

Winter 2014

# CIRCA

Newsletter of the Goldring/ Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life



## Connecting Communities



GOLDRING  
WOLDENBERG  
INSTITUTE OF  
SOUTHERN  
JEWISH LIFE



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# CIRCA

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# IN THIS ISSUE OF CIRCA...



If we had to pick one word that we use more than any other at the ISJL, it would be this one: **community**.

This issue of CIRCA reflects the heart of our entire enterprise. It's all about community. More than that, it's all about community connections – the way that the ISJL serves to link together congregations, families, and individuals across a region to foster greater connectivity and a richer Southern Jewish life.



In this issue, we will explore these community connections through the lens of each department, through the lens of staff members, board members, artists and scholars who have spent time with us, and the communities with which we partner. Together, we are all stronger, more cohesive, and our lives are truly enriched as they intertwine.



Don't forget, you can always be a part of our community and our conversations by interacting with us online!

You can like the ISJL's Facebook page ([www.facebook.com/TheISJL](http://www.facebook.com/TheISJL)) or follow us on Twitter (@TheISJL), where you can always see what's going on, right now – and where we always love to hear from you, too.



## Chairman's Message



Rayman L. Solomon

The theme of this issue of CIRCA is “connecting communities.” The ISJL, in creating a virtual congregation comprised of our thirteen-state region, certainly directly accomplishes this task. To give but a few examples, on weekend visits our rabbis sometimes literally combine congregations or former congregations in conducting Friday night services; our annual Education Conference brings together dozens of communities to learn and teach and get to know one another; our cultural programs bring performing artists and authors to several different communities in joint tours.

However, the ISJL connects communities most significantly by its very existence. The knowledge that rabbinic, educational, cultural, historical, or social justice programming is available to small and isolated communities, as well as to larger communities, is powerfully important to the members of all of our Southern communities.

Regardless of their religious practices or the affiliations of their temples or synagogues, they have a powerful cultural connection. It is not just that they share a love of cheese straws or grits and have a similar drawl. They know that the professionals at the ISJL understand their needs and are dedicated to assisting them in meeting those needs. In our fourteen-year history, the ISJL has been there to help countless families with life-cycle events, with synagogue closings and de-consecration, such as in my hometown of Helena, Arkansas,

or synagogue dedications and new beginnings, such as in Bentonville, Arkansas. Because of the ISJL there are children throughout the South who share a common Jewish educational experience which is second-to-none, and helps provide them not only a Jewish identity, but also a profound connection to their fellow students Southern Jews.

There is another aspect of the ISJL's connecting communities. Recently, I have been included in a large email discussion group which includes many members of the “Southern Jewish Diaspora.” While the ISJL is not directly connecting this group, it has played an important role. This email discussion was triggered by another national news story on Southern Jews. In each case the major sources for the information in the stories were ISJL staffers – either our historian, rabbi, or our executive leadership. The existence of the ISJL has kept those Jews no longer in the South informed and connected to their former hometowns.

To continue to play the important role of connecting communities the ISJL needs the financial support of all of you: those who live within our region, those who were born in the region but no longer reside there, and those of you with no direct connection to the South who are committed to the work of the organization because of the innovative quality of its programming. We are fortunate that so many of you have already generously donated, but I want to urge those of you

who have not to consider making a gift now. We have a goal of 1,000 new donors and are well on our way to meeting that mark, and your help now will enable us to reach it more quickly.

Thank you all for being part of my Southern Jewish experience, even though I am a part of the Southern Jewish Diaspora. Through serving on the board of the ISJL, my connection remains strong. As a final note, I wish to thank Beth Kander, our Coordinator of Development and Communications, who is moving away from Jackson. Her work for the ISJL has been exemplary. The entire Board of Directors joins me in wishing her all the best as she too becomes part of the Southern Jewish Diaspora.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Rayman L. Solomon', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

## Chief Operating Officer's Message



Michele Schipper

*(Note from Macy: In this issue of CIRCA, I invited the ISJL's Chief Operating Officer, Michele Schipper, to share her thoughts. As you'll see, they are particularly poignant given the overall theme of this issue. I'll be back with another President's Message soon, but in the meantime, I'm proud to be part of a staff community with tremendous leaders like Michele, and glad to have her share her thoughts here.)*

As this CIRCA goes to press, the ISJL is completing our B'nai Mitzvah year, and I am in the midst of the final plans for my own youngest child's Bar Mitzvah.

There is something remarkable about the transformation that has taken place since my son began his studies in earnest. He has probably grown 2 or 3 inches in height and a shoe size or two over the course of the year. But it's the responsibility, the approach to his studies, the "I've got this" attitude that has truly impressed me. He has grown and matured from a boy to a young man.

