

SHALOM *y'all*

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



**HISTORIC
GREETINGS FROM
LAKELAND, FLORIDA**

p.10

**TEACHING TEENS
TIKKUN OLAM
IN TEXAS**

p.15

**SHARING JEWISH
CULTURE IN
ALABAMA**

p.16

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CONTENTS

Leadership Messages.....	4
Education.....	6
Fellow Alumni Network.....	8
Rabbinical Services.....	9
History.....	10
Heritage & Interpretation.....	12
Community Engagement.....	15
Cultural Programming.....	16
Around the Region.....	18
Meet the Board.....	19
Gifts & Gratitude.....	20

YOUR STORIES

GREETINGS FROM THE SOUTH!

All of the articles in this issue come from people in the communities we serve. From Alabama to Texas and from Florida to the Carolinas, we have enjoyed reading the stories of our partners across the region.

We hope you will, too. Because these stories are yours. The people, places, and programs celebrated within these pages are personal. The words come from your friends, your family, maybe even you; the places and programs resonate with your vision and values; and even the less familiar faces and places are ones that align with your interests and commitments to community, to connectivity, and to making our world a better place.

And, of course, all of the work we do together is only made possible by your support.

As 2019 draws to a close and we plan for 2020—which will mark the twentieth anniversary of the Goldring/Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life (ISJL)—we draw inspiration from each of the articles in this issue of *Shalom Y'all*. We hope that you, too, will be inspired.

L'shalom,
The Board & Staff of the ISJL



FROM THE BOARD CHAIR



Rachel Reagler Schulman
ISJL Board Chair

YOU MAY BE WONDERING why mine is one of the only articles in this issue not turned over to a guest writer... and the answer is a bittersweet one: this is my last message as President of the ISJL's Board of Directors.

As another summer comes to an end, I feel a sense of sadness. I love summertime for so many reasons—bright sunshine, walking my dog, riding my bike, working in my yard, and going to concerts at Ravinia (a wonderful nearby outdoor music venue). Our summers are relatively short in Illinois, so I truly treasure the warm weather.

My term as Chair of the ISJL Board is coming to an end as well. At this October's board meeting, I will pass the gavel to Jay Hesdorffer. Like me, Jay is now a Chicagoan but grew up down South. For me, home was Wynne, Arkansas; for Jay, it was Jackson, Mississippi. I know Jay will be an excellent Chair, and I am excited to see how the

ISJL will prosper under his leadership. However, as my term ends, I want to reflect on my years as Chair, and the many changes that have occurred.

I became Chair in 2014. During my tenure, the organization has faced many important decisions and choices that have impacted its future. Of course, the major transition was the retirement of the ISJL's founder and President, Macy B. Hart, and the appointment of Michele Feldman Schipper as CEO. The ISJL remains stable and growing as it has transitioned between leaders. This smooth shift in and of itself says so much about both Macy and Michele's leadership



THIS SMOOTH SHIFT IN AND OF ITSELF SAYS SO MUCH ABOUT BOTH MACY AND MICHELE'S LEADERSHIP SKILLS AND LOVE OF THE ORGANIZATION.

skills and love of the organization. With the staff and board working together throughout the change in leadership, all programming continued, all communities received the services and support

on which they rely, and our work with our many partners went smoothly.

Although the ISJL began as the Museum of the Southern Jewish Experience in 1986, during my early years as a board member the museum that operated on the grounds of URJ Henry S. Jacobs Camp was closed and its artifacts were put in storage. Now, after many years of hard work led by current and former ISJL board members, the Museum is preparing to open as a separate and independent entity in New Orleans in 2020. The ISJL proudly supports the Museum's efforts and remains committed to preserving historical documents, objects, and our heritage.

During the last few years, the ISJL has remarketed and rebranded itself, with a new mission statement and a dynamic new storytelling approach. Under the leadership and direction of our outstanding Communications Director, Beth Kander-Dauphin, the ISJL updated its look and storytelling strategies. Beth also worked diligently with the Board to fine-tune the mission statement to clearly and succinctly outline the ISJL's goals and purposes. I love our mission



I AM PROUD OF THE ACCOMPLISHMENTS OF THE ISJL OVER THE LAST FEW YEARS. SERVING ON THIS BOARD IS AN HONOR, AND IT BRINGS ME JOY AND SATISFACTION.

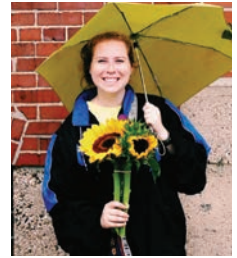
statement now, and unlike our longer mission statements from years past, this one I can recite by heart: the ISJL supports, connects, and celebrates Jewish life in the South.

Over the last six years, ISJL programs have grown in size and structure. The annual ISJL Education Conference raises the bar year after year for excellence in Jewish education summits. Educators and non-educators alike learn to use the ISJL curriculum, as well as meet friends, make contacts, and build cohorts from all over our thirteen-state region. As a frequent non-educator attendee, I am always impressed by the engaging presentations from educators, clergy, and lay leaders.

