

Winter 2016

# CIRCA

Newsletter of the Goldring/ Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life

## ISJL

# Sweet

# 16

## in 2016





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# CIRCA

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# IN THIS ISSUE OF CIRCA...



The Goldring/Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life was officially established on February 13, 2000. Sixteen years later, the ISJL certainly has a lot to celebrate.

Numbers are important in Jewish tradition. While sixteen doesn't have the same famous significance as all of the numbers in Who Knows One (sorry if we just made you start humming that Passover tune early!), or eighteen (*chai*, or "life"—and don't worry, we'll celebrate when we get there!), or forty (like the days of the flood, and the number of years we wandered in the desert...), it's still a special number, especially for us. For example, as an organization that puts so many staff on the road, the age of the driver's license is an important one!



On a more serious note, our six departments have continued to impact communities across the South. In each area, our creative staff have found a way to celebrate sixteen years of service—whether by highlighting sixteen achievements, or work done for and with sixteen year olds, or reflections on the past sixteen years of the ISJL's innovative approach to Jewish communal life. This issue is full of updates, since our sixteenth year is already off and running. From expanding our Community Engagement work to the upcoming Passover Pilgrimage, there's a lot to share!



Speaking of the Passover Pilgrimage, we have something truly special in this sweet sixteen edition of CIRCA: A reading to share at your Passover seder. This reading will be read on every stop of our Passover Pilgrimage, and hopefully at seders throughout the South and beyond. Please feel free to remove the page and add it in to your celebration—we hope it will be one more shared resource we can all use to enrich our holiday. And if you want an easy-to-print-and-copy PDF version of the seder supplement, download the reading from our website: [www.isjl.org](http://www.isjl.org)!



Thank you for sharing in sixteen years of Southern Jewish journeys. Here's to all the years and celebrations ahead!

*The Board & Staff of the ISJL*

## President's Message



ISJL President  
Macy B. Hart

February 13th, 2000, was my first official day as founding President of this great organization. At this sixteen-year milestone, I want to wish a sincere mazel tov to all of us who have been a part of the creation and ongoing work of the Goldring/Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life.

Despite the odds being stacked against us as we set forth to establish the ISJL, with so many saying what we wanted to do on a regional basis was too ambitious—sixteen years later we're still here, and more impactful than ever. Over the years, we have learned so much about doing sustainable, collaborative Jewish communal work. One important thing I've learned: Don't panic.

I have written in the past about a number of concerns the Jewish world as a whole strives to address, and my personal frustration at the inertia we too often see when it comes to addressing these issues. One of the continuing concerns we hear about is the current panic about the "Millennial" generation. Jewish leadership is alarmed about low congregational affiliation rates, for example, and the corresponding fear that this will be the "last Jewish generation."

This panic, of course, is nothing new. Every generation has been the feared potential last. When I was sixteen, it was my generation that was causing everyone despair. It was the era of Civil Rights, marches and protests, the '67 war in Israel, women's liberation, so much social upheaval. It wasn't what Judaism had looked like to previous generations. But now we,

those former sixteen year olds back in the 1960s, are the ones in our sixties. We are the ones holding leadership positions, and worried about the teens and twenty-somethings and thirty-somethings of today.

In the case of each of these generational-panics, the Jewish community has not only survived, but also reached new levels of achievement that were probably thought impossible. The next wave of change is happening now and has been attributed to the Millennials. There is always resistance to whatever change is arising. But if we have a little more trust, we realize that change can be a good thing.

From what I've witnessed, there needs to be more blending of the ages when dealing with change. The last couple of decades, the Jewish world has been obsessed with the notion of "innovation." But I think what we all need to focus on, whatever our age or stage, is not simply innovation but sustainability. That's why the ISJL has taken the approach of identifying key issues and working with our partners to address the issue through meaningful, long-term solutions and not quick-fixes.

The ISJL has distinguished itself in the halls of the innovation-seekers by embracing "bold old" ideas, such as putting itinerant rabbis on the road. Not everything old is bad, and not everything new is scary. Working together, we can incorporate the best of the old and the new to achieve outcomes beneficial to

the entire Jewish community. After sixteen years of putting this into practice, part of the reason we so proudly claim that the ISJL is an "experiment gone right" is because we are always willing to blend old, new, and everything else in between.

I am not panicked about the Millennials. Today's sixteen year olds are going to be just fine, as are today's twenty-somethings, thirty-somethings... and as is the Jewish community. Things are changing, yes, but they're always changing. Those of us working in Jewish life need to make room for this continuing evolution. We also need not focus all of our Jewish communal philanthropy on just "bringing in the Millennials." We can't just innovate and focus on the panic. We have to look at the big picture, realize each generation finds its way, and focus mostly on community-building and connecting individuals and congregations—just as the ISJL has done for sixteen years, and will continue to do.