It's a similar transformation that I have been privileged to share at the ISJL, where for the past six years I have served as Chief Operating Officer. When the organization was founded in 2000, Macy Hart, the ISJL board, and the then-small staff team worked feverishly to get the departments up and running, and to ensure that enriching programs and services were being delivered to our new community partners. Over the years, our staff has grown, the number of programs delivered has multiplied, and our relationships

with our community partners have grown stronger. We have matured, knowing that as we work together, communities small and large, we can thrive and support one another.

Throughout these pages, you will read stories about our community partners, the ways that the ISJL programs positively impact their communities, and the type of response visiting lecturers and performers receive when they are in those same communities. These ongoing relationships, I believe, are the key to the ISJL's continued success.

Typically, we end each year with a snapshot of our work "by the numbers," a celebratory accounting of what has been accomplished. I'd like to share a few of these impressive 2013 numbers. In the past year, our community partners have experienced:

- 49 cultural programs in 22 cities in 10 states.
- 91 rabbinic visits to 45 communities without a full time rabbi.
- The Traveling Trunk program enthralled 689 students in 19 classrooms in 3 states.
- 4 congregations are piloting community engagement service programs.
- Over 270 Community histories are available on the ISJL's Encyclopedia of Southern Jewish Communities.
- Our education program, in place for 10 years, has touched over

100 communities and thousands of children.

Just as the Bar or Bat Mitzvah is but one moment on the path of Jewish education and study, the ISJL's 13th year is but one significant moment as well. We are proud to have attained this milestone – it's a remarkable feat, and one that we don't take for granted. However, we continue to look to the future, committed to continuing the work with our community partners, responding to changing needs, and making good every day on the ISJL's commitment to bring a meaningful Jewish life to everyone, no matter where he or she lives.

One of my favorite lines from Pirkei Avot is this: "It is not your obligation to complete the task, but neither are you free to desist from it." There is much work that is done on a daily basis in communities large and small, in partnership with the ISJL. For all of us directly working in these communities and for all of you who support this work through contributions, our sincere thanks. I challenge you to find something within our programs that inspires you to help us continue the good work ahead. Working together, *we've got this*.

L'shalom,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michele Schipper". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.



Education Fellow Lex Rofes with students in Shreveport, LA

## Cross-Departmental Connections: The More, The More!

A phrase you'll often hear at the ISJL (usually in the education department, from our fearless education leader Rachel Stern!) is "the more, the more" – which means the more good work we have going on, the more good work will continue to be done. It's sort of our modern take on the idea that *mitzvah goreret mitzvah*, or one *mitzvah* leads to another *mitzvah*.

One of the best examples of "the more, the more" is the phenomenon wherein one ISJL department or program reaches a community, and that first doorway to opportunity swiftly opens many other doors as well. For instance, when a community joins the education program, their community will be visited by an Education Fellow, who will share information about all the amazing cultural program opportunities being offered by the ISJL... and the next thing you know, that community is not only an education partner but also taking advantage of a concert or lecture series made available by the ISJL!



Rabbi Klaven in Pensacola, FL

**It's sort of our modern take on the idea that *mitzvah goreret mitzvah*, or one *mitzvah* leads to another *mitzvah*.**

We took a look at just a few of the many communities who have connected with two or more ISJL departments in the past year. Here's what they've done with the ISJL...

**CHATTANOOGA, TENNESSEE.** One of our newer "partner communities," Chattanooga has already jumped right in with several ISJL connections! We've been there for a few years with the **Education Department**, and this year the **Programming Department** also brought a Craig Taubman concert to Chattanooga.

**HAMPTON, VIRGINIA.** In the Northern part of our Southern region, the warm community of Hampton, Virginia has taken part in a variety of ISJL experiences! In addition to partnering with our **Education Department**, Hampton recently hosted a wonderful **Programming Department** event with storyteller Noa Baum, and Rodef Shalom in Hampton was the first Virginia community to receive the Traveling Trunk from the **Museum Department!**

**PENSACOLA, FLORIDA.** When we first launched the ISJL Education

program in 2003, Florida wasn't in our "pilot area" (our first four states were slated to be Alabama, Arkansas, Louisiana and Mississippi). But their then-educator caught wind of what we were doing and said "We need this!" and petitioned to join in on the pilot, making Pensacola one of our very first Education partners. Since then, they have come to the ISJL's **Programming Department** for great cultural programs, most recently a visit from Bible scholar Dr. Joel Hoffman; and have been able to celebrate with other ISJL resources, including a recent **Rabbinic Department** visit to officiate at another beautiful Florida wedding.