Growth in the Fellowship programs continued, too. Now the ISJL not only has Education Fellows but also Community Engagement

FROM THE CEO'S DAUGHTER

Alana Schipper
LITTLE ROCK, ARKANSAS



Fellows who travel the region promoting the social justice work of the Community Engagement department. I am proud to say that the ISJL Fellowship programs continue to be a top training arena for young Jewish professionals.

You may recall that the two previous Chairmen of the Board were also from Arkansas (like me), and I felt honored to continue the Arkansas Chair tradition. Although Jay will be breaking the Arkansas chain, we both call Chicago home as adults, so maybe we are starting a new trend!

I am proud of the accomplishments of the ISJL over the last few years. Serving on this board is an honor, and it brings me joy and satisfaction. I plan to continue to serve and be a part of the organization's future. I hope you, too, will continue to support the ISJL, now and in the future. Thank you for your generous donations, and for your commitment to ensuring that our communities will always find services and support.

Rachael R. Schipper

WHEN PEOPLE ASK me what my mother does, I tell them that her job is to connect Jewish communities across the South—which is important to me, as someone connected to several southern Jewish communities.

One of my earliest southern Jewish memories is driving through the gates that mark the entrance to Henry S. Jacobs Camp in Utica, Mississippi. My mom dropped me off at the camp she went to as a child as the rest of our family was moving into our new home in Jackson, Mississippi.

I remember waiting in a long line of cars. That first summer at Jacobs, I was nervous. I didn't know anyone, and I didn't know what the summer might bring. But it wound up being the best summer of my life, which quickly led me to return to Jacobs as a camper and staff member for many more years. My time at Jacobs also rooted me to the southern Jewish community year-round. When I entered high school, I became involved in Jackson's Beth Israel Temple Youth Group (BITY). Through this organization, I heard about Camp Dream Street, a NFTY Southern Mitzvah Corps project.

Camp Dream Street is a five-day, four-night

sleepaway camp for kids with disabilities. NFTY Southern teens have the great opportunity to act as counselors at Dream Street. This sparked a love and interest that continues today! I have spent many years both as a counselor and as a program leader and ultimately as director at Dream Street. Serving as Dream Street's director was truly a *l'dor v'dor* moment, as my mom also directed Dream Street in the 1980s.

My experiences at Jacobs, Dream Street, and with BITY are why I'm still involved in southern Jewish life to this day (along with my family connections, of course). I currently work as a dietitian at a hospital here in Little Rock, but I also serve as an advisor for LAFTY—the Little Rock Teen Youth Group! It brings me such joy to see these teens continue the traditions that meant so much to me when I was their age. When LAFTYites return from youth group events and camp with great stories and a desire to return next year, it's honestly a full-circle moment.

I have loved becoming a part of Jewish Little Rock; it's a close-knit community with opportunities for people of all age groups to get involved... which is also something I love about southern Jewish life in general. Growing up Jewish in the South shaped my

identity. I enjoyed having the opportunity to teach my school friends about Judaism. I was often the first Jew my peers would meet, so I had the opportunity to discuss a whole new perspective with them! Thanks to Jacobs, I had lots of southern Jewish friends, too—not as many locally, but the Jewish friends I did have in Jackson were really special; we, too, could be described as “a close-knit community.”

As a child and now as a young adult, I know firsthand the value of connecting southern Jewish individuals and communities to one another—and to the rest of the world. The investments we make today—encouraging kids to go to Sunday school, camp, religious school, and youth group, and supporting organizations like the ISJL—keep paying off years down the road.

I'm proud of the work my mom does, and glad to be part of the southern Jewish community. Please enjoy the rest of this issue of *Shalom Y'all*, and if you have any questions about the ISJL, well, you should probably email my mom.

Alana Schipper



Celebrating Havdallah.

EDUCATION

"SO... WHAT EXACTLY IS THE ISJL?"

BY JONAH BERKOWITZ

ATHENS, GEORGIA

"SO, WHAT EXACTLY IS THE ISJL?"

I can remember sitting in my first meeting as Religious School Director of Congregation Children of Israel in our little college town of Athens, Georgia (Go Dawgs!) and hearing those letters for the first time: I-S-J-L.

Two years ago, I had no clue how well I would get to know the ISJL and its curriculum, and just how much it would help our religious school.

When I began my tenure as director, we had technically already been using the ISJL program for a year—but it was still new, and our religious school hadn't fully figured things out yet on our end. In that second year with the ISJL, we experienced a huge sea change. Our returning teachers became more comfortable with the curriculum and our new teachers embraced the lesson format. A huge catalyst for that new understanding was our summer visit with (now former) ISJL Education Fellow Hannah Klegon, who provided a wonderful training session to kick off our year. Throughout that year, Hannah

provided guidance and ideas through programming and support, making my job infinitely easier.

The Fellows are amazing, but the curriculum itself is also a huge lifesaver for our religious school. You see, in our community, we face a significant challenge: when you live in a small southern college town, your teachers tend to be college students. College football is king in our town, so the fall semester provides a challenge when we have huge games on Saturday night, or "fall breaks" because of the Georgia-Florida game, meaning that 90% of our teachers are out of town. The ISJL curriculum alleviates so much of the stress related to that, since I can provide a lesson to a substitute and they can jump into the classroom and take care of teaching for the day. I have even had my Religious School Committee Chairperson have to take over a class one Sunday morning, without any problems!

