal – whether it's during the shelf-life of this issue of *KALEIDOSCOPE* or sometime later – what I am certain about is that it will feel anything but ordinary.

It will be extraordinary.

Extraordinary not only because a simple

ordinary seems so distant right now but instead because of what we've learned about our community over the past year.

We've learned about how we look out for our family, our friends, our neighbors, our fellow congregants, and strangers.

We've learned to not take our neighbors' – or even our own – comfort for granted; knowing that our ability to access life's basic needs – food, toiletries, human touch – might be vulnerable to a next paycheck or a grocery-supply inventory or a government order.

We've learned to be creative, fortunate that the technology and social media we may concurrently bemoan have become an opportunity for connection and community.

While it's been so long since I've seen so many of your faces, I also don't recall a year in which I've had so many inspiring face-to-face conversations. And – in those moments when my microwave oven hasn't interrupted my Zoom connection – I've been deeply inspired by your commitment to each other, our congregations, our community, and our extended Jewish family around the world.

This issue of *KALEIDOSCOPE* has once again swelled in size, back up to a 48-page issue.

Over the past year, my heart has swelled as well.

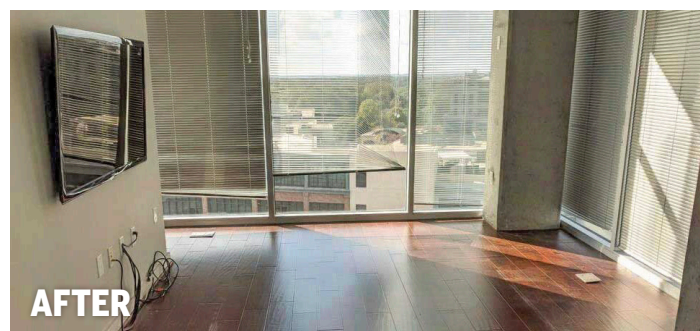
In this issue, we hope to capture just a portion of the inspiring stories of caring, creativity, and self-sacrifice that have emerged over the past 12 months.

Someday our masks will come off. But our community – our compassionate, committed, loving community – will be no less extraordinary.

**We've learned  
about how we  
look out for  
our family,  
our friends,  
our neighbors,  
our fellow  
congregants,  
and strangers.**







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# Shelter and Love, Strength and Comfort

A year ago, the U.S. was just waking up to the reality of a pandemic and taking the first steps to ensure public health and safety. On desks and computers around the country, hundreds of Jewish clergy, writers, and thinkers were chronicling experiences and impressions of those early days, trying to make sense of the new normal and share hope and healing in the midst of uncertainty and loss.

The resulting anthology was published in June 2020. When We Turned Within: Reflections on COVID-19, edited by Rabbi Menachem Creditor and Sarah Tuttle-Singer, is a collection of essays, prayers, and poems that tell our individual and collective stories of a world suddenly turned upside-down. A second volume was published in October 2020. All proceeds from book sales are donated to UJA-Federation New York's COVID-relief efforts.

Rabbi Evan Schultz, spiritual leader of Congregation B'nai Israel in Bridgeport, is among the contributors. He wrote his published essay, "Shelter and Love, Strength and Comfort," on March 12, 2020.

Tonight after putting the kids to bed I decided to go out for a short night run. Today felt immensely hard for so many of us, shutting down schools and synagogues, churches and senior centers. Even Disneyland closed.

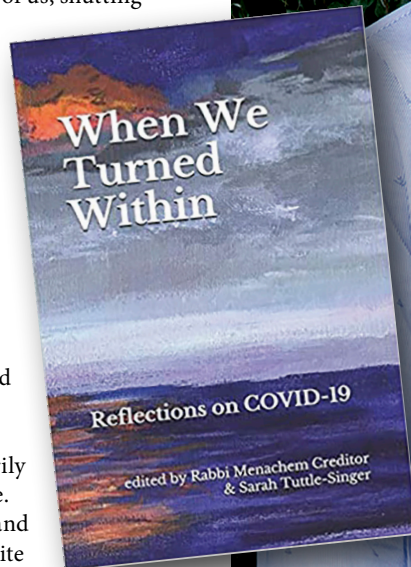
There was a calmness in the air and I made my way down familiar streets, lit by the windows of neighborhood homes that seemed to be engaged in their regular evening activities- the glow of television sets, families gathered around the dining-room table or washing the dishes together. Cars passing by as they do every night.

The last time I felt this way was when I went out for a run in 2012, the night before Hurricane Sandy was scheduled to hit. As I ran along the promenade in Bridgeport, the waves of Long Island Sound seemed unnerved. The cool breeze that I felt would the next day transform into a ferocious storm. Something about that moment then felt eerily similar tonight, although I hope that's not the case.

As I made my way back onto my street tonight and turned off my headphones, I took a moment to recite the Hashkiveinu prayer. Hashkivenu Adonai Eloheinu l'shalom, vhaamideinu shomreinu l'chayim. Grant, O God, that we lie down in peace, and raise us up, our Guardian, to life renewed. Shield us and shelter us beneath the shadow of Your wings. Defend us against illness and sorrow. Guard our going and coming, to life and peace, evermore.

For a moment I felt as though I truly prayed to God, as the droplets of rain and the cool March air briefly calmed my soul. Tonight and in the days to come, may we all find shelter and love, strength and comfort from one another and from our Creator as we weather and prepare for life's impending storm.

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Sam Zuckerman, center, USY International President 2021

# This international president is a teen

Sam Zuckerman would like to meet Theodor Herzl. That's what he told Rabbi Jeremy Wiederhorn of TCS in Westport, in the wake of a milestone moment: in December, the Staples High School senior was elected 2021 International President of United Synagogue Youth (USY), the high-school affiliate of The United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism. Along with its pre-teen affiliate, USY comprises 15 regions in the U.S. and Canada, with more than 350 local chapters and 20,000 members.

As an active member of TCS, Sam led the local chapter housed there and the HaNer Region (New England) before being elected to the organization's highest youth-leadership position.

Regarding the father of modern Zionism, the newly-elected president told the rabbi during a virtual live episode of "Inside the Rabbi's Study," "I would be interested to see what Herzl thinks of Israel today because he died before Israel was created. I would want to talk with him about Israeli politics and how it's gone from 1947 to 2021, and see what else is going on in his life when it comes to Judaism that we either do or don't experience today."

Rabbi Wiederhorn is a former USY International President himself.

**JW:** How did you first get involved in USY?

**SZ:** When I went to synagogue, because of the ages of your kids and Cantor Cattan's kids, it was very hard to avoid youth-group stuff, especially once we revived the Westport USY chapter. I started going to USY events while I was still in Hebrew School and in 2017, when I was a high-school freshman, our former youth director, Annie Glasser, sent an email to all the freshman saying that they needed to fill the position of 9th-grade representative on the chapter board. I happened to be the only person to respond yes to that email so I got the position. From there, I got involved with the regional stuff and slowly worked my way to the international stuff.

**JW:** There are a lot of extracurricular activities for kids your age to do these days. Why did you choose to invest your time in USY?

**SZ:** It started off with the people. My first regional event, in 2017, is where my love truly started. After a while, it became clear that the leadership opportunities and the growth opportunities in USY are much better than what a person my age can get in almost any other place. All Jewish youth groups do an excellent job of giving their kids amazing and truly unique leadership opportunities. After a while – and with the friends I made who took on those positions before me – I got the bug.

**JW:** What are your goals and vision for your presidency?

**SZ:** If I had one thing to get done this year, it would be more mental-health awareness and support for USYers.

The second big-ticket initiative is to build much closer relationships with the other Jewish youth groups like NFTY, NCSY, BBYO. We all have the same goals: to come together in one spot as Jewish teens to enjoy Judaism. So I would like to start a chain of communication between the international boards of all youth groups and hope that my successors will continue that work over five or 10 years. Maybe we can push toward some joint events where we can all work together internationally and on local and hyper-local scales.

**JW:** Looking at the big picture, it's tough to engage teenagers. If there was one thing that we adults should know to help us better understand teenagers today, what would you say is the "secret sauce" to successful teen engagement in 2021?

**SZ:** Adults should know that we're paying attention a lot more than you think we are.

I think people have this mindset that Judaism is fasting on Yom Kippur or sitting through four-hour services. Once you get used to it and see Judaism through other lenses, you appreciate that part, but if that's your only outlet of Judaism, it seems pretty boring. So letting people my age know that being Jewish is a lot of fun, that you

can make amazing friends and have amazing experiences, all while not risking any other part of what would be considered your "normal" teenage life – that's the key to our success in USY.

**JW:** It's been a real tough year for all of us. Is there a lesson that you've learned during this period that you wish to share?

**SZ:** Something I always try to embody – especially now – is that a day where you wake up is a great day. The fact that you can wake up, see the sun rise, do all the things that you want to do, and then go to bed and do it all again the next day, is kind of a blessing. Sadly, there are a lot of people who haven't had that luxury, especially during the pandemic, and a lot of people who have passed away. So just having that ability already makes the day great. Having that mindset has not only helped the days go along; it's also made a lot of the things that I've lost feel much less, because there are so many things that are more important than going to a party or to a USY convention. As long as we can do the important stuff – wake up and smile and make others laugh – we're in a very, very good place.



The future Rabbi Jeremy Wiederhorn, left, USY International Co-Chair 1990







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With your support, in 2020 our Federation stretched to provide stability to our beneficiary partners during the COVID-19 crisis, while providing special support to organizations working on our community's front lines. Allocations from the annual campaign and other sources were directed to the following organizations and programs:



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- PJ Library
- Books2Connect
- Book Buddies
- Community Programs & Events

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- Schoke Jewish Family Service
- Jewish Senior Services
- Keshet Project
- LifeBridge Community Services
- Positive Directions



## Youth & Teens:

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- Bi-Cultural Hebrew Academy
- Ezra Academy
- JCC of Greater New Haven Day Camps
- Merkaz Community High School for Judaic Studies
- Southern Connecticut Hebrew Academy

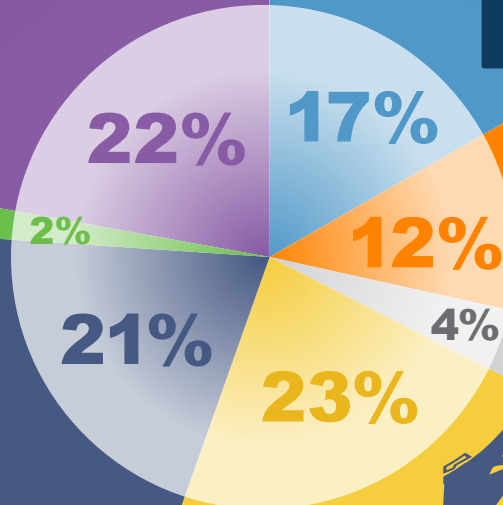
## Congregational Partnerships,

including security consulting and engagement training for congregational professionals and volunteers.



## COVID-19 Relief,

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- Haifa Rape Crisis Center (Afula)
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- Birthright Israel Foundation
- Carl & Dorothy Bennett Center for Judaic Studies, Fairfield University
- Hillel UConn Storrs
- Holocaust Child Survivors of Connecticut
- Jewish Broadcasting Service
- Jewish Council for Public Affairs
- Jewish Federation Association of Connecticut



While 2021 is a new year, our challenges are not behind us, and your generosity will be vital in supporting our extended Jewish family here at home and around the world. Thank you for putting your faith in our Federation to make the greatest impact on our community's behalf.





# From pandemic to pantry

## A new resource to fight hunger in Upper Fairfield County

People are surprised to hear that hunger exists in an area like Upper Fairfield County.

But according to MAZON: A Jewish Response to Hunger, the number of Americans struggling with food insecurity has doubled during the pandemic to 80 million. In Connecticut alone, nearly 400,000 residents, or nine percent of the population, experienced hunger in 2020.

Staff at Schoke Jewish Family Service in Stamford could see the pandemic's impact just outside the office windows. "We had unprecedented numbers of people coming to our Freedberg Family Kosher Food Pantry, a 500-percent increase in demand,"

them," Rebekah says.

A physical location represents the next step in a series of community efforts designed to combat food insecurity in Upper Fairfield County. Since the beginning of the pandemic, a group of TCS volunteers, spearheaded by Julia Marx and Sheri Warshaw, have joined forces with Schoke JFS to deliver canned goods and produce to 50 area families each month. This contact-free delivery has filled a gap by bringing resources to the doorsteps of families in need, easing the logistics of securing food in a pandemic. A neighborhood food pantry would make it even easier for community-members who are mobile to access kosher food as needed, instead of waiting for the monthly distribution.

The search for a site to house Upper Fairfield County's first kosher food pantry began in 2016, when Schoke JFS was expanding its services to the region and had opened a satellite office in the Federation suite at 4200 Park Ave. in Bridgeport. JFS CEO Matt Greenberg approached David Weisberg, who had just started as Federation's executive director.

David, Matt, and Rebekah contacted several potential hosts, but it wasn't until the pandemic underscored the extent of the need in the community that a location was secured.

With demand rising in Upper Fairfield County, it was an easy sell when, in August 2020, Rebekah found herself across the desk from Rabbi Evan Schultz at Congregation B'nai Israel in Bridgeport. "I said, 'We're looking for a place for a food pantry,'" she recalls, "and he said, 'I'd love to talk about it.'"

When B'nai Israel president Larry Levine brought the proposal to the synagogue board, "it was not a hard decision to offer space for the food pantry," says board-member Ivan Maisel. "I can't think of anything that defines *tikkun olam* more than helping to provide food for those in need."

Ivan and fellow board-members Lisa Mallon, Richard Pearlberg, and Brian Ringleheim consulted B'nai Israel member Judy Blumenthal, a veteran volunteer in food pantries – including the nearby Salem Lutheran Church, where many fellow

synagogue-members had also volunteered since its opening in 2015. Brian not only serves as chair of B'nai Israel's House Committee but also runs the Bridgeport-based food-equipment business, Globe Equipment, and helped select the best rolling bakery cart for the pantry.

The utilitarian space contains approximately 40 feet of 12-inch shelves and four feet of 24-inch shelves. "We have to give a major shout-out to Eric Braisted, the B'nai Israel maintenance director," says Ivan. "He created the shelving space in about a minute-and-a-half."