**SHREVEPORT, LOUISIANA.** One of our longest-term partners in the **Education Department**, Shreveport has also taken part in many ISJL programs and opportunities over the years, from **Jewish Cinema South** to scholarly visits from Dr. Stuart Rockoff. Now, our historic community partner is one of the first communities piloting congregational **Community Engagement programming** with the ISJL, and we couldn't be more excited to continue deepening our connection with this community.



Traveling Trunk program in Hampton, VA



Students from the Congregational Jewish Community Religious School in Chattanooga, TN

## What Does "Community" Mean?

Rachel Stern, MAJE/MAJCS

We use the word "community" a lot – not only at the ISJL, but also in the Jewish world in general. However, what do we really mean when we say it?

Sometimes it's a go-to word, used easily and without much thought. But that's not the case in our work. At the ISJL, and in the work of the education department in particular, the word community is our defining concept, core value, and identity.

Our entire philosophy rests on the fact that the Jewish community is responsible for one another, and moreover that all Jews matter – no matter where they live, or the size of their Jewish community. Our drive to live out this belief and deliver on that promise has positioned us to become conveners. We bring people together, to learn and to teach, to celebrate and strengthen each other in our successes and struggles.

Our education program consists of a community of congregations, all interconnected. We bring them together in several ways – most notably, once a year en masse and in person at our annual conference; and throughout the year, as they share in the same curriculum and are visited by the team of Education Fellows committed to a shared educational vision.

Our team visits each of our congregations three times a year, making sure that each congregation always feels supported and valued. Our congregations feel a sense of community because they share the same vision, but the sense of community we have fostered goes so much deeper. As we enter each community, our educators' bags are packed with the ideas, strategies, and resources from all of the other communities we serve. We become the conduits of a collective wisdom. Even when they are separated by state lines, denominations, membership size – all of our congregations are still very tangibly "there for each other," because the ISJL links their hands together.

Each day religious school is in session, our community of over 3,000 students gather in classrooms across the region. All of our 4th grade students are experiencing the same lesson. All of the teachers are trying out a new teaching technique or craft project, introduced in an ISJL teacher in-service taught throughout the region, and a new family education lesson is being taught in countless schools. We learn together and we learn from each other. Collective wisdom continually contributes to better and richer Jewish experiences for our children and their families, enhanced by the bonds we have forged and maintain among the dozens of congregations we serve.

When we say "community" here at the ISJL, this is what we mean.



Education Fellow Missy Goldstein at House of Jacob in Wichita Falls, TX



## Preparing for the Passover Pilgrimage

### Rabbi Marshal Klaven

*"Tradition!"*

Whether it's the Jewish holiday of Passover or the American holiday of Thanksgiving, traditions abound around our tables during these festive celebrations of freedom. In my family, the most pronounced tradition was conversation and debate (what outsiders may see as "arguments" and "fights"). In fact, for the longest time I believed Thanksgiving football was televised silently, in reverence – of course – for the holiday. Only later did I come to realize that the only reason I could not hear the game was because my family's voices were drowning out all other noise. And maybe that is exactly the way it should be. Maybe freedom's call should be so loud as to silence all the enemies that continually rise against it.

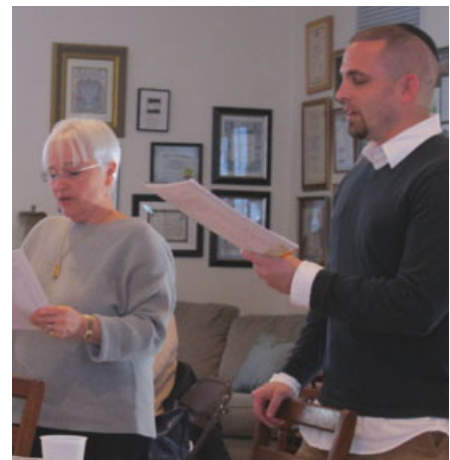
That's one of the essential goals of the annual ISJL Passover Pilgrimage, initiated in 2010. Working with synagogues and schools, churches and correctional facilities, the ISJL Rabbinic Department hits the road to hold a different Passover observance – seders, education programs, social

justice projects – in a different southern community each night of our Festival of Freedom.

More than simply filling stomachs and souls through the sharing of God's bountiful blessings, this program is meant to connect communities and community members, and to fill in the silent spaces that still exist in our world. These silent spaces, if left void, might be filled with much less nourishing things, like fear and hate. So, like my family, the ISJL Passover Pilgrimage comes to fill in that silence with increased constructive conversations.