The true highlight—at least for me—of what the ISJL provides to us comes in the form of programming.

During our Fellow visits, we have done Sukkot programs, skits, trainings, and, for last Halloween, a "campfire" with s'mores and spooky Jewish stories thanks to another wonderful Education Fellow, Carrie Bohn.

In my first year as Director, I remember asking Hannah Klegon if she had any ideas for programming. Slowly, I came to realize that I could pass off some of my ideas to our Ed Fellow, and get them to do the work! I could make programming happen for our Religious School or community without having to do everything myself! As a director with an additional full-time teaching job, this was a huge realization.

So, what exactly is the ISJL? Sure, we know exactly what the letters stand for, and that was the answer I got to my question two years ago. But now, as I prepare to start my third year working with the ISJL, I know that it stands for more than that. The ISJL, at its core, embodies the incredible idea that here in the South, we are all one big community, and we don't have to go on this journey alone.

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



BECAUSE I BELIEVE

**IN THE FUTURE
OF SOUTHERN
JEWISH LIFE**

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

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

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

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

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

How can the ISJL help?

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

The ISJL's Legacy Giving program can help you meet your planned giving goals. To learn more, visit www.isjl.org/planned-giving or email development@isjl.org.



FELLOW ALUMNI NETWORK

ONCE A FELLOW, ALWAYS A FELLOW

BY MICHELLE BLUMENTHAL

FORMERLY OF HOUSTON, TX, & JACKSON, MS / CURRENTLY STUDYING IN LOS ANGELES, CA

This summer, FAN member Michelle Blumenthal returned to the ISJL in an important and immersive way. She came on board as our Interim Educator, helping to run this year's conference and enabling Rabbi Matt Dreffin to go on parental leave knowing the Education team was in great hands. In the article below, which was also shared on our Southern & Jewish blog, Michelle shares the impact of this summer... and her earlier ISJL experiences!

THERE'S A HASHTAG FLOATING around online, which is worth clicking on if you want to see the smiling faces of happy young Jewish professionals: #onceafellowalwaysafellow.

I'm not much of a "hashtag person," but that one means a lot to me—and it certainly sums up my summer. Since finishing my two-year Education Fellowship at the ISJL in 2012, I'm always telling people how working there provided me with a new Jewish perspective that I never knew I needed. Seven years later, I'm still working in the Jewish world; I'm also finishing up my graduate studies at Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion.

But my ISJL journey was not over when I finished my fellowship. This summer, when Rabbi Matt Dreffin was preparing for parental leave, I was asked to take on a temporary role as Interim Educator. I was excited

to accept this unique opportunity.

Rabbi Matt Dreffin has truly taken this fellowship to new heights. Before I arrived, we were discussing all of the trainings that the fellows would partake in during their first two months on the job. When he asked me if there was anything else I would add based on my experience, I had no words. My response was something along the lines of, "Matt, you are doing it all! These trainings cover skills that we had to figure out on the job and it's amazing to see them turned into official trainings." His attention to detail and his commitment to providing a safe space for his team to workshop new skills is beyond what I'd ever imagined. The new skills these Fellows are learning will transfer far beyond their work at the ISJL, and I feel so blessed to be a part of such an impactful organization.

The ten weeks I spent back with the ISJL this summer helped me think more clearly about my career and allowed me to see the ISJL with fresh eyes. The passion, love, and empathy that the ISJL has for the underserved communities in the South is infectious. It has been an honor to be a part of such holy work.

Helping these ISJL Education Fellows transition into adulthood while navigating their roles in this meaningful work has truly been a gift. Each one of these bright, charming, passionate, creative, empowering, strong, enthusiastic, schticky Fellows has so much to offer their

communities and I have no doubt they will each do such amazing things during their 2 years as Fellows and beyond. I have been inspired by their creative drive and ability to think out of the box. I have loved connecting with them on the important things in life—like *Stranger Things*, *Queer Eye*, and, of course, southern food. I have loved helping them work through issues or brainstorm programs, all while noticing a growth within myself that is often difficult to see when you are "stuck in the weeds" of graduate school life. It brings me great joy to think about where all of them will be 10 years from now, knowing that I, and the ISJL, played a role in their trajectories.

And on a personal note—this summer I also got engaged while in Mississippi... and my fiancé, Elias Chajet, is another former ISJL Education Fellow! We didn't cross paths during our fellowships, instead meeting when we began our studies at HUC-JIR. But the ISJL is part of our connection, too.

The ISJL has this unique way of bringing people together to build meaningful relationships with colleagues who serve similar communities, with similar challenges. To see how far the ISJL Fellow Alumni Network spans is truly remarkable. The impact the organization has on our personal and professional lives is amazing. That's why, as our ever-popular hashtag says, #onceafellowalwaysafellow.

RABBINICAL SERVICES

A SMALL TEMPLE CAN MAKE A BIG IMPACT!

BY SHELLEY PAWLYK
LANCASTER COUNTY, SC



Jan Rose (Treasurer), Vicki & Ron Weller (VP), Rabbi Steve Bernstein (Visiting Rabbi from Israel), Robin Spivock (Secretary), Al Rogat (Publicity Chair). Seated: Wendy Weinberger (Ritual Committee) & Shelley Pawlyk (President).