Thanks to all of you for making our work possible. Here's to each next new milestone.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Macy B. Hart". The signature is stylized and fluid, with a large initial "M" and "B".

## Board Chair's Message



ISJL Board Chair  
Rachel Reagler  
Schulman

Sixteen! The ISJL is turning sixteen this year and I know it will be a magical year! After all, my own sixteenth year was pretty meaningful, in a very Southern and Jewish way.

When I turned sixteen, I was finishing my sophomore year at Wynne High School in Wynne, Arkansas. Like many other 16-year-olds, I was thrilled to get my driver's license—but for me, the best thing a license meant was that I could drive myself to Memphis. For a Jewish girl living 60 miles away from her “big city friends” in Memphis, it was such a treat to be able to drive myself to MeFTY and SoFTY events (for those who don't know, MeFTY was Temple Israel in Memphis' youth group, and SoFTY is now what is known as the NFTY Southern region). As a parent myself, I give my parents so much credit for trusting 16-year-old-me to drive all the way to Memphis, and all over the South, to connect with my Jewish friends. I think they knew how important, meaningful, and magical those road trips and connections would prove to be.

Also at the age of sixteen, I spent one of my best summers ever at URJ Henry S. Jacobs Camp (HSJ). Back in 1980 (not to date myself...), kids in the HSJ region entering their junior year of high school did not fly off to Europe and Israel for the summer. Rather, we lived and worked on our own kibbutz community in the middle of Mississippi for eight weeks! Yes, our parents paid good money to send us to Utica, Mississippi, to live in giant Army tents in the sweltering southern summer sun, cook our own food in our own kitchen, shower with only cold water, and work in our own vegetable fields every day.



*K'far Hashlama, 1980*

Our group, which consisted of 18 kids and a married couple as our advisors, named our community *K'far Hashlama*, which meant Village of Accomplishment. We elected our own leaders every 2 weeks, kept our village clean and safe, performed in the camp talent show, sold our fruits and vegetables to visiting parents and guests, rebuilt the outdoor shower (pictured!), and had an amazing time together. I am sure everyone who lived on a kibbutz community that existed at HSJ says the same thing about THEIR kibbutz, as they should, but that year of living in the woods in Utica, Mississippi, at HSJ really was the best summer ever. We connected as a group and accomplished and learned so much as a community.

Now, as the ISJL celebrates its 16th year, I realize that the way the ISJL connects individuals and communities is just as meaningful as when I was a 16 year old at Jewish summer camp. The ISJL believes every child is entitled to a Jewish education, and every Jewish

community, no matter its size, deserves to feel connected and resourced. That's why we partner with congregations to provide education, tikkun olam, cultural events, rabbinic services, and our entire range of programs: So that individuals and communities are able to join together, to learn and collaborate and celebrate their Judaism.

To continue to provide this wonderful programming, and to keep connecting communities year after year, the ISJL needs the financial support of all of us. We are fortunate that there are so many who give generously, and I want to urge those of you who have not yet contributed to consider making a gift now. Become an annual supporter of the ISJL, and you will be part of a community that truly accomplishes so much.

# Natchez Celebrates The Big 3-0...0!



In Natchez, Mississippi, sixteen has a very specific significance – because the city was founded in '16. 1716, that is—making 2016 their Tri-Centennial Year. Since Natchez is home to one of the South's most historic and beautiful synagogues, we've long been involved with the community and are excited to be part of their year-long party!

Natchez will be celebrating their 300th anniversary with 365 days of activities, celebrating their long and storied history. 2016 will showcase Natchez's remarkable 300-year history and bring the community together by commemorating the past, celebrating the present, and creating a brighter future, all while making Natchez's rich, multicultural history more meaningful and relevant to today's visitors and residents. Established by French colonists in 1716, Natchez is one of the oldest and most important European settlements in the Lower Mississippi Valley. Community leaders are encouraging people to visit and learn more about the city, and we think you should, too!

The Tri-Centennial events will draw attention to sites throughout the city that work to ensure the preservation of Natchez heritage for future generations. Natchez's Jewish community will be prominently featured throughout the year, with historic Temple B'nai Israel being the main place visitors can learn about the rich Jewish history in the city. 2016 marks an important year for Temple B'nai Israel, as congregants work to assure a future for the building and the wonderful people of Natchez who have called the congregation home.