In bringing more people around a much larger table, we have witnessed the most impactful of transformations starting from the most unassuming of conversations. Here's an example:

In 2011, the ISJL Passover Pilgrimage included for the first time a seder at a correctional facility in the Mississippi Delta for a handful of Jewish inmates as well as some incarcerated non-Jews, whom I encouraged to come. How do you talk about freedom with



At top: Rabbi Klaven leading a seder at Temple B'nai Israel in Natchez, MS

Above: Rabbi Klaven at Temple Beth Tefilloh in Brunswick, GA

a group that is not free? Easy. You transform it from a physical liberation story to a mental, emotional, spiritual one. And, as one of the inmates acknowledged, "That's where freedom begins. If you can have it in here (pointing to his heart), then surely we can have it out there."

The next night, at a table not too dissimilar from the one the night before (minus the inmate jump suits), I passed along more than matzah. I shared the story of the inmates, and one of the seder-goers retorted:



“What’s the point in holding Passover in prison with those who squandered their freedom?” Although harsh, the inquisitive congregant was trying to make the point that freedom is fragile and must be treated with care. I explained that our traditions are not luxuries to be enjoyed in the best of times; they are life’s necessities, needed all the more so in the worst of times, as was the case with our ancestors – and with the inmates.

It was these traditions that helped lead our people out of slavery and into a better life. And it is these traditions, and perhaps even more so these ongoing conversations and engagement with one another, that continues leading us to our best selves.

“God has called us to be a light unto the nations,” shared the same congregant sometime after our seder together. “I now volunteer as a lay-chaplain at a nearby correctional facility, holding services, education, and conversations. For the best tradition we have is not simply sharing words, it’s living them, thereby allowing their message to be carried to others.”

Those words from this congregant make up the heart of the ISJL Passover Pilgrimage and the other initiatives of the ISJL’s Department of Rabbinic Services. By meeting with each other today, we end up greeting a better world tomorrow. So, please, help us continue to raise both the quality and the quantity of these transformative conversations and actions by joining us at the table.

Keep a look out for Rabbi Matt Dreffin and myself, as we collectively visit 14 communities in 7 states on our fifth annual ISJL Passover Pilgrimage this Spring – perhaps we will be spotted at a seder table near you!

*The Passover Pilgrimage 2014 dates and locations will be shared soon on the ISJL website and Facebook page.*

## *From the blog* **“Southern and Jewish”**

### **Uncle Sam(uel) Needs YOU!**

by Rabbi Marshal Klaven

In addition to being the Director of Rabbinic Services at the ISJL, I’m a proud member of the Jewish Welfare Board’s (JWB) Rabbinic Council, an organization established in 1917 to support the spiritual needs of Jews in the United States armed services.

I recently received word that three pallets of Jewish prayer books were damaged in military efforts, and are now unusable. The military was in desperate need to find Jewish burial plots in the South that could provide a proper resting place for these words of God and the long-held traditions of our people. This would be a great and rare opportunity for a congregation to be of unique service to our nation, a way – if you will – to say ‘thank you’ for our freedom to worship as we choose.

Regrettably, earlier efforts to secure the plots elsewhere had been a bust. Thus, they called me: “Please, can you be of any help?”

Yes, we could help. Land space, particularly in large communities and congregations where there is the realistic hope of continued growth, is more limited. Reasonably, one can assume that much of that limited space is already claimed. But in many of our smaller southern congregations, where the populations are more likely to be on the decline, there is some land to spare.

Therefore, I made a suggestion: “Allow me to reach out to our smaller southern congregations. I believe they’ll respond more promptly. Not simply because they may have space available, but because they know well the meaning of ‘sacrifice.’ It’s what allows these small congregations to defy the odds and continue to sustain and strengthen Jewish identities and values in their area so richly.”

And respond they did. Within a day, there were offerings from smaller congregations in North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Tennessee and Alabama. These were thanksgiving offers to this nation. These offers were also a tribute to all of the American Jews who have valiantly served this nation in uniform since its earliest days. And of course, the response showed respect for the prayer books themselves; as one congregation shared: “It’s only proper that these words should rest here with us, as – for us – they lead the way here!”

The damaged prayer books now have a resting place in the South, and the words within continue to enrich our lives. God bless our communities, God bless our soldiers, and God bless America.



**Read our other posts about Southern Jewish life at  
[www.myjewishlearning.com/blog/southern-and-jewish](http://www.myjewishlearning.com/blog/southern-and-jewish)**

# On the Road with Programs

This time around, we decided to ask some of the performers and scholars who have spent time traveling to ISJL communities to share their thoughts. Here's what Sam Glaser and Dr. Joel Hoffman had to say!