IN 2011, A SMALL GROUP OF fourteen individuals were searching for meaningful Jewish fellowship and community where they lived. They decided to form Temple Solel, which means “pathfinder.” The first High Holy Day services were held in 2012.

Since then, we have celebrated multiple b’nei mitzvah ceremonies, Shabbats, and holidays, and we continue to grow and evolve. So how does a small temple connect with the larger Jewish community? We couldn’t have done it without the help and support of those who have become dear friends and resources for us. We are forever grateful for the work of the ISJL providing our first educational materials, assisting us in borrowing a Torah, and arranging Rabbinical and Education Fellow visits over the years.

Temple Solel recently started meeting at a new location at the UMC Belair Family Life Center, which gives the Jewish population in the panhandle of Lancaster County, South Carolina, easy access to religious services, speakers, and events designed to be welcoming to those with varying backgrounds. We are largely comprised of active “older adults,” but have learned that

there is great value in recognizing and embracing the diversity of Jewish families and individuals throughout our area.

Our footprint and programs are expanding. This July, Rabbi Aaron Rozovsky, the ISJL’s Director of Rabbinical Services, led a welcoming and engaging service followed by a riveting discussion on gun control the next day during Torah study. Participants of all ages were impacted. Temple Solel was also recently named a Beneficiary Agency of the Jewish Federation of Greater Charlotte. This important organization recognized and honored the volunteerism and education we provide within South Carolina—creating an extended community closer to where Jewish people live.

Temple Solel has partnered with multiple non-profit organizations, including food pantries and our local Back to School Bash. We have international membership and relationships with Birkat Shalom in Israel, and are engaged in supporting Jewish efforts there. We recently met with Rabbi Steve Bernstein when he visited Charlotte from Israel. He met with our leaders during brunch to discuss

progressive Jewish life in Israel.

Our congregation’s commitment to helping others locally and globally is reflective of our members. One of our temple members recently participated in a trip to help youth in Guatemala, providing them with school supplies; others volunteer at the USO and Chapel at Charlotte Douglas International Airport; another member is a driver at the Pineville, North Carolina, hospital; several are clowns working with the Make-A-Wish Foundation, and our Temple President is a Senior Jewish Chaplain affiliated with the IFOC (International Fellowship of Chaplains).

We are proof that small synagogues can thrive without a rabbi through the dedication of volunteers—such as our own Russ Cobe, an experienced lay leader, with a degree in religious studies and music from Wesleyan University. Many of our congregants regularly participate in reading various portions of the services, reflecting the inclusive spiritual experiences embraced at Temple Solel. The most meaningful comments members and visitors make are about how friendly and welcoming we are—and we wouldn’t have it any other way.

Want to learn more about the ISJL’s Rabbinical Services? Email rabbinal@isjl.org

HISTORIC GREETINGS FROM LAKELAND, FLORIDA

BY DR. CATHERINE (CAT) ESKIN
LAKELAND, FLORIDA



Above: Tu B'Shevat 1953. Dancing among the orange groves in view of Lake Hollingsworth, Lakeland, FL. Image Courtesy Temple Emanuel Archives. Right: Temple Dedication, 1949. Image courtesy Temple Emanuel Archives.

The History Department is happy to feature this reflection from Dr. Catherine (Cat) Eskin of Lakeland, Florida—when we were working on our new Florida section of the online Encyclopedia of Southern Jewish Communities, Cat was an immense help. As she describes in this article, she has become an archivist and local historian for Lakeland's Jewish community, and we have relied on her research to create the Lakeland encyclopedia entry.

MY “DAY JOB” IS AS A professor of Shakespeare, and I never expected to become an archivist. I was an unsuspecting new board member at Temple Emanuel in Lakeland, Florida, in 2007, when our treasurer pulled me aside and asked if I was interested in history. “The Temple office is throwing away some boxes. Will you take a look at them?”

He knew that I was an English professor and that I studied “old” literature—it was clearly a tactic

to get me hooked. It worked. Just a cursory glance at the contents of the large plastic bin revealed a ledger book from the 1930s, films from the 1950s, and a plug-in Yahrzeit lamp.

As a teacher at a small, Methodist-affiliated college, I teach a large number of undergraduates from an array of disciplines. Community outreach and service is important to me, and I've found it is important to my students as well. The creation of the Temple Emanuel Archive (TEA) and my inclusion of undergraduate students happened nearly simultaneously. In the spring of 2008, my first-year writing students were charged with scanning and cataloging the images and ephemera I found in those bins and other items that were subsequently donated by congregants. As my students wrote projects on various Jewish themes, learning about a “foreign” culture and helping to shape the collection, our electronic holdings



HE KNEW THAT I WAS AN ENGLISH PROFESSOR AND THAT I STUDIED “OLD” LITERATURE — IT WAS CLEARLY A TACTIC TO GET ME HOOKED. IT WORKED.

grew. Very quickly, I added oral history to the TEA mission, and my more advanced students began recording interviews that fed into their non-fiction writing.