Earlier this year, the Connecticut Food Bank approved Schoke JFS's license application and B'nai Israel volunteers received training at the Stamford kosher food pantry. Schoke JFS will spearhead community-wide fundraising efforts, in part via Federation's TzedakahShop.com online giving platform, which has already proved a successful tool.

"It's really our hope that the pantry will be a community collaborative," Rebekah says. "B'nai Israel is doing a really nice job building it and getting it ready, and recruiting volunteers. Federation has been heavily supporting the launch, doing great fundraising not only through TzedakahShop but through its allocations process and Super Sunday and gala." The pantry will provide the Jewish community not only with essential food items, but with many opportunities for volunteering and mitzvah projects.

"Setting up a satellite pantry in Upper Fairfield County will enable us to serve many more people in a much more comprehensive way," says Schoke JFS CEO Matt Greenberg. "This will prove an invaluable resource to that community: we will finally be able to provide food to hungry clients right in their own back yard."

As the ribbon is cut on the Schoke JFS Kosher Food Pantry in Upper Fairfield County this spring, plans are already underway to launch a mobile pantry in late 2021.

For more information: [ctjfs.org/kosher-food-pantry](http://ctjfs.org/kosher-food-pantry)



From humble beginnings... The new Schoke JFS Kosher Food Pantry in Upper Fairfield County took shape over the winter at Congregation B'nai Israel in Bridgeport.

says Rebekah Kanefsky, director of case management. "Whereas 12 to 15 walk-ins would be a crazy day before COVID, all of a sudden, we had a line out the door and down the street of 40 people, every day."

For several years, the Stamford food pantry has expanded its reach to include Schoke JFS clients in Upper Fairfield County. But the system is unwieldy: volunteers pick up donated food in Bridgeport, drive it to Stamford, sort and pack it, and bring it back to Upper Fairfield County.

"It became clear that we needed a second location because it's just not sustainable to keep doing what we're doing and meet people's needs in a way that is helpful to



# The Korns strike again

## This Westport family is a philanthropic food and fundraising phenom

When the COVID lockdown squelched in-person school and socializing for Staples High School senior Ali Korn, she and her friends suddenly found themselves with a lot of extra time on their hands. The youngest of four sisters raised in a philanthropic home, it was only natural for Ali to face the new normal with a challenge: “How can we spend this time to do something productively good for society?” Many of Ali’s friends responded by raising money to purchase laptop computers for area children in need to use for virtual learning. Ali turned to her family.

The three older Korn sisters – Jordan, Jamie, and Emily -- had moved back home to weather the pandemic with Ali and parents

the program, volunteers deliver weekly Shabbat meals to survivors throughout Fairfield County.

The opportunity had particular appeal to Ali, who had spent the first semester of her high-school junior year in Israel. “We studied the Holocaust intensively for a month, and took a week-long trip to Poland to visit all the sites of the Holocaust,” she recalls. “So when my family heard about Anachnu, it seemed like something that we just had to do and that would be such an incredible experience.”

Starting in May, Ali and any older sisters who happen to be home (joined by Shari’s sister, Lorin Blitzer and niece, Nicki) have

already been doing to support the community in new ways – especially since we weren’t even aware of how much of a need there was in our own neighborhood,” says Jordan.

Using Federation’s TzedakahShop online platform and their social-media marketing know-how, the Korns, true to form, surpassed their goal. “We were so happy that we were able to help these families celebrate the holiday despite the extremely challenging times,” says Shari. “We cannot even imagine how difficult it must be for families who are struggling with illness, loss of jobs, financial uncertainty, and concern about feeding their children. Chanukah is a time of giving, of light and of miracles,



Left: Emily, Jordan, Ali, and Jamie Korn

Right: Ali Korn helps Schoke JFS Anachnu participant, Holocaust survivor Charles Ohlenberg, celebrate his 99th birthday.

Shari and Gary. A family who loves to cook (Gary and eldest daughter Jordan work in the restaurant industry), the Korns spent a lot of time in the kitchen and around the dining table. “We realized how lucky we were that the silver lining of the pandemic for our family was this gift of extra time together, much of which was centered around meals,” says Shari. “But we also realized how many people were truly struggling. We were all so upset by the amount of food insecurity in our country, and especially in our local neighborhood, and we knew that we had to do something as a family.”

Among the many generous role-models in the Korns’ orbit, family friend Sheri Warsaw of Westport knew just where to go. She connected the Korns with Rebekah Kanefsky, director of Case Management at Schoke Jewish Family Service (JFS) of Fairfield County, who oversees the Anachnu program for Holocaust survivors. Through

delivered the weekly Shabbat meals – provided by Schoke JFS with Federation funding – to four Holocaust survivors living in Fairfield.

And because *mitzvah goreret mitzvah* – one mitzvah leads to another – they didn’t stop there. The Korns also started Challah for Change, a Friday baking fundraiser to benefit various organizations supporting the Black Lives Matter movement. Inspired by a recipe learned in an online class with Breads Bakery in Manhattan, the Korns’ challot (and special homemade-babka week) raised nearly \$10,000 over summer 2020. The baked treats became a favorite feature of the Shabbat meals delivered to Holocaust survivors.

As Chanukah neared, Federation’s CEO David Weisberg and director of programming Stacy Kamisar asked the Korns for help on a JFS fundraiser to provide 50 Upper Fairfield County Jewish families with dinner on all eight nights of the holiday. “We were so excited about finding a way to use what we’ve

and we were thrilled to be able to help bring some light to these families.”

There’s no telling what the Korns may come up with next, but one thing is for certain: in addition to delivering weekly Shabbat meals to Holocaust survivors, they will continue to devise ways to help others. “We were lucky enough to grow up in a family who instilled in us the importance of realizing how fortunate we are to have what we have and thinking about ways to give back to the community,” says Jordan.

Shari hopes that others will be encouraged to use the pandemic as a time to exercise their philanthropic muscle. “We so appreciate the efforts of Federation and Jewish Family Service and all of the work that they do to help provide for and ensure the safety and care for vulnerable members in our community,” she says. “We encourage more families to become involved with these organizations and the wonderful work that they do.”



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# Merkaz Zooms to new heights

Where can you find a teen in Fairfield and a teen in Stamford chatting with a Jewish sign-language teacher in New Hampshire facilitating a conversation in American Sign Language and spoken English between the teens and a deaf rabbi in Los Angeles?

This type of geographic boundary-less education typifies Tuesday nights at Merkaz Community High School for Judaic Studies, a Bridgeport-based extracurricular program for Jewish teens in Upper Fairfield County and now far beyond. Each week, nearly 100 Jewish teens log on and Zoom in to a variety of classes taught by both local and far-flung educators.

From the comfort of home, students, faculty, and guest speakers engage in meaningful dialogue and discourse. "I miss the socializing of in-person Merkaz, but the smaller class sizes on Zoom allow for interesting conversations," says Becca Fink, a high-school junior from Fairfield.

Students have embraced the virtual classroom. Some fall classes saw perfect attendance for the entire 12-week semester, an unusual endorsement of instructors and content. Some classes were designed especially for Zoom, an online platform which has enabled access to a broad spectrum of special guest speakers on topics like the making of a racist, and issues in medical ethics. A class on the Holocaust has connected students with survivors and their children living in the New Haven area and throughout Fairfield County.

"The courses translate really well to an online platform," says Beah Rogers, a high-school junior from Fairfield. "There's a wider variety of faculty and classes this year."

Meeting students where they are has taken on a new meaning, according to Head of School Shelley Kreiger.

"These learning opportunities have been tweaked and reformatted based on separate focus groups last summer with both students and faculty," she says. "The students taught us something counterintuitive: classes on Zoom need to be smaller. The teacher needs to be able to see all of the students' faces on one screen. This

meant hiring more teachers and offering more sections of our most popular classes."

Merkaz instituted several curriculum changes in order to offer classes in support of teen mental health. Classes including "When My World Changed," "Growth and Positive Attitude," "Meditation and Mindfulness," and "Peer Relations" provide an opportunity for the students to share their experiences and feelings with

mental-health professionals on a weekly basis. Other courses were adapted to shift focus to address issues raised by the pandemic – "College Bound" and "Choices You Will Make on the College Campus" address how to navigate virtual campus tours, gap years, deferments, and cancellation of Israel programs.

Until the lockdown in March 2020, Merkaz teens and Jewish Senior Services residents would meet weekly for joint activities through the joint Better Together program. In April, Merkaz and JSS were honored with a 2020 Programming Award from the Maryland-based Association of Jewish Aging Services for the Better Together program. In response to the lockdown, Merkaz launched its Mobile Mitzvot initiative to bring emotional and material support to staff and residents of JSS and the adjacent Hollander House, and to organize drives for Schoke Jewish Family Service of Fairfield County. Zoom has allowed Mobile Mitzvot students to continue meeting regularly to plan projects like car parades and video montages.

"It's been nice to still be able to help the JSS residents, with both material donations, entertainment, and emotional support," says Julia Hirsch, a high-school senior from

Monroe. "Our mobile model allows more kids to participate."

Merkaz Mobile Mitzvot is planning a virtual Israeli Independence Day Parade and CARNival for the community. Please watch for updates and additional information.

To learn about Merkaz: [merkazct.org](http://merkazct.org).



Merkaz Head of School Shelley Kreiger and Jewish Senior Services President & CEO Andrew Banoff with the 2020 Association of Jewish Aging Services Programming Award



# Andrew Banoff, frontline superhero

On land, the eye of a tornado is a calm oasis in the midst of havoc. In the pandemic, in the arena of eldercare, Andrew Banoff is the eye.

Andrew's 18<sup>th</sup> anniversary as president and CEO of Jewish Senior Services in Bridgeport comes at the end of the most trying year of his career. Managing a 300-resident assisted-living, nursing-home, rehabilitation, and adult-daycare facility is challenging in the best of times. Add in the confusion and chaos of a public-health crisis, and helming the ship becomes an even more impressive feat.

So it seems appropriate to borrow the famous line from the 1992 film, *A Few Good Men*: you *want* Andrew Banoff at that wheel.

"The people who work in this field are here because we want to serve our elders and the residents and our clients," Andrew says. "That's an incredibly powerful motivator: you're not doing this for yourself. We're not making widgets, we're not making toilet paper; we're taking care of people. For the vast majority of staff, in every part of the organization, the motivation to come to work is because we care about the people we serve. And it keeps you going. I may not want to get up today but a resident needs me, and if I'm a certified nurse assistant or a nurse or a physical therapist or the CEO or anybody else, that's a pretty good, strong reason to be at JSS."

Take it from Westport residents Debra and Marshall Levin, who got to know Andrew two years ago when Debra's mother, Sylvia Hirshout z"l, moved into the JSS assisted-living wing.

Marshall can sum up Andrew's success in one word: compassion.

"There are so many variables at a place like JSS, especially when you're dealing with budgets and other pressures," Marshall says. "Running the assisted-living facility is almost like a rental operation: Who's going to come in? How long will they be tenants? Then there are all the different houses in the nursing home, each having different levels of care. Most CEOs would treat that transactionally, and I think there's a huge difference between being a really good transactional manager and being a compassionate manager. With Andrew, everything is from his heart."

Sylvia's journey was peppered with this kind of love. She moved to JSS in March 2019, an emotional process eased by Andrew, who helped find an apartment quickly and made sure the move-in went smoothly. Until COVID threw JSS into emergency mode, Andrew would visit Sylvia often, getting to

**"You're working  
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Above: Andrew Banoff cooks for a JSS Men's Club luncheon

Right: Andrew Banoff with JSS staff





know her as he does all residents.

"Mom lived with us for nine years before she moved to JSS and we knew that she was really in a wonderful, safe place," Debra says. "We would talk to some of the aides and other staff and ask, 'How long have you been at JSS?' We heard '20 years,' '30 years.' It was so remarkable because, having worked in medical offices, I know that comes from the top down, so we knew that the staff were well taken care of and respected."

That's another key to Andrew Banoff: when asked about his tenure at JSS, he insists on pushing others out into the limelight.

"Recognition of staff, to me, is the real story," he says. "It's kind of fun to be in my job, but JSS is all about people. This is such a community organization. And we've been so blessed that the community embraced us. It's the Bob and Jane Hillmans of the world who are out there advocating, and the Ginger Speichers, who would come in every day and take care of residents, and the donors who make our work possible, and the families who come in and support the residents and staff. It really is the broader engagement of the whole that makes this possible. And I just appreciate the fact that I've been able to do this job for a while."

Andrew doesn't use the word *fun* lightly; it's more about relishing the opportunity to help others. The past year has provided myriad occasions to carry out that personal mission.

As he relayed in "A View from the Rollercoaster" in the fall-winter 2020 *KALEIDOSCOPE*, "in spring 2020, we had nothing," he says. "We didn't have personal protective equipment, we didn't have testing, we didn't have treatments, we didn't have protocols, we didn't have knowledge of anything."

In those early weeks, Andrew would spend his days at JSS and his nights poring over the onslaught of regulatory and industry materials, whose protocols and policies often updated on a daily basis.

Andrew found reassurance on nightly group calls with fellow CEO-members of the National Association of Jewish Homes. He had (and has) daily calls with representatives from various government organizations like the State Department of Public Health, CDC, FDA, Homeland Security, Health and Human Services – even the White House. "Given their structure, all the federal agencies involved did a great job managing the pandemic," he says.

"You're working with a broad circle of people who are all trying to accomplish the same goals and that network really underscores that none of us are in this

alone. So as hard as it is at JSS, it's exactly the same in the next community, and how can we help each other so that there's a much more collaborative environment than there's ever been?"

In the spring, families were allowed to visit their loved ones, but only outdoors. To bolster staff battling unprecedented pressures, JSS started a Healthcare Heroes campaign, thanking its frontline workers via special signage, extra pay, enhanced behavioral-health support, and free meals provided by donations from the JSS board and other community-members. Merkaz Community High School for Judaic Studies cheered up staff and residents with regular car parades and gifts.

Summer provided a much-needed reprieve. The rollercoaster ride slowed down, everyone got to catch their breath, and Andrew encouraged staff to take vacations and recharge before the inevitable second wave of the pandemic.