The story of Jewish life in Natchez begins in the early 1840s, when the first Jewish immigrants were drawn by economic opportunity to the Mississippi frontier. They became merchants and valued members of the growing community. The 1905 Temple houses the oldest Jewish congregation in Mississippi, formed in 1843. The story continues today with the current B'nai Israel congregants, who carry on the proud traditions of their ancestors. They have regular Shabbat services and holiday

programs that are attended by a wide range of Natchez community members who support the synagogue. Temple B'nai Israel is open to the public with the support of local docents from the congregation. Visits include a guided tour of the historic building, the "Pass-over to Pilgrimage" exhibit documenting the history and everyday life of Natchez's Jewish families, and a documentary entitled "The Natchez Jewish Experience."

This fall, the ISJL, in partnership with Temple B'nai Israel, will host the annual Southern Jewish Historical Society conference in Natchez. The gathering will introduce visitors to the strength and commitment of Natchez Jewish residents throughout history. It's one more way that 2016 will be a celebration, for all of Natchez—including its small but prominent Jewish community! The congregation's connection to the ISJL will ensure that Temple B'nai Israel and its history are both preserved and celebrated. It will also ensure that the temple continues to play an important role in the religious and cultural life of the Natchez community, the cradle of Judaism in Mississippi.

**For more information visit**  
[www.templebnaiisraelnatchez.org](http://www.templebnaiisraelnatchez.org)

# The Museum of the Southern Jewish Experience Turns 30!

**Rachel Myers**

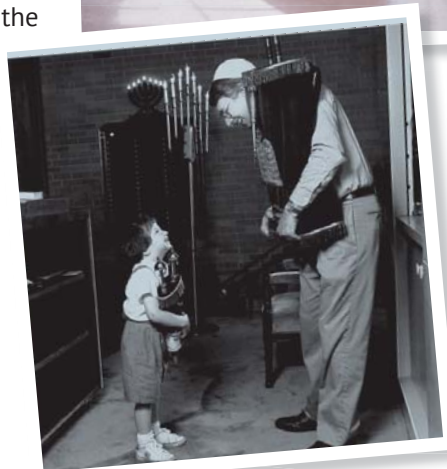
While the ISJL may be celebrating its sweet sixteen, the Museum Department is actually celebrating another milestone: Our 30th year of sharing the Southern Jewish experience!

The Museum of the Southern Jewish Experience (MSJE) was initially established in 1986 to preserve, document, and share the Southern Jewish experience. With the founding of the ISJL in 2000, the MSJE became the Museum Department of the ISJL.

Thirty years ago, Macy B. Hart founded the MSJE to preserve the physical artifacts and stories of southern Jewish communities that were diminishing. With a donation from the Plough Foundation of Memphis, the original museum building was built on the grounds of Henry S. Jacobs Camp in Utica, Mississippi, opening its doors in 1989. For more than two decades, the building in Utica served as the primary location of the MSJE collection. But in 2011, recognizing that the remote campground location did not offer the accessibility needed to support a viable and growing group of museum-goers, the Utica location closed its doors. Now, the collection exists as a “Museum Without Walls,” sending exhibits and programs throughout the South and beyond, as plans are underway for a new physical building.

At 30, the museum is as dynamic and resourceful as ever as we continue to collect and preserve artifacts, while facilitating traveling exhibits, providing resources for researchers, inviting visitors to our region, designing itineraries for heritage tours and developing interactive educational programs for students of all ages.

As the Director of Museum Projects, I'm humbled to share such a milestone birthday with the MSJE. We are both turning 30 this year! 2016 will be a year to recognize how our accomplishments and growth are due to many dedicated and inspired individuals who have continued to support Jewish life in this region. Look forward to more highlights from past programs and updates on MSJE future plans in the months and years ahead!



## 2015 ISJL IMPACT

**255** visits made to **87** Southern Jewish Communities

**153** visits made by ISJL Education Fellows to Southern congregations

**72** Rabbinic visits to **35** different communities in **11** states

**30** Cultural programs held in **20** cities in **12** states

**148** visitors traveled **4550** miles over **48** days on Southern Jewish Heritage tours of **18** Southern cities.

**7** schools & congregations in partnership with the Community Engagement Department, involving over **100** volunteers in local initiatives in **5** states.

More than **100,000** visits to our website.

**Tens of thousands** of shares of our “Southern & Jewish” blog posts

# Celebrating Sixteen Year Olds

Rachel Stern and Rabbi Matt Dreffin



ABOVE  
Education Fellow  
Leah Apothaker led  
teen activities for  
an overnight  
program at Beth  
Israel in Houston,  
TX.

For the Education Department's Sweet 16 celebration, we decided to focus on the actual 16-year-olds we serve. This demographic of Jewish teens, post *B'nei Mitzvah*, are traditionally thought of as a pretty tough group to reach. Since they have already completed their "formal" Jewish education leading up to that big lifecycle event, there's no real carrot to keep them engaged. Further complicating efforts to keep high schoolers involved in their Jewish education is that these students are busier than ever with school, extra-curricular activities, active social lives, and of course test-taking and college planning.