As I have collected for the TEA, I have conducted interviews about the histories that matter to me. “Growing Up Jewish in Polk County, Florida” is one such study; I may be a native Philadelphian, but my children were born and raised in the heart of Polk County. This summer, I was lucky enough to attend the two-week National Endowment for the Humanities Summer Institute on southern



Jewish history in Charleston, South Carolina. This fall, I will be teaching a first-year writing course which will utilize the TEA image and oral history collections and add to our knowledge by conducting spatial research and collecting data. Using ArcGIS tools to help illustrate online exhibits, the course will look at the spaces occupied by the Jews of Lakeland from 1919 to 1939.

Lakeland, Florida, and Florida Southern College (where I teach) have changed since I arrived twenty years ago. When I began here, many of my students had never met a Jewish person; those who had were more familiar with

stereotypes of northeastern Jews, either secular or Hasidic. Even now, students seldom connect the culture of “Jewish” with the culture of the American South, having encountered seemingly incompatible images of each one. Yet Lakeland’s Jewish history demonstrates several major themes of southern Jewish history. Like other small towns and hamlets of the Florida interior, it remains rural, slow-moving, and church-centered. Jewish settlers first came around the turn of the twentieth century and followed many of the patterns we have come to associate with southern Jewish community formation,

especially as merchants and small business owners. Certainly, the Jewish community has experienced vast changes in the make-up of its constituency since its founding, and many of our members would not necessarily call themselves “southern” in the way their Christian neighbors might. Still, most of the second- and third-generation residents are very much aware of the “southern” nature of their hometown.

We are excited that the ISJL has recognized Lakeland’s Jewish history as part of a regional story and that the histories of Lakeland’s Jewish-owned stores—while mostly gone now—will live on.

Want to learn more about southern Jewish history? Email history@isjl.org



HERITAGE & INTERPRETATION

ALTERNATIVE BREAK: MAKING A DIFFERENCE IN NEW ORLEANS

BY DANIELLE ALEXANDER

HOUSTON, TEXAS

THIS PAST JANUARY, THIRTY-eight 8th- and 9th-graders from all over the greater Houston area participated in Kehillah High's fourth annual Alternative Winter Break. With the help of the ISJL, our time in New Orleans was truly nuanced.

Kehillah High, a community supplemental Jewish education program for 8th- through 12th-graders, hosted the experience open to all Jewish 8th- and 9th-graders in the community. Grade-specific immersive opportunities and ongoing community-based service learning helped bring the students' values and learning to life. After spending the previous year volunteering with local Houston institutions and organizations in the aftermath of

Hurricane Harvey, the Alternative Winter Break traveled to New Orleans.

We volunteered, visited important sites in New Orleans' Jewish history, and had lots of fun! This year we partnered with the ISJL to coordinate the trip, with a focus on learning about the history and significance of the southern Jewish experience, past and present. The ISJL also connected us with local non-profits so the students could learn how to put their Jewish values into action. The trip focused on themes of historic preservation, sustainability, and community-building.

We participated in service-learning projects with Save Our Cemeteries and Green Light New Orleans. Juliette Hotard, Restoration

and Volunteer Coordinator for Save Our Cemeteries, spoke about New Orleans cemeteries and the development and importance of the organization. There are more than forty cemeteries in New Orleans in need of preservation, and Save Our Cemeteries' restoration and advocacy work helps increase public appreciation of and interaction with these historic sites. Participants got their hands dirty picking up litter and pulling weeds in New Orleans' Lafayette Cemetery No. 2.

Andreas Hoffmann, Executive Director and Founder of Green Light New Orleans, spoke to us about the organization's mission to "connect New Orleans residents to relevant, local opportunities and encourage

individual actions so that everyone can benefit from a vibrant, resilient, and sustainable community.” We learned about sustainable urban farming and helped prepare recycled olive oil barrels to be painted by local artists, which will be used as rainwater catchment systems in people’s yards.

We enjoyed a delicious lunch at Café Reconcile, a non-profit restaurant located in the Central City neighborhood that works to provide life skills and occupational skills to at-risk youth in the community. Chef Joron Smith explained that the hospitality and food industry is one of the biggest in New Orleans, and by providing this opportunity to the community they are opening doors and preparing young people for success when they enter the workforce. Jeffrey Vannor, Alumni Coordinator at Café Reconcile and 2005 Reconcile graduate, spoke to trip participants about his experience in the program and why he has chosen to continue working for Café Reconcile.

Eighth grader Tali Kalmans said, “My favorite part of the trip had to be Café Reconcile because of the great story all the speakers told. I believed that their mission was truly helping the community around them and caring for the young adults. My favorite [moment] was when Chef Joron said he would like to change the young adults’ mindsets from surviving life to living life. That quote to me meant that although you should take risks in your life, they should not take over your life and that if you try hard—whether it is to quit an addiction or trying something new in the kitchen—you can succeed.”

Volunteering with these organizations helped the students connect with New Orleans in a new and meaningful way, all within a

Jewish framework. Ninth grader Abby Seigle said, “It was so much fun learning about the Jewish culture in New Orleans and Lafayette, and how it compares to the Jewish community in Houston. I also loved learning about social action projects like Café Reconcile and Green Light New Orleans, because they are making a real impact on their city. It really inspired me and I want to do more to help my community.”