When it came, in fall 2020, JSS had the



resources to cope.

"We weren't spending all our energies dealing with crisis, but with slightly more known events," Andrew says. "So, while having a resident or staff test positive for COVID was still a horrific experience, at least we were testing everybody every week. We had the expectation that would find people who were positive and prevent others from getting sick, so there was some progress. For example, a staff-member tests positive who's asymptomatic. Without testing, that person would have continued infecting others; with testing, you send them home and you give them a chance to recover without hurting others. The fact that we had these tools made it a much more manageable experience – still horrible, still emotionally difficult, but if the spring rollercoaster was big ups and downs, the fall rollercoaster was much more predictable."

Through candid and personal weekly email updates to the community, Andrew has chronicled the course of the pandemic from his unique position, tallying the

numbers of positive cases and mourning the fatalities, explaining new government protocols, sharing encouraging news, praising staff, lauding board-members and donors for financial and material relief.

In all, as of this writing, JSS had 152 positive cases (92 residents, 60 staff) and 24 fatalities (22 residents, two staff). Among those lost to the virus was Sylvia Hirshout z"l.

The COVID vaccine became available to JSS residents and staff in December 2020. Three days after Sylvia received her second dose, she tested positive. When Andrew called the Levins to tell them that Sylvia would need to be hospitalized, Debra requested that her mother be taken to Bridgeport Hospital. Within minutes, Andrew called back to report that he had spoken with his friend, Anne Diamond, CEO of the hospital, reassuring the Levins "She'll be in good hands."

"It was comforting that somebody knew Mom was coming in because in a hospital, you need an identity and an advocate," Debra says. "Even though the hospital is 15 minutes from where we live, because of COVID, we couldn't be there, we couldn't be her advocate." Diamond also called the Levins once Sylvia was settled in her room.

After a few days, during which the Levins met with Sylvia on FaceTime and Zoom, she was discharged and moved to a COVID-rehabilitation floor at JSS. Since visitors were not allowed, Andrew would check in on her daily, sending the Levins updates and photos. When Sylvia took a turn for the worse, the Levins requested that she receive hospice care.

It was Andrew who made the arrangements for the family, and then invited Debra to have "compassionate care visits" with her mother. For the last few days of Sylvia's life, Debra spent time at her bedside, enveloped in full personal protective equipment.

Sylvia passed away on Shabbat afternoon, Jan. 30, 2021. Andrew, naturally, offered to help with funeral arrangements and attended the Zoom shiva.

"Andrew was wonderful," Debra says. "If we had asked, 'Can you get us the moon?,' he would have said, 'Give me a couple of days.' You have to be born with the desire and the temperament to want to help make life a little bit easier for the elderly. You have to have a love for the elderly and Andrew obviously does. He just is a really good soul. He's an amazing listener and he has a great desire to make the end of life as good an experience as possible. The elderly just want people to pay attention and to listen to them, and Andrew shows that he loves interacting with them and learning their stories. There's great beauty in that."





## Melissa Bernstein: toymaker, seeker, lighthouse

Westporter Melissa Bernstein has already made her mark as one half of Melissa & Doug, the Wilton-based “purpose-driven” global toy company she founded with her husband to ignite imagination and a sense of wonder in all children.

For some people, enhancing the lives of millions of children and offering wholesome play resources for millions of parents would be sufficient *tikkun olam*.

But Melissa has caught a second wind, driven by a personal breakthrough to bring even more light to the world. Scanning the array of brightly-colored and engaging toys Melissa has designed since 1988, it might be difficult to imagine that the mind behind all that creativity has also been wracked by a lifelong struggle with existential depression and anxiety.

That is the focus of Melissa’s new project. Her just-published book, *LifeLines: An Inspirational Journey from Profound Darkness to Radiant Light*, chronicles her triumph over anxiety, depression, and despair – which she wrote to help others who are also suffering.

The book is just part of what Melissa calls the LifeLines “ecosystem,” a new online community designed to support those seeking meaning, purpose, and self-acceptance.

The project seems specially created for

this difficult year, but it’s something Melissa has been honing since 2017. “That’s when I acknowledged that I wasn’t going to be OK unless I stopped racing and took a deep journey inward and accepted myself,” she says.

The book – a sort of emotional autobiography told through sumptuous photos and Melissa’s personal writings – is divided into volumes, each tackling a taboo subject that Melissa had repressed or denied or disassociated from for her entire life, like loneliness, martyrdom, failure, perfectionism.

One volume, “The Futile Race,” describes Melissa’s need to be constantly engaged in contrived activity in order to avoid feelings. “If I didn’t sit still, I wouldn’t have to be with the relentless drumbeat of mortality,” she says. “I could convince myself I was engaging in fruitful pursuits.”

It’s a state many recognize from their pre-2020 lives, and it took nothing less than a pandemic to force a reckoning. “We were all just in our habitual crazy lives, all busy, busy, busy, with barely a chance to breathe,” Melissa says. “But is it anything that has meaning? No, it’s just senseless BS designed to mask our deeper yearning. So COVID, without even a prelude, just put the brakes on: the window crashes down and you’re left looking at absolute emptiness. It’s as if we

all suffered an existential crisis. We all were forced to look at our lives and say, ‘What does this mean? What do our lives mean without all this manufactured activity?’”

Those questions served as Melissa’s starting point. Four years ago, she enlisted a professional therapist for what she calls her “journey to inner space.”

“It took me to some places that I almost didn’t come back from, because when I truly ended up touching the despair, it was a really, really low place,” she says. “But I made it through and I came back to talk about it and that journey became so life-changing and revelatory for me in so many ways that I wanted to recreate it for others.”

Together with her therapist and an expert in yoga and meditation, Melissa worked “space” into an acronym – Stop, Perceive, Allow, Comprehend, and Embrace – which, through specially-designed exercises, allow others to replicate her journey.

Surprisingly, Melissa discovered the way out of existential anxiety and depression in the deliberations of the existential philosophers themselves. Nihilism is the belief that there is no intrinsic meaning in the world and no point to creating meaning. “But the philosophers didn’t want to stay there; even they thought this was untenable,” she says. Existentialism and absurdism were responses to nihilism, teaching that it’s up to each person – through awareness, free will, and personal responsibility – to make meaning in a meaningless world.

“Once I realized that, that was the most profound change,” Melissa says. “Once I saw that you can blame the world or your parents forever, and it does nothing except entrench you in misery, I thought, ‘I’m here for such a short time, why waste another minute? I’ve already wasted decades of my life feeling disempowered to change; enough already! Start to take action.’”

Melissa hopes that others will be inspired to initiate their own look within. “I see every person as an incredible vessel with sparks of light somewhere inside,” she says. “Society or life represses those sparks and pushes them down to such an extent that some of us forget they’re even there or maybe never learned to find them. So I think the goal of life – and certainly my goal – is to shine my light on others. I can’t unearth those sparks for another; it’s an individual journey. But I can say I’ve done it myself, I see that you have a spark, I know you do have the courage to make your journey and find what your spark is.”

Learn about the LifeLines community and free online workshops at [LifeLines.com](http://LifeLines.com) and [@seeklifelines](https://www.instagram.com/seeklifelines).





# Positive Directions: A half-century of nurturing mental wellness

In the wake of a rise in emergency-room visits for mental-health issues, Sen. Chris Murphy met with Positive Directions staff in February to learn about the mental-health challenges faced by patients and providers. Murphy had proposed increased funding for mental-health treatment in the federal COVID relief bill passed by the U.S. Senate on March 6. For Connecticut providers like Positive Directions, the funding would help increase staff size and reduce waiting times for services. Executive Director Jen Hrbek is to Sen. Murphy's left.

This year marks the 50th anniversary of Positive Directions - The Center for Prevention and Counseling, and there has been no time in recent memory like the past year for the committed non-profit to show its stuff.

Positive Directions was established in 1971 in Westport as a volunteer effort by recovering alcoholics to support recovery and bring awareness and prevention into school and community programs. Since then, treatment and prevention programs have evolved to become more disciplined and outcome-focused, and Positive Directions today emphasizes evidence-supported clinical treatment services and community-focused prevention programs.

The agency provides comprehensive behavioral healthcare, treatment for addictive behaviors, and prevention leadership with the goal of improving the lives and mental health of individuals and families. For the last 15 years, the mental-health organization has been a beneficiary partner of Federation for Jewish Philanthropy.

Like all social-service organizations, Positive Directions has seen and responded to increased demand over the past year. After the first few months of the pandemic, focus shifted from addressing physical needs – personal protective equipment, caring for COVID patients, and food insecurity – to mental-health needs. Positive Directions experienced a similar increase in demand.

“Our organization has always focused primarily on mental-health needs, and we fielded more requests from our clients to address physical needs during the first few months of the pandemic,” says executive director Jen Hrbek, requiring more referrals to partner organizations in the community.

Mental health has returned to the fore, with demand for services doubling since March 2020. “We have seen a large increase in demand for services, particularly services that are time-sensitive,” Jen says. “We are seeing a higher volume of more serious and severe mental-health needs that are manifesting, and our referrals per week have at least doubled within the last few months,” with the number of clients in active treatment at more than 400 and a waitlist. In response to the burgeoning need, the Positive Directions clinical staff doubled in size to include a multidisciplinary team of 16 therapists and medication-management prescribers.

In addition to individual counseling, Positive Directions offers support groups. As the pandemic emerged, the organization added COVID-related groups to help the community navigate those early days. Since then, new support groups have taken shape, open to the community free of charge, including one designed for educators; Self-Management And Recovery Training (SMART) Recovery Support Groups; and drop-in meditation sessions.

Jen has advice to help navigate this (or any) challenging time. “Get creative to maintain connection with others,” she says. “Studies have shown that loneliness and isolation have a detrimental effect on both physical and mental health. Connection with others is one of our most basic needs as human beings, so while that may not necessarily look the same as it did in a world pre-COVID, it is still just as essential to maintaining our mental health and wellness. Meet up with loved ones for a socially-distanced hike or other outdoor activity (and soak up some Vitamin D while you’re doing it!), have a virtual movie or game night, take the time to schedule phone or video calls with loved ones, start a virtual book club (or find one to join!), find virtual activities to join in your community – there are many ways to stay connected while also staying safe!”

Among the most powerful tools in the self-care arsenal necessary to meet the challenges brought by the pandemic is to alter expectations. “Our world and circumstances aren’t the same as they were pre-COVID, so our expectations of ourselves naturally can’t be the same either and need to be adjusted to match,” Jen says. “That doesn’t mean we should throw all expectations and standards for ourselves out the window, but it does mean that a natural adjustment and finding a new ‘normal’ is important in order to take into consideration the new circumstances and challenges we face. Take the time to evaluate your needs and capabilities and adjust accordingly.”

The Positive Directions clinician team is eager to help those in the community who are struggling, Jen says, offering a variety of services including counseling, medication management, and support groups.

For more information: [positivedirections.org](http://positivedirections.org)

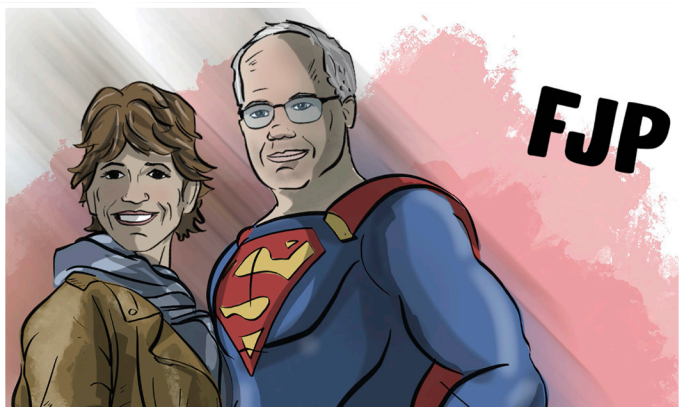


# Scenes from Federation Gala 2021

On March 18, 2021, the Federation held its (Virtual) 2021 Gala. With the theme, "Heart and Music," this year's event, which honored Anne & Mark Kirsch and Laura & Jim Sugarman, was a star-studded affair, featuring a conversation with Tony Award-winning Broadway composers Jason Robert Brown, William Finn, and Stephen Schwartz, moderated by Emmy Award-winning comedian Judy Gold; special musical performances by Tony Award-winners Stephanie J. Block and Kelli O'Hara, and Platinum-selling recording artist Five For Fighting; and some marvelous surprises. A special pitch at the gala aimed to raise funds to support the first year of operations of the new Schoke Jewish Family Service Kosher Food Pantry programs in Upper Fairfield County.



KIRSCHES & SUGARMANS TO BE HONORED AT 2021 GALA



OUR OPERATORS ARE STANDING BY!  
[JEWISHPHILANTHROPYCT.ORG/DONATE](https://www.jewishphilanthropyct.org/donate)





# What makes Sally run?

## Federation's out-going Campaign co-chair on why she helps

**I**t's a bit ironic, but Sally Kliegman doesn't love the act of fundraising. "I hate asking people for money. I detest it," confides Federation's immediate past co-chair of, well, fundraising.

So why did she take on the job together with fellow co-chair Arthur Finkle – not only asking for donations, but leading the team of volunteer solicitors who helped bring in thousands of dollars to help those in need?

It's the motivation behind the act that drives Sally Kliegman. Perhaps this story holds a clue.

Shortly after she and husband Michael moved from the Washington, D.C. area to Westport in 1989, the couple applied to join Birchwood Country Club. At the time, members were required to make a minimum donation to the local Jewish Federation and a certain amount to other charitable causes.

"They wanted members who had some civic responsibility," she recalls. "At our application meeting, we were asked, 'What charities do you give to regularly?' and we made a long list and they were very impressed and I said, 'You understand that these are not all major contributions' and they said, 'It doesn't matter: you feel an obligation.'"

That sense of responsibility for the welfare of others was honed during Sally's childhood in the Washington, D.C. area.