## Sam Glaser

What a week! I just completed a whirlwind trek from Baton Rouge to New Orleans, Birmingham, Nashville, and Chattanooga. When the Jewish press interviews me, I always tell them that my favorite region to play is the South. This amazing week just reinforced what I have always believed. There are no more hospitable, appreciative and demonstrative audiences than in southern towns. Each has its own charm and uniqueness but they all share a warmth and sincerity that I just don't find in Los Angeles, New York, and Miami. I perform in over 50 cities every year, but there are few that I look forward to returning to like my favorite southern hangouts!

The culture in the South is incredible. I told my musician friends that I had a few free nights in NOLA and Nashville and managed to see at least a dozen bands in each city. I visited NOMA (New Orleans Art Museum) and also got to tour to the top of the Louisiana capitol building in Baton Rouge, the tallest state capitol in the nation! In Nashville, on my free day I saw the Hermitage, Andrew Jackson's home and plantation, and enjoyed an amazing educational experience that I had missed on my other visits. Finally in Chattanooga, my hosts took me to the top of Lookout Mountain via the Incline train, where we took a beautiful autumn hike.

I returned to my home in Los Angeles simultaneously exhausted and refreshed, happy that I had connected a half dozen audiences with their heritage through the joy of Jewish music. I certainly hope I can repeat the experience soon.

*Sam Glaser is a composer, performer and interpreter of Jewish music. Referred to as one of the top ten Jewish artists in the United States by Moment Magazine, he holds a global fifty-city music tour culminating in Israel every year.*

## Joel Hoffman

Each time the ISJL brings me to the Bible Belt for a book-signing or lecture tour, I learn a little more about the magical charm of the South. And I say that as a Jewish New Yorker.

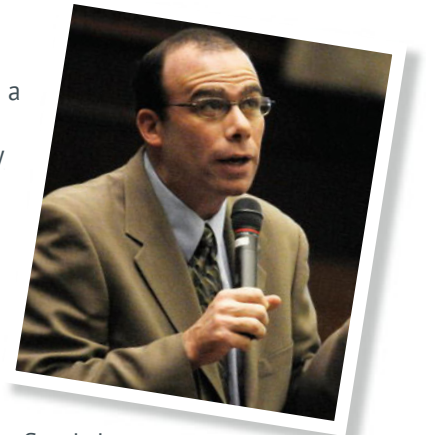
My field is the Bible, and I've been lucky to lecture all over the world, from the Catholic University in Leuven, Belgium to Bar Ilan University in Tel Aviv, Israel. But each time I visit the South, I feel like I'm not just flying down to lecture. I'm accepting an invitation to join a community and to participate in local dialog.

I remember the Southern Baptist minister who wouldn't hear of letting me take a taxi to the airport, never mind the fact that the pastor had to wake up at 5:30am to drive me. I remember the Temple president who graciously gave me a walking tour of his historic town, in spite of the freaky cold-snap that had brought sub-freezing temperatures that day. And I remember the ISJL itself, who insisted that I not dine alone when a broken aircraft stranded me in Jackson for a night.

Equally, I remember the enthusiastic interfaith crowds that show up to talk about the Bible and religion: the Temple whose seating was suddenly insufficient thanks to a hundred Christians who attended my lecture, or the Church that welcomed the local Jews, and not for the first time. Anyone who knows anything about history knows that Jews and Christians have not always sat together amicably. Certainly the occasions for meaningful interfaith study of Scripture have been rare. It is my great fortune to live at a time and in a place that not only permits me to engage in this holy endeavor, but even provides good company and pleasant conversation when I do.

So for this die-hard New Yorker, there's nothing like a few days in the South.

*Dr. Joel Hoffman is the chief translator for the 10-volume series, My People's Prayer Book. His book, And God Said, provides readers with an authoritative account of significant mistranslations and shows how new translation methods can give readers their first glimpse into what the Bible really means! His delivery is filled with "aha" and humorous moments.*



## Programming in 2014

The Programming Department had a banner year in 2013. And 2014 is starting out with a bang:

January 11th – Noa Baum  
Temple Emanu-El  
in Tuscaloosa, AL

January 12th – Noa Baum  
Temple Beth Shalom  
Ft. Walton Beach, FL

January 19th – Stuart Rockoff  
Knoxville Jewish Alliance  
Knoxville, TN

January 26th – Noa Baum  
Congregation Shaarey Israel  
Macon, GA

January 30th – Joel Hoffman  
Pensacola Jewish Federation  
Pensacola, FL

February 7th – Michael Cook  
Temple Sinai  
New Orleans, LA

March 4th – Batsheva  
Blacksburg JCC  
Blacksburg, VA

April 6th – God in the Box  
Temple B'nai Sholom  
Huntsville, AL

Several more communities are in the planning stages to join these tours or for dates of their own. If you would like more information on bringing Jewish Programming to your community contact me anytime!  
Ann Zivitz Kientz  
akientz@isjl.org

## A New Chapter for Dr. Stuart Rockoff

At the end of 2013, after eleven years on the ISJL team, Dr. Stuart Rockoff took on a new role as Executive Director of the Mississippi Humanities Council. Stuart is the third executive director of Mississippi Humanities Council, an independent nonprofit established in 1972 by the National Endowment for the Humanities.