On the way back to Houston, we met with congregants and community leaders at Temple Shalom in Lafayette, Louisiana. Kehillah High ninth grader Elan Grossman said, “Something that really stuck with me was the small Jewish temple we visited in Lafayette...Temple Shalom has 60 families and only 12 religious school students. The differences between our two communities [are] remarkable. It was really interesting seeing how widespread [Jewish] practices are and how different communities with different

populations practice our religion.”

In addition to volunteering and touring, we had plenty of time to bond as a group—we bowled at Rock ‘n Bowl, tried an escape room, toured the National World War II Museum, and ate beignets at Café Du Monde. We also toured the Tulane Hillel and ate lunch at Rimon, their kosher restaurant.

This winter break, Kehillah High students will be back in Houston volunteering, learning about the city’s Jewish history, and having lots of fun. We look forward to continuing to partner with the ISJL in the future.

Danielle Alexander is the Executive Director of Kehillah High. The Alternative Winter Break is supported by Kehillah High, which is funded by the Jewish Federation of Greater Houston and its Fund for the Jewish Future, the Houston Jewish Community Foundation, participating congregations, and donors.

Left: The group outside of Tulane Hillel. Below: Preparing rain barrels for Green Light New Orleans.



To learn more about the ISJL’s Heritage & Interpretation Department, email heritage@isjl.org.



EXPLORING JEWISH IMMIGRATION HISTORY WITH THE ISJL

BY SARAH JEW
AUSTIN, TEXAS

As Education Coordinator at Congregation Beth Israel in Austin, I'm now quite familiar with the ISJL's Education program—but that wasn't my community's first introduction to the organization. Our first glimpse at the ISJL three years ago was through the ISJL Immigration Traveling Trunk.

The ISJL Immigration Traveling Trunk was just the tool we needed to breathe some new life into our mid-week 4th grade classes. Our students participated in an entire

semester dedicated to learning about southern Jewish history and about how special it is to be Jewish in the southern United States today. We were the first congregation to use the newly updated Immigration Traveling Trunk, which contains five hours of content designed to teach 4th-through 6th-grade students about Jewish immigration to the South and how immigrants made an impact on their communities.

While most people relate Jewish

immigration to the United States with Ellis Island, the trunk taught us that for many Jews, Galveston was their first port of call. The students measured out the small amount of room an average passenger was allotted on board a ship and couldn't imagine being that uncomfortable for weeks at a time!

Just as the journey was very long and often unpleasant, so was the process of assimilating into a brand-new culture. Between learning English and finding a job, it could be very difficult to keep the Sabbath. One of the highlights of our experience with the trunk was learning all about peddlers and their lifestyles. We expanded upon the activities in the trunk and had our students create their own items to peddle. We had a "market day" in class where students bartered goods. One student created origami flowers, while another student came up with different useful "inventions" out of recycled materials.

Since our first experience with the trunk, we have become ISJL Education Partners and are amazed at how organized and thorough the materials and support continue to be—and we'll always be grateful for our first encounter with the ISJL's immersive materials, nestled in a trunk sent from Mississippi to Texas.

Monthly gifts to the ISJL are an easy way to make a meaningful impact.

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Join the Chai Club today and help us support southern Jewish communities!

Visit www.isjl.org/donate to learn more.



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

TEACHING TEENS TIKKUN OLAM IN TEXAS

BY SHERYL ESKOWITZ
HOUSTON, TEXAS

AS THE EDUCATION DIRECTOR at Congregation Beth Yeshurun's religious school, I work with our Kehillah High students for post-b'nai mitzvah enrichment education. Something we are working hard to do is create programming for as many different groups and ages as we can. We're trying to help everyone find their place in our Jewish community.

Rabbi Strauss, our senior rabbi, wants to create more opportunities for social action within the synagogue community, so when we had the pleasure of having Community Engagement Associate Rachel Glazer visit us one weekend and started finding out more about what the ISJL's Community Engagement Department does, it seemed like a really good fit.

One of Rabbi Strauss' goals was to bring all of the b'nai mitzvah families together for a couple of programs during the course of the year so that they could get to know each other and talk about topics relevant to them. Last spring, we

used the "Gefilte Fish Tank" module, which really got them thinking about mitzvah projects and things they needed to consider when picking a project. Our families have really appreciated the opportunity to work together and start some of those conversations.

We've also been lucky enough that whenever someone from the ISJL's Community Engagement team has come to visit—several times now!—we've done additional programs in the religious school. We have done various grade-level-appropriate modules for first through seventh grade. The younger students did "Turning Prayer and Ritual Inside Out," which dealt with emotions, as well as "Chesed Challenge," which dealt with being kind and spreading that kindness through their actions. In the module "Prayers & Playlists: What Do You Stand For?", the older kids connected the prayers to familiar songs. I think it was a great way to make the prayers more meaningful for them.

While we've been very involved

with the ISJL from the Education Department side, the Community Engagement partnership brings the ISJL to us and our synagogue community from a different angle. It has played in really nicely with some of our other programming for the year and has been very well-received by our families and students.

In addition, the Our Reading Family program really resonated with me because my Master's degree is in Reading Education. The Facilitator Training during the ISJL Education Conference was wonderful, and really well-thought-out and well-organized. It's something that I would personally love to see happen in my community.