The trend in congregations throughout the country is that teens tend to stop attending religious school

after 7th or 8th grade, even though some congregations have classes offered all the way through 12th grade. Even participation in informal Jewish experiences for teens, such as youth groups and summer camps, is at an all-time low.

The ISJL strives to reach this age group by creating programs that meet the needs and interests of the teens we serve. We have created programs to train teaching assistants (*madrachim*), who are then able to teach younger students; we've developed lessons on how to deal with issues such as cyber-bullying and anti-Semitism; and we've created hands-on, immersive programs on topics like leadership, environmentalism, and social activism (and much, much more).

We also reach our Jewish teens by showcasing our Education Fellows as examples of young

and "cool" Jewish role models, ones who share why being Jewish matters with them over pizza or while bowling. Being with Jewish young adults that they can relate to and who they also look up to can be a powerful experience. When Fellows come to town, they often rally as many teens as possible to run either a youth group event or some kind of informal gathering to bring the kids together and connect them to something Jewish.

We also brainstorm new ways to reach our Jewish teens by creating rituals focused on their milestones such as getting a driver's license, selecting a college, and even taking the SAT. (Hey, who couldn't use a prayer on that particular morning?!) Many of our teens have community service hour requirements for school, so why not offer them Jewish ways to get those hours? If we can create Jewish ceremonies for our pets, surely we can get creative with our teens.

We want our Jewish teens to know that they matter to us, and that we care about what's important to them. Connecting what teens value to being Jewish is our ultimate goal. Maybe we won't see them attend religious school every week, and maybe they will choose other experiences over synagogue events, but we can make the moments we have with them meaningful and memorable. The impact of these Jewish moments will go with them to college and as they become Jewish adults.



# Sixteen Sweet Years of Cultural Programming

## Alachua Haskins

One of the original departments of the ISJL, our Cultural Programming Department is here to stay! We began with film festivals, book tours, and now have expanded our offerings to include musicians, theatrical performances, and all sorts of dynamic cultural experiences enjoyed by diverse audiences throughout our thirteen state Southern territory.

As we celebrate sixteen years of programming, 2016 will be a busy year for the ISJL Cultural Programming Department not only as we recall past successes but also because our line-up for the year is truly exciting! In addition to continuing to promote fabulous returning presenters, such as renowned scholar Dr. Joel Hoffman and Yiddish/Ladino/Hebrew singing sensation Batsheva, we have some new folks on the docket as well. Here's a glimpse at what's coming in 2016:



### Jane Larkin

Jane speaks about intermarriage, Jewish continuity, building a Jewish home, Jewish parenting, and Jewish engagement. She is available for an event or scholar-in-residence weekend, and is happy to tailor a program to your specific needs. Perfect for congregations with young families!

### Andrew Lustig

You might recognize Andrew from his popular YouTube video, "I Am Jewish." His spoken word performances and Jewish identity workshops are accessible, authentic, and awesome. Andrew is a great fit for audiences of all ages, especially teens and adults, and we are looking forward to helping bring Andrew to your community!



### My Heart in a Suitcase

We are currently promoting the play *My Heart in a Suitcase*, the story of a Jewish family in 1938 Berlin and their decision whether or not to send their daughter on the Kindertransport. This play is designed for students 4th grade and up and well-suited for a Holocaust education session, Yom HaShoah event, or all-school program.

We are thrilled to promote our 2016 performers. Whether you are looking for a scholarly presentation, a laugh-out-loud performance, a family concert, or a captivating storyteller, we look forward to bringing you excellent Jewish programming throughout the year!

For more information about our roster of presenters visit [www.isjl.org/southern-states-jewish-programming-series.html](http://www.isjl.org/southern-states-jewish-programming-series.html)



Nancy Ehret teaches Walker and Jack about Tikkun Olam.

## From the Blog: The Catholic Mentsch Teaching Jewish Sunday School in the Mississippi Delta

Gail Goldberg

News flash: In Greenwood, Mississippi, Jewish religious school has officially been deemed “cool.” And it’s thanks in large part to someone you may find surprising.

My husband and I are longtime Greenwood residents, and recently our two grandsons – Walker, a second grader, and Jack, a kindergartener – moved here with their parents. When they made the move to our small Delta town, we all still wanted to make sure that these two boys could have an excellent Jewish education. So our congregation, Ahavath Rayim, re-joined the ISJL Education program. (We were partners before, until we had no more religious-school age children left; now, we have kids again!) We decided pretty quickly that the boys needed someone in addition to their mother and immediate family to participate in this process.

I reached out to Nancy Ehret, a devout Catholic friend of mine. Nancy recently



**I told Nancy as I thanked her: “You are a mentsch.” (Yes, she had to look it up.)**

moved back to Greenwood, retiring here after a very impressive 40+ year education career in Louisiana. During our lunch meeting a few weeks ago, I asked her to consider helping us provide a Jewish education for my grandsons.