“(Dr. Rockoff) is a well-respected scholar, known as an active research historian, who also has a talent for public programming in the humanities,” said board chair Pamela Pridgen. “He has worked on many projects with the Mississippi Humanities Council, including the Smithsonian Institution traveling exhibition, Journey Stories. In 2010, he received the Preserver of Mississippi Culture Award from the Council in recognition of his work with the Council as a project director for grant-funded programs, scholar, oral historian, evaluator and lecturer. Additionally, he authored a chapter on Jews in Mississippi in the Council’s second volume of Ethnic Heritage in Mississippi, published by the University Press of Mississippi.”

The Mississippi Humanities Council is funded by Congress through the National Endowment for the Humanities to provide public programs in traditional liberal arts disciplines to serve nonprofit groups in Mississippi. This is truly a wonderful new chapter for Stuart, and we all join in wishing him a hearty mazel tov! He’s also still a scholar on our programming roster and still living in Jackson, so fear not – he won’t be a stranger.

## Bringing the Encyclopedia to Life

The ISJL’s history department continues to actively collect information and documents relating to every Southern Jewish community that has ever existed. This project provides a valuable resource for researchers, scholars, and people interested in their family history. This project, the Encyclopedia of Southern Jewish Communities, is live and available on our website. As of November 2013, our digital encyclopedia now includes detailed histories for every Jewish community in twelve Southern states.

The engagement with our material is tremendous, and continues to increase:

- Over the past year, the ISJL’s online Encyclopedia of Southern Jewish Communities had 149,566 page views (122,424 unique page views)
- There are over 270 community histories, in total, represented in the Encyclopedia



As we move forward, updating the encyclopedia entries and continually curating the information, we are also bringing these resources to life by developing programs based on these assets, which not only preserve the legacy and stories of Southern Jewish life, but also foster community today. Coordinating visits for tour groups, creating educational lessons and lectures, and contributing materials to the Traveling Trunk for every state it covers are just a few of the ways this work is ever-evolving!

# Snapshots from the Road



**1. HAMPTON, VIRGINIA**  
Education Fellow Sam Kahan and Education Director Tess Goldblatt dressed for the Temple Rodef Shalom Centennial Celebration.



**2. JACKSON, MISSISSIPPI**  
French tourists from the Alsace region visited the ISJL offices as part of their Jewish heritage tour through Louisiana and Mississippi. Dr. Stuart Rockoff spoke to the group about Southern Jewish history and Rachel Myers led them on a tour of historic Civil Rights sites in Jackson.

**3. GREENVILLE, MISSISSIPPI**  
Education Fellow Allison Poirier celebrating Simchat Torah at Hebrew Union Congregation.



**4. AUBURN, ALABAMA**  
Rabbi Matt Dreffin invites congregants to participate in a Shabbat service at Congregation Beth Shalom.





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**5. JACKSON, MISSISSIPPI**

New student mediators are sworn in at Blackburn Middle School. They are the 4th cohort of mediators to be a part of the TAP program in their school.

**6. FAYETTEVILLE, ARKANSAS**

Students at Temple Shalom of Northwest Arkansas participate in the Linda Pinkus Memorial Labyrinth program developed by Rabbi Marshal Klaven.

**7. BIRMINGHAM, ALABAMA**

Students at Temple Beth-El loved “The Rabbi and the 39 Witches” story-time with Education Fellow Amanda Winer.



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# Connect Four

Malkie Schwartz



ABOVE:

Malkie Schwartz leads a workshop with congregants of Temple Israel in Columbus, GA.

OPPOSITE PAGE:

Malkie Schwartz, Rabbi Dan Gordon and Susan Pollard from Temple Beth Torah in Humble, TX.

What connects B'nai Zion in Shreveport, Louisiana; Temple Beth Torah in Humble, Texas; Temple Beth-El in Birmingham, Alabama; and Temple Israel in Columbus, Georgia?