The Community Engagement Department at the ISJL has been a great way for us to help create opportunities for so many different groups at Congregation Beth Yeshurun, and to help us deepen our engagement with *tikkun olam* (repairing the world). I'm excited for everything we will connect and collaborate on in the future!

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



CULTURAL PROGRAMMING

SHARING JEWISH CULTURE IN ALABAMA

BY RABBI STEVE SILBERMAN
MOBILE, ALABAMA

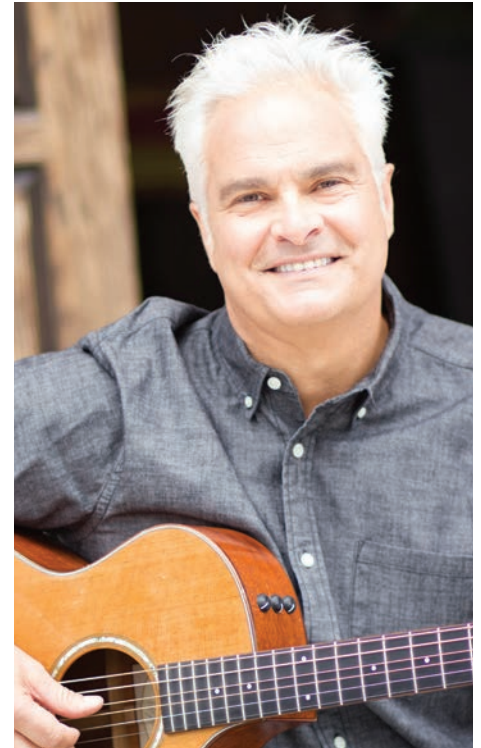
MY CITY OF MOBILE, ALABAMA, has between 1,200 and 1,500 Jews, the vast majority of whom comprise the membership of either my home synagogue, a conservative congregation called Ahavas Chesed, or our Reform neighbors at Springhill Avenue Temple. Many of them also support the Mobile Jewish Federation.

Over the past nine years, our community has hosted a number of cultural programs from the ISJL. Springhill Avenue Temple welcomed Rabbi Michael Cook in 2011 and Ron Wolfson in 2012. In 2013, our Federation invited Saul

Kaye for a community concert, and the Springhill congregation brought us the amazing Craig Taubman for Simchat Torah! Our Federation also invited the hilarious Benji Lovitt in 2015 and hosted a wonderful concert with Batsheva in 2017. This November, Ahavas Chesed is thrilled to host the Jewish Women's Theatre on their southern performance tour. These cultural programs enrich our whole Jewish community and bring us together.

Like many of you reading this article, I am grateful for the groundbreaking significance of the ISJL, for Macy and Michele, for the

past and current visionaries and funders who have brought an exciting vibrancy to southern Jewry over the past two decades. The ISJL has revolutionized our Jewish landscape, bringing energetic young Jewish professionals from across the nation to that hitherto unexpected but now well-established hub of Jewish vitality, Jackson, Mississippi. The ISJL extends rabbinical outreach to small communities, inspires Jews to build for future generations, nurtures the yearning to transform local communities via tikkun olam, takes care of not only materials and archives but also oral histories, and educates



From Left: Saul Kaye, Rabbi Steve Silberman, Benji Lovitt, Batsheva, Ron Wolfson (top), Rabbi Michael Cook, Craig Taubman

our youth and teens—to name only a few of its marvelous impacts.

The ISJL has transformed local communities and the South itself, not to mention myriads of individual Jews and their families. The ISJL's touch is deep and will leave a lasting imprint on us, on our children, and on our grandchildren.

The members of Ahavas Chesed in Mobile have been the beneficiaries of the ISJL since its beginning. I am proud to say that we have been education partners with the ISJL since the inception of the Education Department. A small Conservative shul, we joined because we saw the exciting potential of a system that offered flexible and available educational resources, enthusiastic young educators, and the backing of many caring and devoted supporters across many states. We have never been disappointed! We

have seen the caring and courteous Fellows schlep across many miles of hot asphalt only to enthusiastically arrive, ready to give their all to our community. What a gift they are!

We have also benefited from other aspects of the ISJL. Last summer, ISJL Director of Cultural Programming Ann Kientz traveled to Mobile for the purpose of helping us to clarify how the ISJL might better serve our community. As a part of the ISJL's Listening Tour, we local Mobilians gathered and talked her ears off. For two hours, Ann carefully and attentively listened to the musings and offerings of members of the local Conservative shul and Reform temple. The ISJL came to our hometown and asked any Jew interested in talking, "What can we do to help?" Among its greatest strengths is the ISJL's flexibility—the organization's ability

to understand that Mobile's needs are different from Meridian's and that every Jackson (in Tennessee, Alabama, or Mississippi) is unique.

We are looking forward to increasing our participation with ISJL programs. Until now, much of our focus has been educational. Now, as we begin the year 5780, we are also making plans to take advantage of some of the cultural offerings available to us. Already on our calendar is the Jewish Women's Theatre. Save the date and join us in Mobile on Wednesday, November 13. The program will bring professional actors to our community, and I know it will be a show-stopper! Ahavas Chesed also hopes to bring a musical program to our community in the spring of 2020 to continue the tradition of rich cultural programming in Mobile in partnership with the ISJL. I look forward to seeing y'all in Mobile.

To learn more about the ISJL Programming Department, email programming@isjl.org.