I explained to Nancy, as Rachel Stern explains to all: the ISJL curriculum is

developed to allow folks with limited Jewish knowledge to teach each lesson, with very little preparation or previous knowledge required. Everything you might need is included in the books and supplements. To my delight, Nancy said she was “in” for the challenge and opportunity. She quickly committed to teaching one lesson every month.

We just experienced Nancy’s first lesson for the boys. She taught them about Tikkun Olam, and it was beyond amazing. Nancy gathered the boys in her kitchen, and with amazing teaching skills she interacted with her two new students, asking questions, sharing her research, and bringing the rest of our family into the conversation. Nancy had indeed “done her prep” as the lesson continued: to our surprise, she produced a container of live earthworms, and then explained to the boys exactly how worms are part of the Tikkun Olam concept. Worms are important – worms aerate the soil, allowing air to get to plant roots; worms eat dirt, digest it, and excrete this rich-in-nutrients matter back into the soil. They help repair the world!

With non-toxic food coloring and paper, Nancy showed her now fully engaged students (what kindergartener and second grader wouldn't love a lesson featuring live worms?!) how the worms were going to paint a picture to remind us of their impact. As the Shalom Sesame "Tikkun Olam" song played on Nancy's iPhone in the background, we placed food coloring and worms on paper. As they wiggled through the different colors – art was produced. The art will be framed using twigs.

The lesson concluded with a "to be continued" component. Nancy and the boys share a ditch behind their homes. Nancy explained that Tikkun Olam needs to be action, not just thought. She asked the boys to make a pledge – to "repair the world" by beginning at our neighborhood ditch. We all walked to the ditch and discussed what needed to be cleaned up.

In a few weeks, Leah Apothaker, our ISJL Education Fellow, will spend her first Shabbos in Greenwood. We will have Shabbos dinner in our "holy" garage, and services in our 109-year-old synagogue. And now, we'll have something new: follow-up on Nancy's lessons and more ISJL curriculum adventures. That Saturday morning we will continue Walker and Jack's Tikkun Olam project: Cleaning the ditch, making the neighborhood aware of not throwing trash, and the ongoing commitment of monitoring the ditch. In the long term, Nancy is interested in applying for a grant to make the ditch a natural habitat, and our boys will be part of that process.

The ISJL Education Department is important to all communities – providing the curriculum, the Ed Fellows, the Conference, and the access to the support provides access to a Jewish Education. However, to make all this work and be effective, you must have the support of your synagogue. In a community like Greenwood, with only 15 Jewish people, reaching out to our faith-based neighbors and friends is an option; receiving their support is a blessing.

I told Nancy as I thanked her: "You are a *mentsch*." (Yes, she had to look it up.) Thank you, Nancy Ehret for sharing your time and your knowledge with our boys, and helping make their Jewish education phenomenal right here in Greenwood, Mississippi.

## Former Fellows Return to Jackson



Did you know the ISJL Education Fellowship now has nearly 40 alumni spread across the country (and in Israel)? Since 2003, the ISJL has recruited and cultivated among the best and brightest young Jewish leaders from across the nation-- and these young professionals continue to do amazing work after finishing their Fellowship. In fact, our recent survey of them reveals that they're active volunteers, lifelong learners, and 81% of them still work full or part-time

in the Jewish world! This puts the ISJL at the forefront of finding and cultivating the best and brightest young Jewish leaders, and helping retain them as deeply engaged participants in Jewish communal life.

We have been saying for some time that bringing together this inspiring group would align well with the Jewish community's commitment to and interest in the "often elusive" twenty and thirty-something demographic. We knew it would also lead to wonderful connections for the alumni, for the ISJL, and for our entire community-- so we're doing just that!

Thanks to the generosity of Lawrence Magdovitz z"l, this month we are hosting our first-ever ISJL Education Fellow alumni reunion. Provided with travel assistance and professional development stipends, Former Fellows will return to Jackson for three days of networking, professional development, socializing, and visiting their favorite Mississippi hangouts. Robin Axelrod, Education Director at the Holocaust Memorial Center in metropolitan Detroit and former director of the Sol S. Drachler Jewish Communal Leadership graduate program at the University of Michigan, will serve as facilitator and professional development presenter for the reunion.

We'll share more updates and stories after this late-February reunion takes place. We know it's going to be a tremendous gathering!