"I grew up in a family that was always involved in the Jewish community," she says. "My parents and grandparents set the example that this is what a Jewish family does; I was brought up knowing that I had an obligation to my people. Their involvement spanned across the Jewish-cause spectrum – charities, libraries, educational institutions, Zionist organizations. My mother was involved in a lot of organizations – National Council of Jewish Women, ORT. In the '30s, her parents used to go down to the docks in Baltimore and meet boats with Jewish refugees and help them find places to live, find them jobs, get them settled. My father had a slightly different attitude: he was very supportive financially of Jewish organizations, but he had been in the army during World War II for four-and-a-half years, four of them overseas – he went in as a private at 22 and came out as a captain at 26 – and he said, 'I've given enough time, I'm happy to share my good fortune.' My parents used to say, 'If Jews don't give to Jewish causes, nobody will.'"

Michael Kliegman comes from a similarly involved family, so the couple has contributed to and volunteered for many Jewish organizations and causes throughout their 41-year marriage. They are currently members of AIPAC's National Council and trustees of The Washington Institute for Near East Policy.

"Whether on a local or national level, it is an obligation to your own people," Sally says. "It is wonderful to support other causes, but that should always be in addition to Jewish causes. It doesn't have to be \$10,000; it could be \$50 or \$100 – but it's a buy-in."

Sally began volunteering at Federation five years ago, invited to join the Allocations Committee by longtime Federation donor and volunteer Linda Russ. Last year, when asked to serve as Campaign co-chair, Sally thought she could rise to the task if offered support. "Thankfully, Janet Wainright [development manager] and David Weisberg [CEO] provided a lot of that," she says. "I saw great value in bringing the whole Jewish community in Upper Fairfield County



together and I think that Federation has taken strides in that regard."

After numerous phone-athons and a stint at the heart of Federation's philanthropic endeavors, Sally is clear-eyed about the power of collective giving.

"Are you going to write a check to every single recipient that Federation supports?" she says. "From Jewish Family Service and Jewish Senior Services, to all the organizations for at-risk youth in Afula, to Jewish day schools, Hebrew high schools, BBYO, to the dwindling population of Jews in Ukraine? And what about after the Pittsburgh synagogue shooting, when Federation organized every Jewish congregation in our area to offer consultations with security specialists, and covered the consulting fee? And the extra funding we've been providing in the face of COVID? There is a purpose for a bedrock central organization. Nothing is stopping anyone from contributing directly to a particular recipient. But isn't it nice to have a community that can respond in times of crisis as well as every day?"

Now that Sally has handed the co-chair reins to Linda Lerman, who will continue the work with Arthur Finkle, she has more time for her other lifelong pursuit. "I've always had a passion for the arts," she says. "I studied dance most of my life, studied art history in college, worked in Washington, D.C. at the Phillips Collection and the Smithsonian Resident Associates Program, designed high-fashion jewelry." She can often be found at her easel, painting textural abstractions, or with a good book, or walking the Kliegmans' three large dogs.

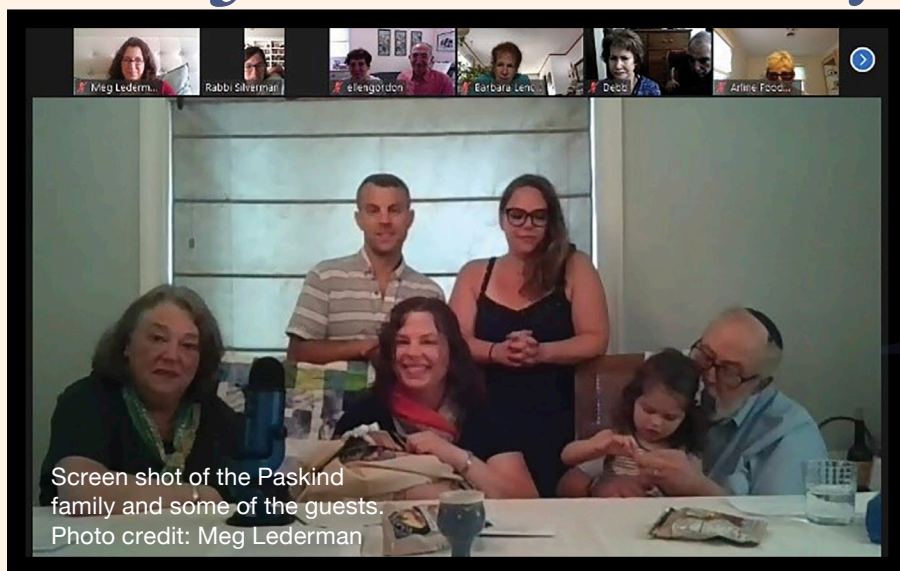
And although raising money could be challenging, Sally was often heartened by the response – for example, when calling older donors. "I enjoyed their enthusiasm," she recalls. "They've been giving for decades – usually the same modest amount – and they seemed to genuinely appreciate being reminded of their participation in and commitment to Federation. I would love to find the button to push to get more Jews to see what these donors see: the value in what this organization does and can do for the Jewish community."



# Jewish Lifecycle Events

## Adjust to a Virtual Reality

*In a year unlike any other, our Jewish traditions – as much as ever before – provided a sense of stability in uncertain times. In our Upper Fairfield County Jewish community, and across the world, our clergy found creative ways to bring connection and meaning despite distance, finding the intersection of ancient customs and modern technologies.*



### BRIS & SIMCHAT BAT

Please Mute Yourself for “*Siman Tov u’Mazal Tov*”

**Rabbi Ita Paskind, Congregation Beth El-Norwalk**

I myself was blessed to give birth to my second daughter, Ayala Ziv, in August 2020. Almost my entire pregnancy was during COVID, so hardly anyone got to see my belly growing (except over Zoom). It was clear that her Simchat Bat, her baby naming, would be over Zoom as well.

Some aspects of Ayala’s Simchat Bat were normal: my family was with me, we recited blessings, she received her name, and her big sister Noa screamed through part of it.

But everything else would have been unrecognizable a year ago. All guests were remote. My close rabbi friend officiated from her home in Massachusetts. My siblings spent an hour setting up our Zoom space and checking lighting and sound. There was no celebratory meal, and we even forgot to arrange something special for ourselves to eat afterward!

But like so many parts of this difficult year, there were silver linings, too: friends and family joined us on screen from all across the U.S., Canada, Brazil, and Israel. I set up Zoom to record, so I can watch the ceremony any time, and a colleague co-hosted and saved the good wishes people wrote in the chat. (And, dare I say it: I saved a ton of money because there was no meal!)

I have also been honored to help two wonderful families welcome their baby boys into the covenant during COVID-19. The pluses and minuses of my Simchat Bat were also true for these families, with the additional wrinkle of figuring out the actual circumcision. One family was comfortable having the *mohel* in their home while the other was not. I sought wisdom from rabbinic colleagues about how to guide the family whose son would have a hospital circumcision, and then we crafted a ceremony around that. Even the family that welcomed a *mohel* into their home had to make compromises: in order to minimize contact, only the *mohel*, the parents, the baby, and the *sandak* (person honored with holding the baby during the bris) were present; even the big sister and the grandma needed to remain upstairs and participate via Zoom!

All families celebrating a milestone on Zoom and all officiants have needed to be creative about how those in attendance can flood the celebrants with love... while on mute. The time lag on Zoom makes it virtually (ha ha) impossible to sing together, so that moment of “*Siman Tov u’Mazal Tov*” becomes a solo performance. Some celebrations included all participants waving or blowing kisses at the same time. Others had all participants raise a *l’chayim* at the same time.

Bottom line: while a Zoom Bris or Simchat Bat is really not the same as in person, it does get the job done. It really is possible to feel the love from everyone who participates. It remains to be seen which parts of these Zoom celebrations we’ll hold onto, but of this I am sure: we all look forward to safely and healthily welcoming new babies while in the same room!



### B’NAI MITZVAH

**Temple B’nai Chaim**

**Cantor Harriet Dunkerley**

COVID has forced us to close our building, but it has not dampened our commitment to stay connected to one another and to find innovative (and safe) ways to celebrate our congregants’ lifecycle events. Our Religious School students – particularly those about to reach the milestone of their B’nai Mitzvah – were most impacted because their services and celebrations had to be postponed.

Our synagogue is nestled in the woods between Wilton and Redding. It is an idyllic, peaceful, and bucolic setting. We were able to take advantage of our courtyard to hold postponed B’nai Mitzvah services outside in our courtyard over the late summer and into the fall. We tented the area, limited the number of participants and guests to ensure social distancing, and used Zoom so that family and friends from near and far could also attend. We set up a protocol to ensure everyone’s safety, including taking temperatures and requiring all participants to complete and sign a health questionnaire. We even had a flock of uninvited wild turkeys join several of the services!

The results were far better than we had anticipated! Our six B’nai Mitzvah families were delighted that we had succeeded in making their special days extraordinary!







Rabbi-Cantor Shirah Sklar officiates at Lauren and Jake Rosenbaum's wedding.

## WEDDING

**Temple Shalom, Norwalk**  
**Rabbi-Cantor Shirah Sklar**

Lauren and Jake were supposed to be married surrounded by family and friends in a dream destination wedding in Lake Como, Italy on Aug. 1, 2020. The family had made arrangements for Rabbi Mark Lipson of Temple Shalom to accompany them on the trip and officiate the wedding in Italy. When the pandemic hit, the couple still had some hope that their plans could somehow come to fruition, but as time progressed, it became clear that travel to Italy was not in the cards for that date. Wanting to mark the day as their official wedding as they had planned, I officiated a beautiful, intimate ceremony on Aug. 1 in the backyard of the bride's family home overlooking the Weston Reservoir. We were joined by the bride's parents and her beloved grandmother, and the groom's family over Zoom. Although not the large-scale wedding they had planned, the afternoon was beautiful, filled with love and gratitude and the celebration of a new bride and groom beginning their life together. There are plans to celebrate the couple in Italy once it becomes safe to travel again, but Lauren and Jake's wedding will always be a representation of hope and joy during a very challenging time.

## MEMORIAL SERVICE

**Congregation for Humanistic Judaism of Fairfield County**  
**Marilyn Brownstein**

One of the most significant lifecycle events we experience is the celebration of a life at a funeral or memorial service. Whether we are mourning the death of a parent, a spouse, a sibling, a child, or a friend, it is usually a time of looking back, a reflective mix of sadness and loss, accompanied by tears and perhaps some laughter.

On Aug. 21, 2020, CHJ gathered together virtually to remember and honor the life of my husband, long-time member Sam Brownstein, who passed away at age 90. The service was a warm and moving tribute to his life, character, and accomplishments. Sam was a successful businessman, a caring and socially conscious citizen, and a loving husband, father, and grandfather. I shared memories of our life together, spanning more than 50 years. I recounted Sam's early years, some incidents derived from memoirs he had written, his adult personal and professional life, and his many contributions to CHJ. Our children, Jessica and Peter, spoke movingly of their father and their relationship with him, offering interesting and revealing anecdotes.

CHJ members contributed thoughtful remembrances as well about Sam as a friend and fellow congregant. Sam and I were fortunate to be early members of CHJ and to help perpetuate our congregation as an enduring, vibrant community.

## FUNERAL

**Congregation Beth El Fairfield**

Since March 2020, Rabbi Marcelo Kormis and Dr. Samantha Stinson, director of Education, Ritual & Music, have each officiated or both co-officiated some 20 funerals, all exclusively graveside without the customary prior indoor service in a sanctuary or funeral home. At that time, a maximum of 20 people were allowed to attend in person, with funeral homes graciously providing cameras, sound equipment, and Zoom links for mourners to attend virtually. All participants wear masks and use hand-sanitizer before sharing shovels to assist with the burial. "We still get to hear the kindest words spoken about the departed," says Stinson. "The hardest part is not being able to properly comfort people with hugs."

## SHIVA

**Beit Chaverim Synagogue of Westport/Norwalk**  
**Rabbi Greg Wall**

The Beit Chaverim virtual *shiva* has been a notable method of coping with COVID. In many ways, it avoids some of the pitfalls that greatly reduce the effect of a traditional *shiva*: the tendency for socializing instead of being *menachemim aveilim* (comforting the mourners), and the inevitable deli-fest that often takes precedence over the mitzvah at hand. With the Zoom minyan, all the attention is placed on the *aveilim*, and there is little opportunity for side or off-topic conversations to diffuse the power of *shiva*. I think this is something that will survive after COVID passes: many more people will have the opportunity to do the mitzvah, as distance will not prevent a *shiva* visit.





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# Speaking volumes

## Book Buddies volunteers send a midwinter gift to Bridgeport students

This would have been Year 4 of Book Buddies, Federation's literacy program that trains and pairs adult volunteers with students at Blackham School in Bridgeport and Brookside Elementary School in Norwalk. The weekly 30-minute meetings are designed to encourage students in underserved and at-risk communities to improve their reading skills and develop a lifelong love of books.

But this unprecedented year has upended many in-person programs, Book Buddies included. Co-chairs Anita Chargar and Lauren Zirn, who started the initiative in 2017 as part of Federation's Books2Connect, devised a creative stopgap, encouraged by the 30 Book Buddies volunteers who haven't seen their young reading partners since early 2020.

"The volunteers kept asking, 'What can we do? We really want to do something,'" Anita recalls. Inspired by a book drive led by Connecticut Sen. Chris Murphy, Anita and Lauren decided to raise enough money to provide books not only for the Book Buddies children at Blackham School, but for the entire 3<sup>rd</sup> grade of 106 children.

The co-chairs put out a call for donations to their volunteers. Within two weeks, most had responded. "What's touching to us is that not just our Blackham volunteers but also our Brookside volunteers donated," Lauren says. "I think they just recognize that there are so many children in need."

Most current Blackham volunteers have been with the program from its inception, and have developed close bonds with the students, many of whom have asked their teachers to connect

with their adult buddies, a task too labor-intensive for the already-strapped school staff.

"This seemed to be a good way to give the children a midwinter gift and to show that we are thinking of them," Anita says.

A former educator, Anita mined the Scholastic website for a robust selection of fiction and non-fiction books to match students' interests and reading levels, titles and series that reflect diverse faces and family relationships.

"This is also a way of maintaining our connection with our volunteers, who are very committed to the kids and to the program," says Lauren.

"For me, this project has been a reminder of how important Book Buddies is, how important the bonds that have been created between students and volunteers, and how much we want to be able to do something for Blackham," Anita says. "That bond is what's really missing: when we go around to collect the kids, they jump out of their seats and they're really excited to come see their buddies. So this is just a little thing that we could do to make a difference during this challenging time."