This year, these four congregations have partnered with the ISJL's community engagement department to meaningfully engage in service. To some this may sound simple—as simple as picking up food and dropping it off at a food pantry, or bringing toiletries to a shelter, or school supplies to a school. All of these acts of service are wonderful. However, these four congregations are taking a new approach to service; an approach that is consistent with the belief that greater efforts yield greater results.

In the case of true community engagement, investing the

time and energy into learning, planning, implementing, evaluating, and reflecting increases the possibility that we will see lasting impact. It also increases the likelihood that we will find our experience of service to be more meaningful and worthwhile. Edmund Burke said it best with this line: "Reading (or serving) without reflecting is like eating without digesting."

The process of engaging in meaningful service is not linear. In fact, we are often juggling two or three areas of concentration at once. Each congregation is going through this process and we are learning a lot along the way. These are some examples:

• **B'NAI ZION, SHREVEPORT, LA:** B'nai Zion is fortunate to

have congregational members who are also educators, familiar with the local education system. A series of conversations took place where congregants explored what motivates them to serve and the components that make a service project particularly meaningful. After a year of becoming familiar with the schools' needs, potential partner organizations and the schedules of interested volunteers, a reading program was born. **Read, Lead, Succeed** is underway in Shreveport, and is positioned for growth in the coming year.

• **TEMPLE BETH TORAH, HUMBLE, TX:**

During an October visit, I was particularly struck by the depth of conversation among the leadership team as we went around and shared what it is that inspires us to serve. Those conversations led the group to focus on issues of education and safety. The new **SALT (Social Alternatives Leadership Team)** group is hard at work! Currently, they are compiling a list of people who may be impacted or have the influence to impact education and safety initiatives in the Humble area. Learning about the work that is already underway provides a basis from which the group can make an informed decision about how to proceed—a decision that is based on an understanding of what other organizations are working on, their intended destination, their strengths, and the partnership opportunities that are available.

• **TEMPLE ISRAEL, COLUMBUS, GA:**

The leadership group in Columbus has zeroed in on addressing bullying and parent/

family involvement with related issues. There is a history of individual members of the Jewish community getting involved in education; two of the Muscogee County School District's 12 middle schools are named after Jews: Rothschild Leadership Academy and Aaron Cohn Middle School. **The Jewish community has a historic relationship with the school district.** The congregation is seeking to deepen those relationships and continue the legacy of these two influential Jewish leaders.

• **TEMPLE BETH-EL,  
BIRMINGHAM, AL:**

The youth of Temple Beth-El are leading the way. The 7th and 8th graders have already become B'nai Mitzvah, and they are gearing up to engage in Jewish life through service. The students have talked about their enjoyment of sports and their interest in making sure that all children have the opportunity to play sports and experience a healthy life. The group is in the early stages of planning a project that will align with their interests in having a great time and **making Birmingham a healthier city.**

Young and old, addressing a range of issues, but all in a connected and deeply engaged way – we can't wait to increase the number of communities partnering with us to make our world a better place, community by community.



## LIMMUD: Convening a Community of Learning



A New Orleans-style celebration of Jewish learning and community will bring Jews from all corners of the region together for a unique shared educational experience.

LimmudFest New Orleans 2014, a festival of Jewish learning that celebrates

culture and community, will take place March 7–9, 2014 in Uptown New Orleans. Organized and run entirely by volunteers, LimmudFest is designed to appeal to Jews of all backgrounds, denominations, ages, and interests. There are nine simultaneous tracks of programming: Israel, Spirituality, Contemporary Jewish Life and Identity, Arts & Culture, Social Justice, Text and Thought, History, and Family.

LimmudFest 2014 is a family experience, providing quality Children's Programming throughout the weekend, including presentations by author Amy Meltzer, a social justice workshop for children and parents, and a children's music program presented by Meryl Zimmerman. A multi-denominational Shabbat service will be held for children ages 5-10 and babysitting will be available throughout the weekend.

Three of the national and international presenters include Mark Schleifstein, Rachel Luft and Dr. Mark Wagner. Environment reporter Mark Schleifstein is a journalist and author who has worked at NOLA.com / The Times-Picayune since 1984. He has received numerous awards including a Pulitzer Prize for Public Service and A Louisiana Press Club Lifetime Achievement Award. Rachel E. Luft is an Associate Professor of Sociology at Seattle University. For nearly a decade prior she taught at the University of New Orleans. Her areas of research specialization and social activism are race, gender, social movements, and disaster. Before becoming a sociologist Rachel was a Jewish educator in Berkeley, CA where she created curricula for Jewish youth and families on Jewish identity, gender, and race. Dr. Mark Wagner is an associate professor of foreign languages and literature at LSU. His areas of interest include Arabic Literature, Islamic law, and Muslim Jewish relations. His session will focus on how Jews living in the Islamic world were able to adapt to Islamic law, and even learn to manipulate it to their advantage.