## The ISJL's Big Texas Board Meeting

In November, the ISJL's Board of Directors convened in San Antonio, Texas. Though most of the weekend was spent on governance, there were some good times to be had, too - the riverboat tour and dinners out on the town brought big Texas grins to everyone's faces! The Board was glad to be able to spend their bi-annual meeting in Texas, a state full of ISJL partner communities. From education to cultural programs to rabbinic visits to community engagement, museum, and history -- every single ISJL department has served the Lone Star State! The Board will next convene this April in Jackson, where they'll have the chance to socialize with and hear updates from the entire ISJL staff.





## Read, Lead, Succeed

Dave Miller

ABOVE  
Tutors assist young readers with their reading skills during a Read, Lead Succeed session in Jackson, MS.

Read, Lead, Succeed is a program developed and coordinated by the ISJL, which uses research-based techniques and materials to improve literacy skills among K-3rd grade students. The program is implemented by high school and college students, who visit an elementary school on a regular basis to provide targeted interventions with students during the school day and utilize materials from RALP (the Reading for All Learners Program). The young scholars enjoy their one-on-one personal time, creating positive reading experiences.

RALP consists of a series of books known as the “Little Books,” and techniques that have a long history of instructional design and development, field-testing, evaluation, and distribution. These books are built on a solid foundation of reading

research and evidence-based instructional strategies that successfully target beginner reading levels.

By using a model that links K-3 students to and through college there are a series of benefits to all participants; K-3 students have an opportunity to practice their reading skills and spend time with positive role models, are able to see how important being literate is in their future endeavors, and receive effective interventions prior to the 3rd Grade Reading Gate Assessment. Teachers are able to have additional support in the classroom to assist with their students’ needs in a way that aligns with the work they are already doing. High school and college students are able to obtain field work/volunteer/community service hours that are often a required component of their degree programs. High school and college students are able to experience what

it is like to work in schools, explore a career path, and make a difference in a young person’s life. Community ties are strengthened by linking primary schools to colleges to community organizations.

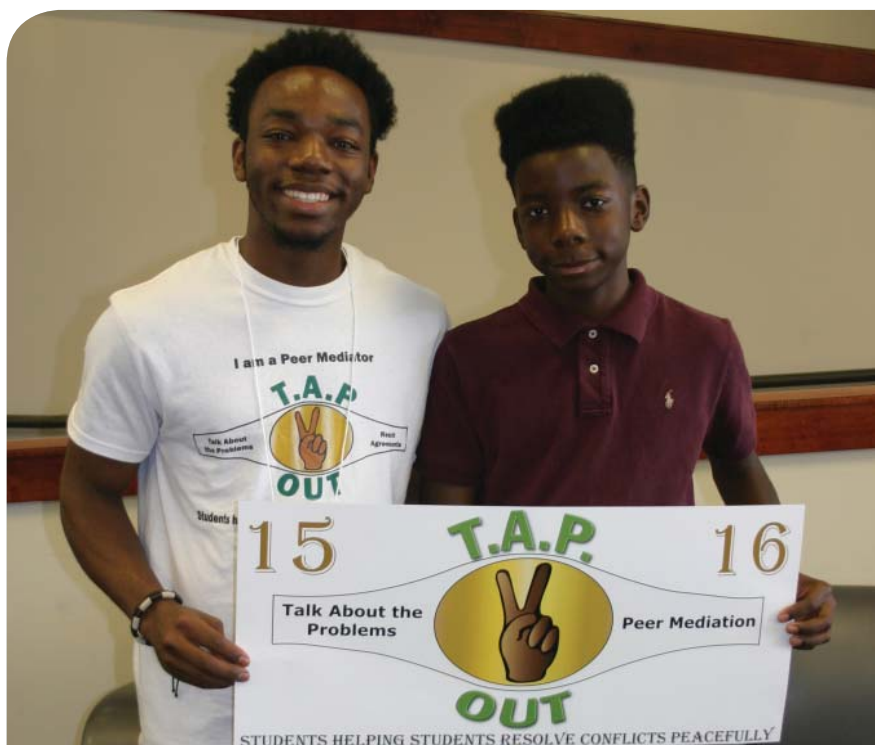
For the 2016-2017 school year, we aim to partner with 2 universities, 3 school districts, and two after-school programs. We firmly believe that children need to be literate and it is crucial that every stakeholder in our communities plays a part in making our children ready and capable to lead successful lives. We’re committed to partnering with schools, communities, and congregations to do this vital work.

# Coming Full Circle: A Story of Two Brothers and Peer Mediation

Meet Cargin Madison. He is a freshman at Tougaloo College, in Jackson, Mississippi. If he looks familiar to you, it is probably because you have seen him over the last 6 years of T.A.P. (Talk About the Problems), our peer mediation/conflict resolution program. Cargin started with us when T.A.P. was just launching. He was in the very first cohort of students at Blackburn Middle School and was eager to try this new program designed to help improve the safety and climate of his struggling school. With the help of his advisor Mrs. Harkins, Principal Brown, and his fellow mediators he was able to make a sizable impact on the school.