As Blackham serves not only educational needs but also provides meals for many of its students, Anita and Lauren hope to organize a follow-up drive in the spring.

"The real lesson of the pandemic is just how much people want to help others," says Lauren. "We have so much appreciation for our volunteers continuing to care."

**"This seemed to be a good way to give the children a midwinter gift and to show that we are thinking of them."**



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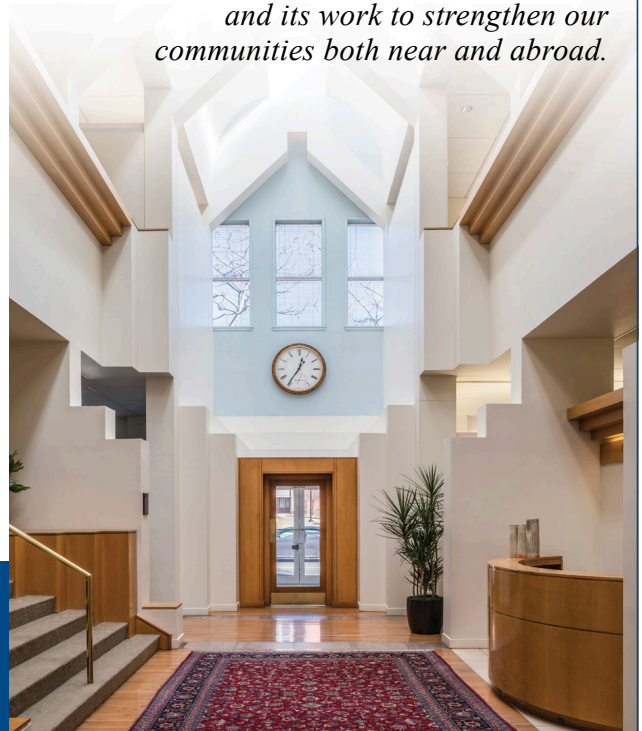
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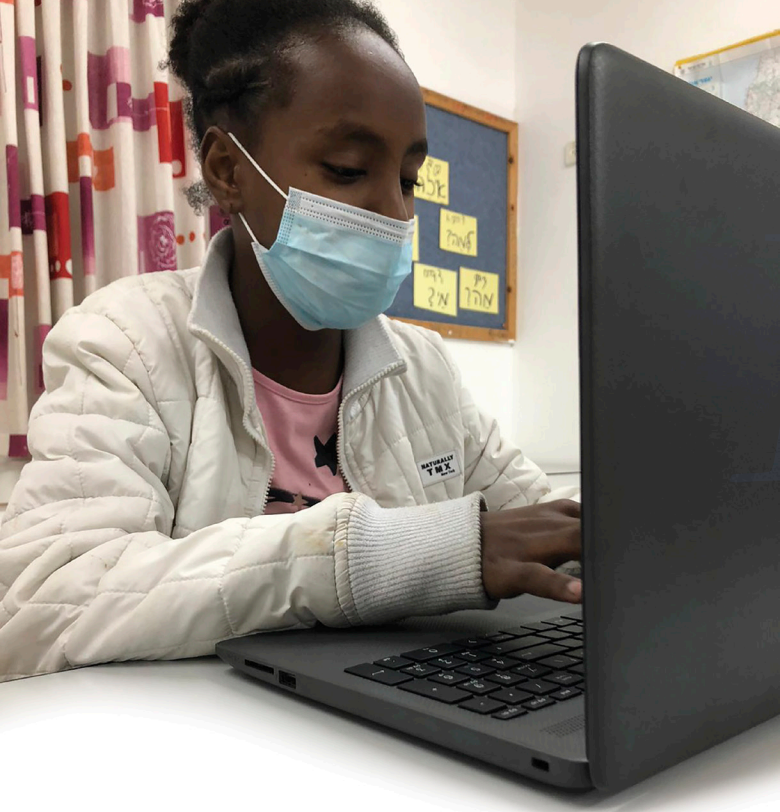
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Community High School for Judaic Studies







## Meanwhile, 6,000 miles away...

Federation for Jewish Philanthropy is a member of the Southern New England Consortium of 12 Jewish federations in Connecticut, Massachusetts, and Rhode Island who partner on collaborative projects with the Jewish Agency For Israel and its affiliated organizations in the Afula-Gilboa region of northern Israel.

When the pandemic hit both ends of this “living bridge,” SNEC federations quickly allocated funds for the most critical needs in Afula-Gilboa – from life-saving medical equipment to food packages for residents under lockdown to activity kits for seniors in isolation.

The partnership continues to make a difference for our extended family in Israel.

“One of the amazing things about the SNEC connection with Afula-Gilboa is that we are connected no matter what,” says Sharon DeFala, board-member of both Federation and SNEC. “During this time, when our next-door neighbors feel further away than ever before, we still have the ability to share resources with our sister community in Israel. Our partners in Afula-Gilboa let us know what’s needed, our SNEC communities provide funding, and our partners make it all come together. And then, the next thing we know, a grateful young girl who has immigrated to a new country during a global pandemic opens her very own, very first, laptop computer to begin her life as an Israeli. An overworked hospital employee receives a basket of joy created by a team of underprivileged teens, with an assist from Americans they may never meet. It makes the world warmer and closer at a time when what we all desperately need is the sense of human warmth and closeness.”

A recent wave of new Ethiopian immigrants returning to their Jewish homeland has brought new needs for support, as the Beit Alpha Absorption Center in Afula, Israel, was crowded with new *olim*, including many students needing laptops for distance learning due to the pandemic. SNEC made funds available to purchase new laptops for these students, including the young girl pictured here.



Teen volunteers from the Afula Crowns Community Center's Sandwich Club assembled *mishloach manot* Purim-treat baskets for delivery to frontline healthcare workers at Emek Medical Center in Afula. The contents were purchased with a SNEC allocation.

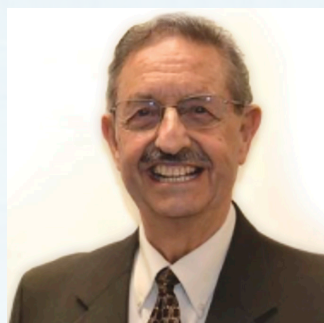


# On the front lines of *tikkun olam*

Federation's Jan. 31 Mitzvah Hero Awards ceremony – the fourth annual and first virtual – honored 12 Upper Fairfield County “good-doers” selected by their respective congregations.

## **Barry Diamond** Congregation B'nai Israel

Barry offers “Be the Boss,” a free entrepreneurship-training



program in Bridgeport and surrounding communities for individuals currently or formerly incarcerated who want to start their own business upon reentry. Barry developed the course based on his own business-consulting background and with the input of many business experts. He created a training manual to help future entrepreneurs develop a successful business plan. To date, Barry's program is offered inside five Connecticut prisons and has been approved by the Federal Bureau of Prisons/drug court support as a means of reducing inmates' sentences by one year. Barry's course has been praised by the Director of Reentry for the FBI, Director of Reentry for the Attorney General's Office, a congressperson, two governors, two DOC commissioners, mayors, and many community leaders.

## **Marty Gitlin** Temple Shalom

From his service on the Board of Trustees, as Ritual Committee chair and as a member of the Bylaws Committee, Marty has worked countless hours to enhance temple life. Marty is also a devoted member of the volunteer choir, sharing his passion for music during special services and concerts. Marty is a

committed Jew and community-member, always willing to get involved to support, enhance,



and participate in any project, big or small. He is a true mensch. His contributions and efforts were especially meaningful during this past year, when he worked with clergy, leadership, and congregants to build bridges and secure a location for drive-in High Holiday services, held safely and joyfully outdoors at the Remarkable Drive-In Theater in Westport. He also coordinated and produced beautiful virtual choir videos to enrich our community's services.

## **Barbara Jay** Congregation for Humanistic Judaism of Fairfield County

Since joining CHJ in 1976 with her late husband, Saul, Barbara has been an active volunteer. CHJ members have benefited from her contributions, including creating and leading Shabbat services and programs, helping to create



CHJ's website and online monthly newsletter, and serving in various leadership capacities including board member. Barbara's giving extends well beyond the CHJ community, as she is often found participating in CHJ's social-action initiatives in support of

various causes and organizations. Emblematic of Barbara's desire to improve the world is the Saul Haffner Jewish Enrichment Fund. Established by Barbara three years ago in memory of her husband and under CHJ, the Fund's principal purpose is to create and support high-quality events with a Jewish theme, reflecting Saul's many interests, including social issues and taking action, and are open to all.

## **Dick Kalt** TCS

When it comes to performing mitzvot, Dick is the first to volunteer, without hesitation and with pure intentions. For High Holiday services, he oversees transportation and works with the consultant on sanctuary audio setup. When TCS conducts a food drive, Dick is there. When a minyan is needed, Dick is there. Not only is Dick generous with his time, but he has always been

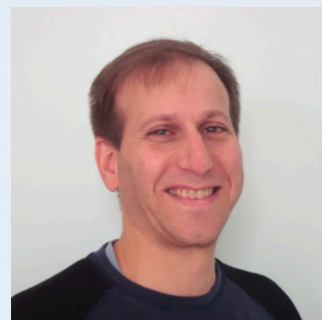


generous with useful resources, such as providing thumb drives printed with the TCS logo for B'nei Mitzvah students to use when learning their prayers and readings. Dick has served on the Cemetery Committee for many years and visits the cemetery regularly to check on its upkeep. As soon as COVID-19 hit, Dick helped upgrade TCS's live-streaming capabilities for Shabbat and holiday broadcast. Dick sits on the Building Committee and Board of Directors as Security chair.

## **Jeff Levi** Congregation B'nai Torah

A regular shul-goer and B'nai Torah's “tech wizard,” Jeff is always available to lend a hand or a listening ear and to share his wisdom and common sense.

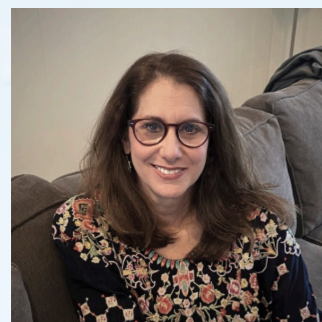
He has undertaken a variety of roles at the synagogue over the years – currently as treasurer of Trustees and chair of the



Security Committee. He served as co-president from 2010-2013, a period of tremendous growth at B'nai Torah, and worked to improve the synagogue's stability and visibility. He spent many years as VP of House and probably understands the inner workings of the facility better than anyone. There is no area of B'nai Torah that Jeff has not touched – including the roof! Loved and respected by all, Jeff is at the top of the list of people to call to for help or input.

## **Hildy Parks** Beit Chaverim Synagogue of Westport/Norwalk

Hildy Parks fills the thankless position of synagogue treasurer. Somehow she has managed to keep the lights on, pay staff, and ensure that congregants



understand the importance of keeping the shul open. Hildy stays on top of the latest government programs for non-profit assistance, reads countless memos, rules, and guidelines, and fills out many applications. She keeps track of innumerable details — with a smile, and without



complaint or regret. A few weeks before the High Holidays, the beloved shul administrator reported that her family had to relocate immediately. Hildy performed most of the office tasks herself and got the synagogue through the most stressful period of the year. Afterwards, she worked out a system for the administrator to telecommute from out of state, and personally took on the day-to-day tasks that could not be done remotely.

**Andrew Moss**  
**Congregation Beth El-Norwalk**

Last winter, when Rabbi Ita Paskind announced her pregnancy, Andrew agreed to serve as the officiant for High Holiday services. When COVID



arrived and Beth El decided to go virtual, Andrew stuck with his commitment and joined the High Holiday planning team. He served as Master of Ceremonies, working with lay daveners across the bimah, the IT consultant on Zoom, and congregants at home. A human-resources professional, Andrew has been an asset to the synagogue for many years. He first dipped his toes into volunteering by donating scotch for a tasting event. Since then, he has served on the Board of Trustees and Executive Committee, co-chaired the Ritual Committee, negotiated contracts, and served on a strategic team to transform the religious school and preschool. Andrew is always the go-to person when any HR situation arises.

**Mitchell Rapoport**  
**Beth Israel Chabad of Westport/Norwalk**

A regular participant in Beth Israel Chabad's Shabbat-eve and Shabbat-morning services, Mitch is grateful to have discovered the inspiration and connection afforded through traditional Judaism. He is active in promoting awareness of the synagogue to the greater Norwalk-Westport

community, including editing shul communications, and in-shul social programming. Mitchell is the kind of person who



motivates others to be active at the shul. His personal example of positivity and generosity of time and talent are an inspiration for many to emulate. He enjoys fulfilling his religious duty of blessing the congregation with the Birkat Kohanim, as he is a Kohain. Mitch is also a dedicated participant in Beth Israel's weekly Chabad University Torah Classes held via Zoom. He is a former board-member of the Jewish Federation of Greater Danbury.

**Steve West Rosenthal**  
**Temple B'nai Chaim**

Steve serves as House chair and quietly makes sure that the officially-closed building is safe and secure with all systems running smoothly. He headed the High Holy Day technology



team, working tirelessly to bring old systems up to snuff, assembled and trained a superb production team, and sourced all the equipment needed to ensure a meaningful High Holy Day experience. Steve spent countless hours setting up the sanctuary for its first-ever livestreams, ensuring that visual T'filah synched up with what was happening on the bimah. In the midst of all that preparation, Steve coordinated and ran six outdoor B'nai Mitzvah and a Sukkot Shabbat Festival morning service, assisted with

an in-person Religious School opening-day program, helped with virtual choir recordings, and troubleshooted off-site Zoom setups for reliable virtual transmission.

**Steve Robifker**  
**Congregation Beth El Fairfield**

For more than 25 years, Steve has served on Beth El's Executive Board as vice president of House and co-chair of the Human Resources Committee. He oversees the synagogue's physical property, including the congregational



cemetery, responding to all emergencies, maintaining our computer systems, and addressing all technology issues and concerns. This past year, amidst the pandemic, Steve helped put together Beth El's policy and guidelines for keeping everyone safe at the synagogue. He worked closely with the staff and other committees, especially the preschool and Religious School, so that a safe in-person reopening could take place. Steve was instrumental in successfully implementing and coordinating remote High Holiday services. He worked closely with the production company, directing the broadcast and providing congregants with a truly meaningful experience under very difficult circumstances.