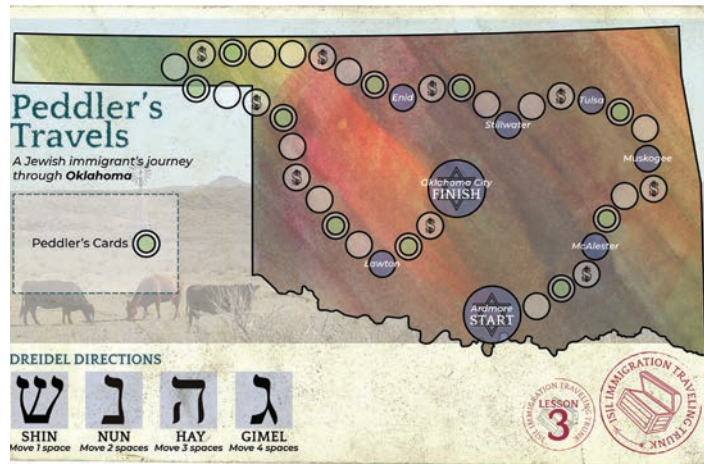
← TAP site coordinators and administrators from Jackson Public Schools.

↓ This year, Rabbi Aaron Rozovsky visited Harrisonburg, Virginia, home to Temple Beth El and James Madison University Hillel.



← Jewish Women's Theatre (JWT) of California is heading to the South on a tour organized by the ISJL, visiting Memphis, Tallahassee, and several other cities!

AROUND



THE REGION

← History and Heritage interns Rose Steptoe and Mimi Brown at Club Ebony in Indianola, Mississippi.

↓ Shabbaton in San Antonio, Texas.



MEET THE BOARD

JAY HESDORFFER LIVES AND works in Chicago, but his southern roots run deep. Born in Jackson, Mississippi, he is the youngest of five children. His parents, Eugene and Gilda, grew up in small southern towns where being Jewish helped define their character. His father was raised in Canton, Mississippi; his mother hails from Whitmire, South Carolina, and currently resides in Dallas. Together they raised their family in Jackson, committed to respecting Judaism and maintaining Jewish culture and traditions. They lived at a time and in a place where being Jewish was not taken for granted. Jay still feels that commitment.

Jay grew up in a warm and welcoming home that hosted visiting lecturers, writers, Holocaust survivors, and Civil Rights leaders who passed through Jackson to share their stories at Beth Israel Congregation. It made an impression. So did coming home late one night to see sirens flashing in front of his friend's house. It turned out that a 12-foot cross was burning on his friend's front lawn. Not the typical distraction for teenagers worried about being out past curfew, but this was Mississippi in 1978.

It was a world of contrasts. During the school year he was one of two Jewish students in his high school, but in the summers he was one of many Jewish campers at Henry S. Jacobs Camp.

Fast forward 35 years. After



moving to Chicago, establishing a career in financial services, and raising a family, Jay received a call from Macy B. Hart, his former camp director at Henry S. Jacobs. Macy was calling as the founder of the ISJL to ask Jay to join the board. Jay was all in.

That was five years ago, and Jay has been an active member ever since. He is currently Vice Chair and will extend his tenure as he becomes Board Chair in October 2019. Last year, his commitment to the ISJL was recognized with the prestigious Morgan Stanley Community Leadership Award. The ISJL was presented with a \$10,000 check in his honor.

Jay is committed to the work of the ISJL. He believes in supporting, sustaining, and celebrating the legacy of Judaism in the South. He wants its supporters to know how powerfully they impact Jewish children, families, and communities across the South. There is no other organization quite like the ISJL.

Jay's commitment to Judaism and serving others is consistent in both his northern and southern homes. He led Congregation Hakafa as President after serving as Vice President and Dues Treasurer. When

Hurricane Katrina hit, he was on the ground in Biloxi, Mississippi, helping with clean-up efforts. He heard the call from Houston and went to help victims ravished by floods start rebuilding their homes and their lives.

Jay and his wife Marietta work together in Chicago and live in Winnetka with their mini labradoodle, Vandy. Marietta is honored to be in the 2018 Morgan Stanley Class of MAKERS, which recognizes women who are advocates, groundbreakers, and innovators. Their son David graduated from Vanderbilt and is a wealth actuarial associate at Mercer in Washington, DC, where he also serves as Chair of the Young Professionals Council for Special Olympics DC. Their daughter Melanie graduated from NYU, lives in Manhattan, and is a creative strategist for FMCG Direct.

Even though Jay left the South, he has never forgotten his southern roots. He is committed to lifting others by advancing, sharing, and advocating for the important programs and bold work of the ISJL.

Prepared by Marietta Hesdorffer: Spouse, business partner, and major fan of the ISJL.

ISJL Fall Board Meeting—October 11-13, Durham/Chapel Hill, NC

Stay tuned for our 2020 social media campaign to meet the ISJL Board— #ISJLBoardWhosWho!

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In these pages, you can see the impact our education, history, heritage and interpretation, cultural, community engagement, and rabbinical programs have on thousands of people just like you. With deep appreciation, the Goldring/Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life extends thanks to everyone who made a contribution or pledge from January 1 - September 15, 2019, to enable our important work.

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