Over the next six years Cargin stayed in T.A.P. and became a more powerful and influential mediator. He was one of the leaders who helped expand our program into his high school, Jim Hill High School, as well as several other schools in the local school district. We at the ISJL came to know Cargin very well and loved seeing him grow as a student leader.

When it came time for him to graduate high school we were thrilled that he decided to stay local and attend a phenomenal university. Since he graduated he has helped us present T.A.P. to new school leaders, joined us to meet with university deans, and was an instructor at our annual T.A.P. Summit held at the beginning of each school year, when we bring all T.A.P. mediators together for a day of learning and bonding. One of the best moments of this year's summit was seeing Cargin pass the T.A.P. baton to his younger brother, Cameron, who is just starting out at Blackburn Middle School. These two young men are committed to making a difference in



Cargin (left) and his brother Cameron participate in the annual summer TAP training.

their school, community, and state; and that is why T.A.P. is so important.

Talk About the Problems is providing students throughout the state meaningful leadership opportunities at their school. They are able to work with their peers to resolve conflicts that arise and disrupt classroom learning, keep students in administrative offices, and degrade school culture. The mediators work with the teachers, counselors, and administrators to provide this meaningful service during the school day so that small issues can be resolved expediently and not develop into larger problems. T.A.P. is designed to empower students and show them that they can improve their school just as much as any of the adults on campus. Moreover, they are learning skills that will be valuable to them for their entire life.

Now that we are nearing the finish line for the 2015-2016 school year, there are some amazing opportunities on the horizon. We are expanding our footprint in Mississippi by reaching additional schools that cover a geographic region of more than 150 miles.

Here at the ISJL we are eager to improve the quality of our schools, increase opportunities for our future leaders, and teach students that there are ways to handle conflicts that arise that will lead to a peaceful resolution. Young leaders like Cargin are a shining example of what students can do—we're proud to be able to partner with them to make it happen.

# Snapshots from the Road



## 1. LAFAYETTE, LOUISIANA

Students from Kehillah High in Houston, TX visit Temple Shalom during their Jewish Heritage Tour through Louisiana.

## 2. DAVIDSON, NORTH CAROLINA

Education Fellow Becca Rosenthal helps students at Temple Kol Tikvah celebrate Chanukah with their own cucumber menorahs!



## 3. GAINESVILLE, FLORIDA

Education Fellow Arielle Nissenblatt gives an ISJL overview presentation to our new congregational partner, Temple Shir Shalom.

## 4. SHREVEPORT, LOUISIANA

Students sing and dance along with Billy Jonas during his concert at Agudath Achim.





**5. AIKEN, SOUTH CAROLINA**

Rabbi Jeremy Simons enjoys a delicious potluck dinner with members of Congregation Adath Yeshurun.

**6. SARDIS, MISSISSIPPI**

These TAP students at North Panola High School were officially inducted as Peer Mediators.

**7. HOUSTON, TEXAS**

Education Fellow Abby Kliensky gives instructions for a life size game of Chutes and Ladders® at Congregation Beth Yeshurun.



# Community Engagement: Sixteen Is Our Specialty!

We might be the youngest department at the ISJL, only established in 2009, but the Community Engagement Department has a whole lot of sixteen-themed connections! Aside from the fact that we work with several high schools now, making sixteen year olds one of our key constituent groups, and the incredible way our current partnerships add up to sixteen, here are sixteen fast facts about what's going on these days in the ISJL's tikkun-olam-focused efforts!



10

Read, Lead, Succeed  
University Students



16

3 TAP  
School  
Districts



3

University  
Partnerships

Partner Groups  
Strengthening Schools  
& Communities!