**Susan Spivack**  
**Congregation Rodeph Sholom**

Dr. Susan Spivack exemplifies mitzvot ben adam l'havero, mitzvot performed by a person for her fellow(s). She will often

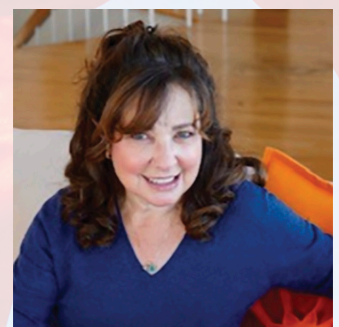


mow not only her own lawn, but her neighbors' as well. She also embodies lifnim mishurat ha-din, going beyond the letter of the law and the call of duty. A retired Bridgeport high-school business teacher, she continues to communicate with many former students. Sue has a lifelong dedication to Rodeph Sholom. She worked in the office as a teenager; more recently, she stepped in at a critical time to help manage and organize the office. She regularly interacts with congregants and others, doing whatever she can to help them feel comfortable. Pre-pandemic, she often led daily services and helped with ushering. Sue has decluttered closets, vacuumed floors, catalogued synagogue ritual items, kept memorial-board plaques lit, and more -- all as a volunteer!

**Cindy Zuckerbrod**  
**Temple Israel**

"I am lucky that I have the time to help make our world just a little bit better for everyone."

For several years, Cindy has



led Temple Israel's community-organizing work through Congregations Organized for a New Connecticut (CONNECT). She serves on the CONNECT Strategy Team and has played a leadership role in numerous CONNECT actions and victories. Among many synagogue roles, Cindy helped lead the recent Anti-Racism Trainings and Two Books/Two Films program addressing race in America, served as a Trustee, and taught in the high-school program. Outside Temple Israel, Cindy has long volunteered as a guardian ad litem advocating for youth in Connecticut's foster-care system, both in the court and the community. She can always be counted on whenever asked to step up for the community, and is a reassuring voice of compassion and empathy at every turn.



# Open, Sesame!

PJ Library families enjoyed some sweet tahini fun in a cooking demonstration with Amy Zitelman, CEO and co-founder of the women-owned Soom Foods. Sharing a love for food, family, and community, Amy and her two older sisters established Soom Foods in 2013, bringing quality tahini and tahini products to the American market.

Amy shared her journey into tahini, chatted about her family's favorite PJ Library books, and taught an eager audience how to make Orange Tahini Sorbet – with an assist from her toddler son, Henry. The recipe is found in Amy's new cookbook, *The Tahini Table: Go Beyond Hummus with 100 Recipes for Every Meal* (Agate Publishing, 2020). Using colorful bowls and spoons, Amy shared her tricks in navigating the recipe while keeping even the youngest of cooks engaged. If you missed the fun, watch the demo here: [youtu.be/3JKjn7pJxS8](https://youtu.be/3JKjn7pJxS8)

**PJ Library sends free Jewish children's books to families across the world every month.** Something magical happens when family-members sit down to read together. PJ Library shares Jewish stories that can help a family talk together about values and traditions that are important to them.

Learn more about PJ Library and upcoming PJ Library events in our community, [pjlibrary.org](https://pjlibrary.org), [facebook.com/PJLibraryCT](https://facebook.com/PJLibraryCT), or [jblumenthal@jewishphilanthropyct.org](mailto:jblumenthal@jewishphilanthropyct.org).

## WE'RE MAKING SORBET!

### Recipe: Creamy Dairy-Free Tahini Sorbet

**Technically this dessert is sorbet because it has no cream, but the richness of the coconut milk combined with tahini gives it the mouthfeel of premium ice cream.**

MAKES ABOUT 1 QUART

- 1 (14-ounce) can full-fat coconut milk, well mixed
- 1/3 cup premium tahini paste
- 1/3 cup honey
- 1/4 cup freshly squeezed orange juice
- 1 1/2 teaspoons vanilla extract
- 1/8 teaspoon almond extract
- Blend everything in a blender or a food processor until smooth, then pour into a shallow baking pan, such as a brownie pan or pie pan.
- Freeze until solid, at least 2 hours, or up to 2 days.
- Cut into cubes with a sharp knife and purée in a food processor until smooth. Scoop and serve.
- Store in a closed container in the freezer for up to 3 days.

Reprinted with permission from *The Tahini Table* by Amy Zitelman, Agate Publishing, November 2020.





# Women's giving event bolsters Israeli non-profits during COVID

On a Sunday morning in December, 32 women from throughout Upper Fairfield County “met” on Zoom with representatives of four non-profits working to advance social change in Israel. Though virtual, the conversation provided an opportunity for the Federation community to get a personal look at the work and needs of partner organizations on the ground in our sister region of Afula-Gilboa, an underserved area in the north of the country.

Federation had set aside \$5,000 of allocable funds to be divided among the participants, who each decided how to distribute her portion. Participants also had the opportunity to make a personal contribution to the organization/s of their choice, resulting in an additional \$2,213 in donations.

Several of the women were new to Federation fundraising and programming activities.

“I enjoyed participating in the philanthropy ‘power hour!’” says Susan Ochman of her first Federation group-giving experience. “It makes such a difference to interact with the organization representatives and to ask them questions. It was a great format and very well-organized.”

For Andrea Gottschall, a veteran of Federation giving programs, the event served to reinforce philanthropic commitment. “You learn something new about our partner organizations and you feel the energy of doing good by giving,” she says. “It reminded me of all the good we do and how very lucky I am to be a part of a Federation that continues to support Israel.”



**Aharai!** works to advance the values of solidarity and equal opportunity. The nationwide organization was founded with a mission to nurture youth leadership development and promote civic participation among more than 8,000 teens and young adults from all sectors of society, especially the marginalized communities of the country's socioeconomic and geographic periphery.



Israel, “The Start-Up Nation,” is known for innovation and technological prowess, but only eight to 10 percent of the population work in hi-tech. This is a symptom of severe socioeconomic inequality in which residents of the socioeconomic and geographic periphery do not benefit from the 21<sup>st</sup>-century economy, which is concentrated in the central region. **Unistream** works to promote entrepreneurial, innovative, creative, and technological thinking among youth throughout the periphery in order to provide equal opportunities to all, reduce socioeconomic disparity, and transform the periphery into the engine of growth driving the State of Israel.



**Home in the Valley** was founded to support and promote acceptance of the LGBTQ community in the northern periphery of Israel, focusing on the Afula-Gilboa region. Through educational and community-building projects, HITV is working to ensure that every home in the region has access to information about the LGBTQ community and its activities, and resources to help families embrace diversity. At age 18, thousands of young adults from dysfunctional and emotionally or economically unsupportive homes graduate from Israel's state-funded boarding schools, youth villages, and foster families and are left to fend for themselves.



**Lamerhav** works to create comprehensive social change through intensive, multidimensional, and long-term intervention in the lives of young adults who lack family support, allowing them to shatter academic, occupational, and social glass ceilings and enabling them to become independent and productive citizens who can act as agents of social change.



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 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

*continued on the next page*





# Jewish education has never looked like this!



Beth El Fairfield 7th-grade students and teacher Irwin Schildkraut created a COVID-19 Memorial Garden as one of their first projects in the fall.

When the pandemic hit last spring, local Jewish educators didn't miss a beat. Instead, Upper Fairfield County religious-school directors quickly pivoted to remote and hybrid learning, relying in part on the mutual support of their colleagues at Federation's Jewish Educators Council (JEC).

Launched more than five years ago, JEC was created to convene Upper Fairfield County religious-school directors to build region-wide excellence in Jewish education. Through monthly meetings and regular professional-development workshops, the forum provides an opportunity to discuss and resolve challenges, explore the latest research in Jewish education, and share resources and best practices.

After a year adjusting to online and hybrid learning, JEC represents an impressive cache of collective wisdom and experience that will continue to serve the community when the pandemic is just a memory.

"The Jewish Educators Council was an integral part of our process, inspiring us with ideas, resources, and strong moral support," says Associate Rabbi Jason Greenberg, co-director of Education at Temple Shalom in Norwalk. "I most admire how our wonderful teachers have adapted and how everyone in our community has really lived up to the promises of being flexible, patient, and understanding."

Temple Shalom rallied over the summer to rework its religious-school curriculum, convening teachers, staff, clergy, and other stakeholders to create a new plan incorporating innovative distance programming. The updated curriculum can be used interchangeably between virtual and in-person platforms, and includes a week-to-week schedule that allows for unforeseen glitches.

Cantor Harriet Dunkerley arrived at Temple B'nai Chaim in Georgetown "right smack in the middle of the pandemic," starting in July as Congregational Leader, Cantor and Educator.

"From the start, I wanted to lay out clear guidelines and goals, especially around Hebrew, because students need to learn and practice prayers, and they also need to feel connected," she says. "But I knew that was going to be challenging on Zoom."

Cantor Dunkerley consulted colleagues from JEC and other Jewish-education groups, and decided on *La-Bri'ut: To Our Health and Wellness*, a K-through-6th curriculum developed last summer by the Jewish Education Center of Cleveland.

Each of five, five-week modules explores a big concept rooted in Jewish tradition and ties it into a therapeutic principle specifically designed to help with recovery from this trying year. Activity boxes for lower grades and challenge cards for upper grades encourage off-screen time for families to join in the learning process.

Beth El Fairfield's religious school (BERS) kicked off the learning year outdoors as "Beth El Bachutz," in the synagogue parking lot. Once the weather turned, a hybrid model was implemented, with simultaneous indoor in-person and remote learning on Sundays, and all-virtual learning on Tuesdays.

To encourage family engagement, BERS introduced Chag-in-a-Box, a collection of treats and interactive activities to correspond with each Jewish holiday, culminating in a Zoom celebration.

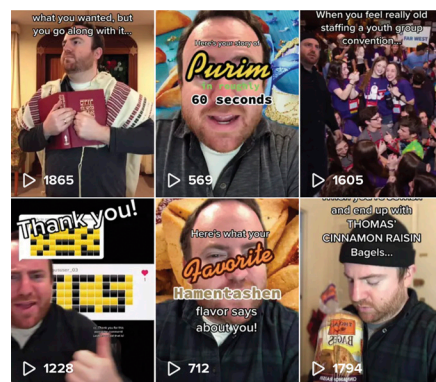
It's one thing to understand the imperative to go virtual, but quite another to get educators up to speed on how exactly to bring effective learning to the screen.

In response to JEC members' requests, Federation brought in Jonathan Fass, managing director of Educational Technology and Strategy at The Jewish Education Project, to teach a three-part tech boot camp. Using a train-the-trainer model, Jonathan took a small group of JEC members on a deep dive of facilitating online, and they in turn trained fellow educators at their respective schools.

"When choosing an online platform,



TCS Director of Education Seth Golub has turned TikTok into an entertaining and effective Jewish-education tool.



teachers should always first ask, 'What do I want the students to learn?' and not 'What technology do I want to use?'" Jonathan says. "Then, I encourage teachers to 'keep it simple' and choose the technology that achieves their learning goals with the lowest barrier to success."

"I have gained a lot of valuable skills from the program, which I have shared with my fellow faculty-members," says Noah Gordon, 8th-grade teacher and youth-group leader at Beth El Fairfield. "A great thing about a lot of the programs that Jonathan has taught us is that we can continue to use them post-pandemic."

One educational platform that has proved especially effective is TikTok, which TCS Education Director Seth Golub has leveraged this year to enhance student engagement – far beyond the Westport-based religious school. "Besides using TikTok to educate, I use it to show how being a modern Jew is dynamic and fun," Seth says. His twice-daily educational videos have more than 2,500 followers internationally, 90,000 likes, and more than one million total views.

JEC continues to meet monthly, keeping educators connected and encouraged. "JEC has been so supportive of Congregation Shir Shalom's Religious School program and to me as its director of Education," says Leslie Gottlieb. "Our meetings, facilitated by Stacy Kamisar, have been useful beyond measure. The group provides profound support and growth initiatives from which we all benefit enormously."