According to Ann Zivitz Kientz, donning another hat as a member of the LimmudFest Steering Committee, "I love Limmud because I enjoy shared communal Jewish experiences, and the opportunity to learn side by side with and from Jews of all denominations! This year is extra special as we have a very rare opportunity to spend Shabbat together as a community under one roof, with many varied worship, learning, and social experiences. There is something for everyone!"

To encourage regional participation, many people have volunteered to open their homes to Limmud participants from outside New Orleans. You can request home hospitality by going to the Hospitality page of the Limmud website, [www.limmudnola.org](http://www.limmudnola.org).

# Curating Community Connections

## Rachel Jarman Myers

The museum department at the ISJL operates in full-on outreach mode, all of the time.

Since we are currently a museum without a building, existing without physical walls, we must quite literally think outside the box. Instead of inviting people into our space to learn about Southern Jewish history and culture, we offer to meet them in their spaces. We are a museum on the move, actively curating connections with communities on their own turf.

The model has been working: our Traveling Trunk reached over 600 students throughout Mississippi, Texas, and Virginia in 2013. Classrooms that are usually home to spelling tests and multiplication problems are transformed by the trunk into miniature museum galleries. Using artifacts, costumes, games and primary documents, teachers can provide a unique learning environment for their students without leaving the classroom. The lessons encourage students to make personal connections with the material while it's in the students' learning space, but the trunk can inspire connections outside the classroom as well.

In November, I worked with staff at the Sunflower Public Library in Indianola, Mississippi who used the trunk in collaboration with a traveling Smithsonian exhibit "The Way We Work." The lessons on peddlers and Jewish store owners provided a local connection to their exhibit, which focused on the history of the American workforce. The

materials were used in the library for public educational programs as well as within two local schools.

Not only did the trunk travel to libraries, but also found its way to a piano studio! I received a message from a Jewish piano teacher in the small town of Aberdeen, Mississippi, letting me know that she had been recruited by one of her students to speak to a class using the Traveling Trunk! A New Jersey native, she is now one of the only Jews in her county and was delighted with her role as Jewish ambassador, sharing her practice and experience with the students. In this instance, the trunk not only connected students to their community's diverse cultural history, but also connected a local resident to her own heritage.

Other curated connections occurred through the ISJL's partnership with the Margaret Walker Center at Jackson State University. Together, we hosted a powerful photography exhibit developed by the Morgan County Archives, "Scottsboro Boys: Outside the Circle of Humanity." The exhibit featured photographs taken during the trial of Haywood Patterson and shed light on an important episode in the struggle for racial justice in the South. We planned three unique events that attracted diverse audiences from across the city, one of which featured a lecture by Dr. Stuart Rockoff,



Hanukkah Celebration at Jackson State University

highlighting the important role Jewish lawyers and activists played in the case. In conjunction with the lecture, we also hosted a Hanukkah celebration, complete with laktes! The first of its kind on campus, the gathering was a successful cultural exchange that may not have happened if we were within a traditionally "Jewish" space.

We joke in this office about our ability to give anything a Jewish connection (Hunger Games Maccabia, anyone?). But the work we do to come up with creative associations ultimately results in diverse partnerships, which help foster new understanding between Jewish and non-Jewish communities. Taking advantage of a surprising connection is just part of the fun!



Trunk Library Program



## *Thank You to Our Supporters!*

In these CIRCA pages, you can see the impact our education, history, museum, cultural, community engagement and rabbinic 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 1st- December 31st, 2013 to enable our important work.

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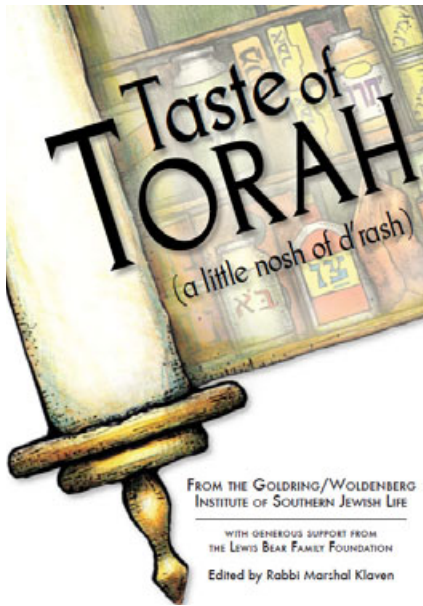
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