## 16 Fast Facts About the ISJL's Community Engagement Department

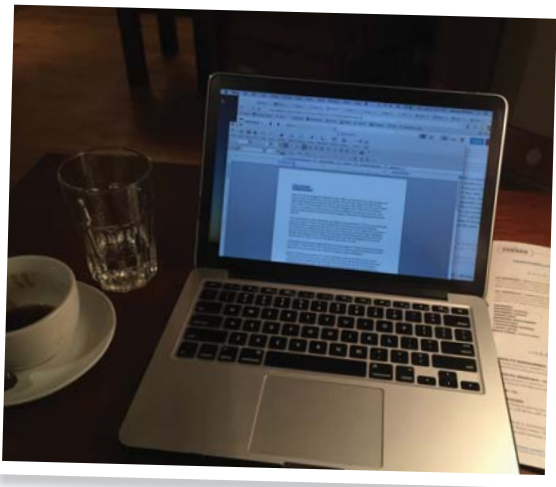
1. The Community Engagement Department has now been operating for 7 years!
2. T.A.P., our peer mediation program, is in its 6th year of existence – it's our flagship program and has won honors such as the 2012 Kids Count Mississippi Success Story Award.
3. The Community Engagement Department works in both religious institutions and in the secular sector – we have no religious agenda, and we're proud to represent the Jewish value of making the entire world a better place!
4. There are 3 current programs housed in our department: T.A.P. (peer mediation); Read, Lead, Succeed (literacy program); and Congregational Partnerships (empowering congregations to commit to sustainable service in their communities).
5. We have worked in congregations covering 7 states, and someday we'll reach all 13 in the ISJL's region, growing just like the ISJL's other departments have!
6. In the 2015-2016 school year, we conducted 20 mediator trainings, and are planning to expand the T.A.P. program reach.
7. There are 79 T.A.P. mediators currently trained to handle conflict resolution in their public schools.
8. This year we were able to offer a social justice course to our congregations through our partnership with JOIN.
9. We have partnered with 7 circuit court judges over the last 6 years to work with our T.A.P. mediators. These judges swear in the mediators and bring a true level of gravitas to the program.
10. The Community Engagement department has traveled over 4,000 miles this year – whew!
11. The Read, Lead, Succeed curriculum contains 383 little books, 3,400 flash cards, and 8 certificates of accomplishment.
12. The first group of students to be T.A.P. peer mediators graduated high school in 2015 – and they're committed to making sure T.A.P. impacts younger students, just as it impacted them.
13. The most valuable travel accessory when presenting about our programs: an auxiliary cord. (Trust us.)
14. The best part of any T.A.P. swearing-in ceremony is when the judge addresses the new T.A.P. mediators directly, and talks to them about why the program is so valuable.
15. The most exciting development in T.A.P. is that our most experienced students at one of the high schools we work with are developing a conflict resolution presentation that will be shown to all new 9th graders.
16. The best part of reading with a student in Read, Lead, Succeed is seeing them light up when they finish a story and tell their parents all about it.



# Rabbis on the Go

You know that the ISJL's Rabbinic department serves small and under-served Jewish communities with no full-time rabbis of their own, all over the South—which keeps them pretty busy! Part of how the ISJL is able to serve so many Southern Jewish communities is through the generous visits from rabbis across the nation who donate time as "Rabbis on the Road" for the ISJL. But the ISJL's two rabbis on staff still conduct an astonishing number of visits—AND manage to squeeze in even more adventures than you might guess. So, other than community visits, what have Rabbi Jeremy Simons and Rabbi Matt Dreffin been up to lately?

**Rabbi Jeremy Simons** just returned from a trip to Poland, where he visited family—and even wrote his weekly Taste of Torah email d'var from the heart of the Jewish Quarter! That definitely puts him in the running for one of the farthest-flung locales from which ISJL work was done...



**Rabbi Matt Dreffin** has been training for a half-marathon. After knee surgery last year, several of his communities got visits from him while he was still on crutches or in a leg brace. But now, he's recovered so well that he's not just walking but running his way toward health—and enhanced spirituality. Check out our Southern & Jewish blog to read his recent essay about finding meaning in all these miles.

Speaking of **Taste of Torah**, we're trying something new! In addition to the weekly email, we're previewing the popular "nosh of d'rash" with a little video bite. Each week, our rabbis literally stand on one foot (just like Hillel!) and give a brief teaser about this week's Taste of Torah.

**Check it out at [www.youtube.com/TheISJL](http://www.youtube.com/TheISJL)**



## *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, 2015 to enable our important work.

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At the very end of 2015, the ISJL was thrilled to be among the Jim Joseph Foundation's new grantees. The grant award is designated to our Education Department, in specific support of the Education Fellowship program. The Jim Joseph Foundation announced the award of funding of up to \$450,000 spread out over the next three years "to support the recruitment, selection, training, and supervision of Education Fellows, and the implementation of the ISJL's itinerant education program, which currently deploys eight full-time Fellows to serve communities and congregations of all sizes and denominations across the southern United States."

We are grateful for this tremendous support from the Jim Joseph Foundation for our Education department. We are committed to keeping the education program affordable and accessible to all of our communities, so we will continue pursuing grants, donations, and endowments to ensure full funding for the long future of this important program.



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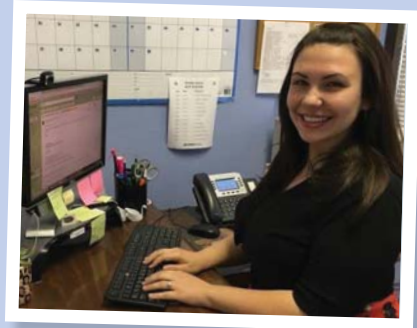
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