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## Jewish Community Resource Directory

### Norwalk

Beth Israel Chabad  
40 King St.  
203-866-0534 | [info@bethisraelchabad.org](mailto:info@bethisraelchabad.org)  
[bethisraelchabad.org](http://bethisraelchabad.org)  
Orthodox

Congregation Beth El-Norwalk  
109 East Ave.  
203-838-2710 | [office@congbethel.org](mailto:office@congbethel.org)  
[congbethel.org](http://congbethel.org)  
Conservative

Temple Shalom  
259 Richards Ave.  
203-866-0148 | [admin@templeshalomweb.org](mailto:admin@templeshalomweb.org)  
[templeshalomweb.org](http://templeshalomweb.org)  
Reform

### Ridgefield

Chabad Jewish Center of Ridgefield  
27R West Lane  
203-403-5372 | [chabadridgefield@gmail.com](mailto:chabadridgefield@gmail.com)  
[chabadridgefield.com](http://chabadridgefield.com)

Congregation Shir Shalom of Westchester  
and Fairfield Counties  
46 Peaceable St.  
203-438-6589 | [office@ourshirshalom.org](mailto:office@ourshirshalom.org)  
[ourshirshalom.org](http://ourshirshalom.org)  
Reform

### Trumbull

Congregation B'nai Torah  
5700 Main St.  
203-268-6940 | [office@bnaitorahct.org](mailto:office@bnaitorahct.org)  
[bnaitorahct.org](http://bnaitorahct.org)  
Conservative

Congregation Mishkan Israel  
77 Mt. Pleasant Dr.  
203-268-0740 | [mishkanisrael@aol.com](mailto:mishkanisrael@aol.com)  
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# Jewish Community Resource Directory

## Westport

Beit Chaverim Synagogue of Westport/  
Norwalk  
85 Post Road West  
203-227-3333 | [office@beitchaverim.com](mailto:office@beitchaverim.com)  
[beitchaverim.com](http://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](mailto:info@humanisticjews.org)  
[humanisticjews.org](http://humanisticjews.org)  
Humanistic

Temple Israel  
14 Coleytown Road  
203-227-1293 | [info@tiwestport.org](mailto:info@tiwestport.org)  
[tiwestport.org](http://tiwestport.org)  
Reform

TCS  
30 Hillspoint Road  
203-454-4673 | [execdir@tcs-westport.org](mailto:execdir@tcs-westport.org)  
[tcs-westport.org](http://tcs-westport.org)  
Conservative

## COMMUNITY AGENCIES & ORGANIZATIONS

Anti-Defamation League  
Connecticut Regional Office  
[connecticut.adl.org](http://connecticut.adl.org) | 203-288-6500

Federation for Jewish Philanthropy of Upper  
Fairfield County  
[shalomct.org](http://shalomct.org) | 203-226-8197

Israelis-in-CT  
[israelisinct@hotmail.com](mailto:israelisinct@hotmail.com)  
[facebook.com/israelisinct](https://facebook.com/israelisinct)

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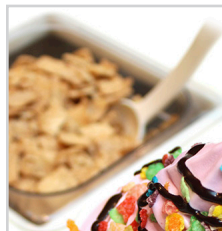
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# Jewish Community Resource Directory

Jewish Family Service of  
Connecticut, Fairfield  
jfsc.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  
lifebridgedirect.org | 203-368-4291

Positive Directions - The Center for  
Prevention and Counseling (Westport)  
positivedirections.org | 203-227-7644

Schoke Jewish Family Service  
of Fairfield County  
ctjfs.org | 203-921-4161

The Jewish Community Foundation, Serving  
Upper Fairfield County  
dweisberg@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



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# Jewish Community Resource Directory

## End of Life

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

Jewish Cemetery Association of  
Fairfield County  
203-452-1221

Loyalty Cemetery Association, Fairfield  
203-452-1221

Martin H. Green Memorials & Lettering  
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## 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 | 203-226-8197

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

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

Bonim Preschool  
Congregation B'nai Israel, Bridgeport  
cbibpt.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

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## Jewish Community Resource Directory

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

Nitzan Nursery School  
Congregation Beth El-Norwalk  
congbethel.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  
Lower School: 203-329-2186  
Upper School: 203-883-8970  
bcha-ct.org

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  
circleoffriendstct.org | 203-293-8837

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





# Jewish Community Resource Directory

Keshet Jewish Enrichment for Children with Special Needs and Their Parents  
Congregation B'nai Israel, Bridgeport  
cbibpt.org/keshet.html#keshet | 203-336-1858

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

Westport USY  
TCS, Westport  
tcs-westport.org/communities/youth-groups  
203-454-4673

## Day 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  
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## Jewish Community Resource Directory

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

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

### CULTURAL

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

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

### YOUNG PROFESSIONALS

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

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

Young Jewish Professionals, CT  
yjpc.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  
jseniors.org | 203-365-6400

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## Congregation Ahavath Achim

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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 look into 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, as well as 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-distanced minyanim on a daily basis. We continue to enjoy a wonderful partnership with Jewish Senior Services, and we hold morning services daily in the courtyard tent at the Harry and Jeanette Weinberg Campus in Bridgeport. For more information regarding our warm and welcoming congregation, please do not hesitate to reach out to us at [office@ahavathachim.org](mailto:office@ahavathachim.org).

Looking forward to meeting you,

Rabbi Peretz Robinson





## Beit Chaverim Synagogue of Westport/Norwalk

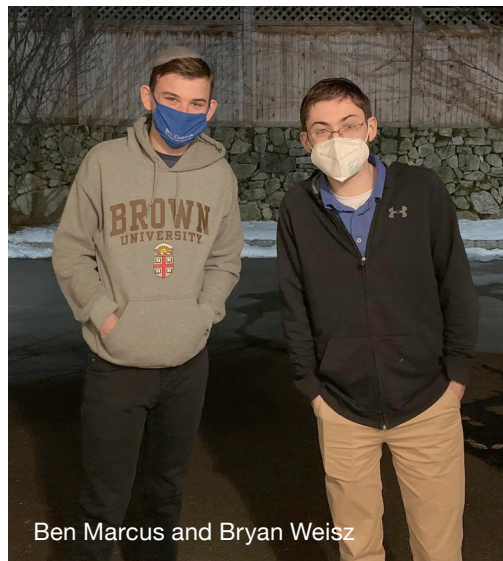
85 Post Road West, Westport | 203-227-3333 | BeitChaverim.com

The COVID pandemic has had devastating consequences globally and locally. In small Jewish communities where the synagogue is the primary venue for “doing Jewish,” the closure of that building had the potential of being devastating as well. If we look carefully, we see that along with the illness, loss of life, financial challenges, isolation, and general disruption to the pursuit of happiness, there is a silver lining, some distinct benefits amidst the crisis.

At Beit Chaverim, we have enjoyed many unexpected and positive developments, among them a dramatic increase in participation in educational and spiritual activities through Zoom, increased social action through outreach to the isolated, and an influx of young families with children who left urban areas for a new Jewish life in Upper Fairfield County.

Here is just one “benefit” that has greatly enhanced life in our own community. When our veteran *ba'al korei* (Torah reader) had to stay home due to the health risk to senior citizens, we were faced with a great challenge for the our springtime outdoor services. Two teenage congregants took on the substantial task of preparing the full Torah portion every week (and one even woke up early, before school, to read at the daily minyan as well). Over the ensuing months, they both turned into expert *leiners*, developing a skill they will have for the rest of their lives, and becoming real Jewish leaders.

This is just one of many examples of how our community has not merely survived, but actually thrived in the face of the worst challenge most of us have ever faced. We are truly blessed to live in an area with so many resources and caring people!



Ben Marcus and Bryan Weisz

## Congregation Beth El Fairfield

1200 Fairfield Woods Road, Fairfield | 203-374-5544 | bethelfairfield.org

### K'tanim Preschool continues to shine in the midst of these challenging times

Congregation Beth El's K'tanim Preschool, led by Kate Luedtke, continues to be a shining light for our youngest families during these unprecedented times. Kate and her staff developed a hybrid program full of enrichment, warmth, and education through a Jewish lens.

The pandemic began more than a year ago, but that didn't stop Kate and her staff from thinking outside the box. Virtual learning began, our 4s class graduated, and summer camp was offered with themed activities delivered in costume to participants' doors.

In September, Kate and her staff were ready to provide an in-person Jewish educational experience for the preschool-age children. Enrollment in each class was lowered to ensure safety, along with the creation of pods to keep groups separate from one another; cleaning protocols were established and instituted.

Alternative learning spaces were created which included an outdoor classroom, art through nature, and outside cooking. Friday Shabbat with our clergy continued outdoors while STEAM activities and gross-motor gym spaces were created inside the synagogue.

Parents were also in the mix! Kate, along with the preschool committee, led Moms' Nights Out and fundraisers such as a take-home pancake breakfast kit and weekly Shabbat challah accompanied by thought-provoking guided questions to spark family dinner-table conversation.

Congregation Beth El is thankful to have Kate Luedtke at the helm of our preschool. She and her faculty continue to educate and enrich our youngest members Jewishly despite the obstacles faced by the pandemic.

Rabbi Marcelo Kormis





## Beth Israel Chabad

40 King St., Norwalk | 203-866-0534 | [bethisraelchabad.org](http://bethisraelchabad.org)

Beth Israel Chabad is excited to announce the expansion of its Weston after-school Hebrew program. The curriculum includes Hebrew reading, culture, Mitzvoth, art, song, and Torah values – subject matter relevant to today's youth that conveys and instills a sense of Jewish peoplehood and connection to Torah and the Jewish people worldwide. The program is under the direction of veteran educator Morah

Freida Hecht and Rabbi Yehoshua S. Hecht, who is in charge of Bar and Bat Mitzvah education and preparation. There is a special ingredient that permeates the entire after-school program – namely, a teaching staff who are experienced educators and have a first-hand knowledge of Judaism, whose lives reflect an observant lifestyle and



fealty to the Jewish people and Israel. Beginning with 1<sup>st</sup>-graders through Bat and Bar Mitzvah-age students, the program has seen an expansion under the expert tutelage of Freida Hecht. The non-judgmental, inclusive policy means that every Jewish child is welcome regardless of religious affiliation, level of observance, or prior knowledge. The diverse student body provides a setting

where each child is comfortable and is able to learn at their own pace. No synagogue membership is required. For information, contact Director Freida Hecht at 203-716-1052 / [westonhebrewschool@gmail.com](mailto:westonhebrewschool@gmail.com) or visit [westonhebrewschool.org](http://westonhebrewschool.org) or [bethisraelchabad.org](http://bethisraelchabad.org).

## Congregation Mishkan Israel

77 Mt. Pleasant Dr., Trumbull | 203-268-0740 | [mishkanisrael.com](http://mishkanisrael.com)

Under the leadership of Rabbi Joseph Torenheim for more than three decades, Mishkan Israel serves the communities of Trumbull, Easton, Fairfield, and Monroe, providing Shabbat and Holiday services throughout the year.

During this challenging time, Congregation Mishkan Israel continues to go above and beyond to unite and uplift the community while complying with CDC and State health guidelines. Weekly Shabbat services begin at 10:30 a.m. After services, individually-wrapped Challah, Kiddush, and refreshments are provided. For all the holidays, Congregation Mishkan Israel hosts additional commemorative events.

Congregation Mishkan Israel has volunteers joining to assemble food packages for distribution to the needy

for the Jewish holidays of Purim and Passover (March 27-April 4).

Rabbi Torenheim notes that the Hebrew word for philanthropy and charity is “*tzedakah*,” a form of social justice where “donors benefit from volunteering and giving even more than the recipients.”

“As in the case of justice,” said Rabbi Torenheim, “the critical social responsibility is done ‘with’ someone, not ‘to’ someone. In Hebrew, the word meaning ‘to give’ is ‘*natan*,’ which can be read the same forward or backward. So when we think about volunteering and philanthropy, ‘to give’ is also ‘to receive’ and at the same time to build a trusting relationship. Of the 613 commandments Jews are obligated to observe, a ‘mitzvah’ refers to any commandment and the ‘mitzvah’ of *tzedakah* is regarded as one of the

most important commandments.”

In a year corresponding to 5781 on the Hebrew calendar, the holidays celebrate the freedom of the ancient Israelites from bondage and also commemorate Jewish deliverance. Anyone who would like to volunteer for future projects can contact the congregation at [mishkanisrael@aol.com](mailto:mishkanisrael@aol.com).

Mishkan Israel also offers youth activities and Mishkan Israel Day Camp, which provides children with memorable summer experiences. Summer camp is open for registration. For more information, please visit [mishkanisrael.com](http://mishkanisrael.com).





## Congregation B'nai Israel

2710 Park Ave., Bridgeport | 203-336-1858 | [cbibpt.org](http://cbibpt.org)

At Congregation B'nai Israel, we are dedicated to the Jewish value of Tikkun Olam, or repairing our broken world. One way we do this is through our monthly Mitzvah Mornings. Each month, a group of volunteers gather together to engage in a variety of projects aimed at supporting our local community. Congregants of different generations work side by side with the common mission of doing the sacred work of Tikkun Olam.

The projects undertaken have varied widely. Among these efforts have been:

- Cleaning and preserving the marker stones at our very own B'nai Israel cemetery
- Providing school supplies and filling backpacks for students through CIRI (Connecticut Institute for Refugees & Immigrants)
- Collecting and wrapping holiday gifts for Al's Angels, an organization that supports children and families battling cancer and severe financial hardship
- Collecting food items and preparing and distributing a holiday supper to the hungry with nOURish Bridgeport.

Mitzvah Mornings have been serving the needs of the community for many years, but the pandemic has greatly exacerbated these needs. Families are struggling all over the greater Bridgeport area, and there is no shortage of opportunities to help provide assistance.

Our B'nai Israel community has responded with enthusiasm. Attendance and interest in Mitzvah Mornings are greater than ever as our congregants answer the call to make the world a better place and demonstrate their ongoing commitment to our Jewish values.

We invite you to join us in this important work of repairing the world!



## Congregation for Humanistic Judaism of Fairfield County (CHJ)

P.O. Box 82, Westport, CT 06881 | 203-293-8867 | [humanisticjews.org](http://humanisticjews.org)

### CHJ Celebrates Tu B'Shvat 2021

During these difficult times, it's even more important to gather and feed our spirits through connection, even if only virtually. Celebrating the joyful holiday of Tu B'Shvat or Jewish Earth Day with a seder is a winter tradition at CHJ, and we refused to let the pandemic stop us this year. Nurturing and caring for our Earth provides the opportunity for celebration of the seasons and serious evaluation of Earth's climate situation, a call to do better than in the past.

This year, we added "new traditions." For the first time, we partnered with the Stamford Jewish Community Center, using a fun promotional video created by our song-leader to invite JCC members. Our mitzvah students decorated and delivered nearly 40 goodie bags packed with ceremonial



foods of dried fruits, nuts, and olives.

This year, we included readings from Greta Thunberg, climate activist, and a Marshall Islands poet whose homeland is at risk of submersion by rising seas in the next decade. During the service, our members shared personal reflections about nature's alignment with their values, including noticing early peepers (frogs hatching), planting gardens for a

respite from the grief of losing loved ones, and harvesting our own food. In the chat, we shared names of loved ones lost over the past 12 months.

More than 80 participants joined us from the tri-state area and from as far away as Denver, Atlanta, and London. The most well-attended seder in years, our event helped attract two new members.

*Artwork by Mitzvah students*



## Congregation Rodeph Sholom

2385 Park Ave., Bridgeport | 203-334-0159 | rodephsholom.com

### L'Dor V'Dor

From generation to generation, Rodeph Sholom honors and remembers its members and relatives while providing Jewish Education scholarships for children throughout the country who have a connection to us. Although the pandemic has closed our doors temporarily, we are providing high-quality services, programming and education virtually.

### Every Plaque Has a Story...

and Rodeph Sholom is committed to learning about, and documenting, each of the 3,000 plaques in the Sanctuary, Chapel and throughout the building. The names on those plaques will come to life both in print and digital formats.

Each of the plaques represents a person with a special history and story. This project is designed for family, friends and the community to create a snapshot of the person's



life. Rodeph Sholom invites you to participate in this very exciting endeavor. For information, email [plaques@rodephsholom.com](mailto:plaques@rodephsholom.com).

As we look to the future, as we have in the past, Rodeph Sholom is committed to Jewish education. **The Rodeph Sholom Family Legacy Scholarship Program** is an opportunity for children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren of members and former members to receive a Talmud Torah scholarship. These funds, while not need-based, will help to defray the cost of a Jewish education for the future generation and will be sent directly to their own synagogue. For information, email [info@rodephsholom.com](mailto:info@rodephsholom.com).

**"Rodeph Sholom honors the past while looking to the future as we document our history, value our members and alumni and invest in Jewish Education for the youth of today and tomorrow."**

## Congregation Shir Shalom of Westchester and Fairfield Counties

46 Peaceable St., Ridgefield | 203-438-6589 | [ourshirshalom.org](http://ourshirshalom.org)

Congregation Shir Shalom continues to innovate and adapt ancient traditions and rituals, safely and thoughtfully proceeding with worship and programs, a calming presence amidst chaos and uncertainty. Our engaging and creative celebrations and observances of sacred milestones and holy days continue to inspire and add meaning to lives. Family and friends have attended and participated in worship with Congregation Shir Shalom from near and far: Dubai, Senegal, Amsterdam, Israel, Mumbai, and even Long Island! Our Menorah Mobile travelled around the region, adding light amidst darkness during our celebrations of Chanukah.

We are committed to the health and safety of our sacred community and will continue with our mix of in-person

and online opportunities for worship, learning, and gathering as we aspire to celebrate and honor our past, enrich our present, and inspire our future. Our souls are uplifted with beautiful music led by our wonderful cantor, Deborah Katchko-Gray, and we find inspiration through the words of our prayerbooks, our tradition, and our rabbi, David Reiner.

We are an inclusive and caring sacred community, committed to enrich our lives by connecting with Torah. We gather from many Jewish backgrounds and faith traditions; we celebrate and embrace equality in our Jewish practice, regardless of gender identity and sexual orientation; we welcome people of color into our sacred community and celebrate our socio-economic diversity.

Check out [ourshirshalom.org](http://ourshirshalom.org) for more information and to participate in our celebrations and programs!





## TCS

30 Hillspoint Road, Westport | 203-454-4673 | [tcs-westport.org](http://tcs-westport.org)

One year ago, just before the pandemic, we honored **Bill Mitchell** (of Mitchells in Westport) at our annual TCS Gala, celebrating all that Bill has done and continues to do for our synagogue and the larger Westport community. Our relationship goes back more than 25 years, when neighbors and community-members were fighting against the building of our synagogue on Hillspoint Road, sharing concerns over parking and other issues. Bill stood up at the Westport Planning and Zoning Commission meeting and spoke out in our favor, offering the Mitchells parking lot for overflow parking on Jewish holidays. The vote passed unanimously, and the rest is history.

In Bill's honor, we created a special fund called TIES. Of course, Bill sells neckties at Mitchells, but at TCS, we created an acronym for what TIES stands for: Tolerance, Inclusivity, Education, and Solidarity. We believe that these values are essential to the task of building bridges in an increasingly polarized society. Bringing people together is at the heart of the moral "fabric" that constitutes Bill Mitchell.

Our inaugural TIES event featured a Zoom conversation with **Bari Weiss**, former staff writer and editor of *The New York Times* Opinion section and one of the leading voices in the Jewish world today. Our second program was a conversation with **Senator Richard Blumenthal**, who has dedicated much of his career to fighting hate.

As we stand up against anti-Semitism, discrimination, and hatred of all kinds, TIES will continue to provide opportunities to acquire more knowledge, understanding, and unity in Fairfield County and beyond.



## Temple B'nai Chaim

82 Portland Ave., Georgetown | 203-544-8695 | [templebnaichaim.org](http://templebnaichaim.org)



Nestled in the woods in Georgetown, Temple B'nai Chaim serves the Reform Jewish communities of Redding, Ridgefield, Weston and Wilton. And, although our building has been closed due to COVID, weather permitting, we have been able to make use of our beautiful grounds to safely bring members of our TBC family together in person for a variety of worship and learning opportunities

and celebrations. Of course, virtual services, Torah study, lectures and events continue. A recent virtual Sisterhood/Women of Reform Judaism (WRJ) Shabbat service drew a large and diverse group of worshippers from around the country who participated in a beautiful and informative service.

Our Religious School has continued to thrive through the use of our *La'bri-ut* curriculum, which was designed specifically for virtual instruction during COVID. It limits students' time on Zoom and provides grade-specific materials and activities for children to complete at home, plus guidance for parents to get involved as well. Bringing our students together

for virtual T'filah and for socially-distanced in-person holiday learning in our large parking lot has added to the diversity of this year's curriculum offerings. The response has been overwhelmingly positive.

An Art Show and Sale, postponed from March 2020, will be held virtually in early May. Fine art donated by our community, including paintings, sculpture and jewelry, will be part of the many beautiful pieces available for purchase.

At TBC, Judaism is something that we live and love. We offer meaningful, musical and creative worship experiences, participate in a wide range of social-action activities in our communities, honor and celebrate diverse families and so much more. To learn about the magic that is TBC, please call us or visit our website!





## Temple Israel

14 Coleytown Road, Westport | 203-227-1293 | tiwestport.org

### Kesher Online Hebrew Learning

Temple Israel Kesher students learn Hebrew online. Students tell us that they look forward to logging in to see the familiar faces of temple friends, to connect with teachers, and learn. Just like with in-person learning, there are jokes, silly stories and lots of laughter to keep the students engaged and connected.

Rabbi Elana Nemitoff-Bresler set up small learning groups of one to five students, enabling students to make incredible strides in their knowledge of Hebrew. Wherever our students are in their Hebrew-language journey, they have the benefit of significant one-on-one time with their teachers, and meaningful breakout groups.

Kindergarten through Grade 2 students learn Hebrew Through Movement (HTM), a language-acquisition strategy where students learn Hebrew by hearing and responding to commands. HTM is based on ways children learn naturally: by moving about and doing, in an environment of positive support. Students feel safe from the embarrassment of not knowing; learning is joyful and playful.

Grade 3 students learn letters and vowels, and begin working on prayers; Grade 4 students work on recalling letters and vowels and learn *Avot v'imahot* and *G'vurot*.

Grade 5 students fine-tune prayers and learn the *V'ahavta*. Grade 6 students work on learning Torah and Haftarah blessings. Grade 7 is an exciting year when students learn the blessings they will need for their B'nei Mitzvah.

The Temple Israel Kesher Hebrew learning journey is a fun, immersive and tangible experience. Students are supported by their teachers, their friends and the community, and the learning is sweet.



Rabbi Elana Nemitoff-Bresler,  
Temple Israel Rabbi Educator,  
(second from right) at a community  
Sukkot program

## Temple Shalom

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

In *Parshat Terumah*, in the Book of Exodus, G-d instructs Moses and the Israelites on the construction of the Mishkan, the portable sanctuary the Israelites will carry throughout their journey in the wilderness. G-d says, "*V'asu Li Mikdash V'Shachanti B'tocham*" – Build for me a sanctuary and there I will dwell among you.

During this year of COVID, we have all wandered in the wilderness, exiled from our familiar way of life and thrust into a scary unknown. However, no matter our distance, holiness most certainly dwells in our midst. At Temple Shalom, we faced adversity and change head on, and learned so much about the power of the deep and abiding connections within our community.

As in our ancient days of wandering, the sanctuary became portable. Through the creative use of technology and outdoor COVID-safe gatherings for holidays and lifecycle events, we strengthened our Jewish values and

connections at precisely the time they were needed most. An amazing number of households continue to gather for the beautiful music that is the centerpiece of Temple Shalom's joyful character, and we fostered connection and inspiration through our weekly interactive Zoom Shabbat services, as well as our annual gala and auction, adult-education offerings, movie series, book talks, concerts, and social events – with more participants than ever before!

Temple Shalom's daycare and preschool continue to operate under the utmost care of our dedicated staff and COVID committee to ensure the safety of our teachers and students from infants to school-age. Our religious-school students continue to thrive with an engaging new online curriculum and the guidance, dedication, care, and skill of our incredible teachers.

Most importantly, we have maintained and nurtured close and personal connections with our temple families, responding and

adapting to changing needs and concerns and being present for all the joys and sorrows of our community as an important cornerstone of hope, care, and faith.

We are so incredibly proud of our temple family. Each day, we strive to support and continue our sacred work. Our incredible leadership, volunteers, clergy, and staff have collaborated to find creative solutions to new challenges and bring meaning to so many in a time of isolation.

We are so blessed for those in our community that give generously of their hearts, their time, effort, and resources – the level of engagement that we see is unprecedented in the best ways possible. It reflects a truth that Jews have understood throughout the generations: sacred community is the antidote to suffering.

Together, with "*Chazak V'ematz*" – strength and courage – we will continue to draw on what we have learned to inspire and strengthen our Jewish community.

## Congregation Beth El-Norwalk

109 East Ave., Norwalk | 203-838-2710 | [congbethel.org](http://congbethel.org)

### We Didn't Choose This, But It Hasn't Been All Bad

**Rabbi Ita Paskind**

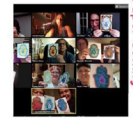
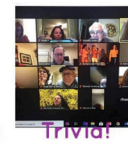
There's no doubt—we would rather have not had a pandemic. We would have preferred to remain in person. And we can't wait to do that again. At the same time, it has forced our congregation to do things differently, and it hasn't been all bad. I'll highlight three of our silver linings.

We've experienced a revitalization of our morning minyan. Minyan was the very first service we Zoomed—back on March 13, 2020—and our participants adapted beautifully. On most mornings, the screen is full of friendly faces, and we've gladly welcomed local friends and congregants' out-of-state relatives. Our minyan participants have always

loved beginning the day together, and the only difference now is that they have to provide their own breakfast. Viva Minyan!

Living virtually has forced us to be wonderfully creative. After the push to make sure that our congregants were healthy and had safe access to food, we realized that what we were all craving was... fun. Our congregants have stepped up and led cooking, baking, and mixology classes, trivia nights, and cocktail hours. We've hosted paper-cutting, origami, and lectures on our Holocaust Torah's origins and on Harry Houdini. And we've learned that connecting via Zoom can sometimes be a bonus (especially when it's really cold outside!).

Finally, one last silver lining. This isolation begs us to be in touch. We've



### Zooming through 2020

seen our congregants reaching out to one another. We know that each of us has our own support networks, and this pandemic time has demonstrated that our shul must indeed be one of those networks. And it is.

## Congregation B'nai Torah

5700 Main St., Trumbull | 203-268-6940 | [bnaitorahct.org](http://bnaitorahct.org)

### B'nai Torah Goes Green

What does a caring congregation do while stuck at home? Go green. Our *tikkun olam* plan for this pandemic year: Save the planet. We pledge to live more sustainably, to consider the environmental impact from our resource consumption.

At our "2021: Year of Thinking Green" Zoom session, B'nai Torah member and environmental activist, Laura Cahn, explained how we harm the planet, and challenged the congregation to make one environmentally-friendly change, so that together we can save the planet. At our Zoom Tu B'shevat Seder, Laura shared additional ecological opportunities, including different approaches to planting trees, vegetable gardens, and native plants. Even our preschool has an ongoing focus of protecting the environment!

We have pledged to conserve water and energy, eliminate factory-made chemicals in everything from laundry to lawns, and forgo plastic – especially single-use items. We have been challenged to think about what becomes of our discards: will the items in our recycling bins be reused? Or will they pile up in a landfill or be burned in an incinerator?

Everyone is encouraged to adopt our ideas or come up with your own. A few simple changes can make a great impact!

Carry reusable bags for purchases; buy used clothing and items made of organic materials (cotton, wool, silk, linen); air-dry hair and laundry; switch to organic laundry soap (preferably powder or soap nuts) and bar soap; use less makeup and/or hair products; store food in glass jars, paper or fabric food-storage bags, or takeout containers instead of plastic bags; use waxed paper instead of plastic wrap; use loose tea or coffee instead of individual tea bags/pods; buy local food/produce; use cookware and bakeware without non-stick coating; use dishwasher soap powder in a cardboard box instead of liquid in a plastic bottle; use reusable utensils instead of disposable plastic; recycle corrugated cardboard separately so it does not get wet or full of glass shards; compost plant-based food waste and use it to feed plants; water lawn/garden at dawn and only when absolutely necessary; stop using herbicides on lawn and garden; plant native species such as Mountain Laurel, Connecticut's state flower; request a street tree for your tree belt; walk, bike, or take public transportation instead of driving; wash the car less often; buy fewer new cars; take one less airplane flight.

Our new motto: USE LESS. REUSE MORE. DISPOSE OF WASTE IN THE MOST ENVIRONMENTALLY-FRIENDLY WAY POSSIBLE.

Learn more at [bnaitorahct.org](http://bnaitorahct.org).







# JCC DAY CAMPS

**2021 CAMP SEASON:**  
 Session 1: June 21 - July 16  
 Session 2: July 19 - August 13



## TAKE ME BACK TO CAMP...

Last summer, JCC Day Camps was in session even when other camps were not. We not only ran a safe and successful camp season, but it was the most rewarding yet. This year, strengthened with knowledge and experience, we will again persevere. Join us on our 54-acre campus for an adventure you're sure to never forget.



## Our Summer Camp Includes:

- Outdoor Pool
- Makerspace
- Drama Stage
- Sports Fields
- Music & Dance
- Basketball
- Ga-Ga and Human Foosball Courts
- Archery Range
- Picnic Areas
- Arts & Crafts
- Four Miles of Hiking Trails on 54 Acres

**Camp Hours:**  
 Monday - Friday  
 9 AM-4 PM

**Pricing:**  
 Each 4 Week Session:  
 Members: \$1,400  
 Community: \$1,600



Learn more at [www.jccnh.org/camp](http://www.jccnh.org/camp)  
[summercamp@jccnh.org](mailto:summercamp@jccnh.org) | 203-387-2424 x253  
 360 Amity Road, Woodbridge



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