

SHALOM *y'all*

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



▶ SUPPORTING ▶ CONNECTING ▶ CELEBRATING

**OUR (VIRTUAL)
READING
FAMILY**

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ON THE COVER:

With COVID precautions in place, the ISJL has still offered services and support. Here, Rabbi Matt Dreffin leads prayers for our communities.

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WE ALL NEED SUPPORT

THE MISSION OF THE GOLDRING/WOLDENBERG Institute of Southern Jewish Life (ISJL) is to support, connect, and celebrate Jewish life in the South. Those few words embody a tremendous commitment. No matter what, we're dedicated to delivering on the promise of our mission. As we continue navigating these strange times, feeling hopeful as the first COVID-19 vaccines are administered, we want to focus not only on meeting new and evolving needs but also on sustaining the values we hold dear at all times.

That's why throughout 2021, our *Shalom Y'all* issues will each hone in on one of the three core principles of our mission: Support, Connect, and Celebrate. In this issue, focusing on Support, we will highlight the ways in which we are supporting our communities, the inspiring ways they are working to support each other, and how the support we receive enables us to keep going—now and always.

Looking back, one year ago the February issue of *Shalom Y'all* was themed "2020: Year of Vision," and we were joyfully marking the twentieth anniversary of the ISJL. What a strange reflection! There is no way we could have envisioned how the rest of 2020 would unfold; that a month later, our staff would all be working remotely and rapidly adapting our programming. But we persevered, and the spirit of support never dimmed or diminished.

We don't know what this year will hold, but we do know that with mutual support, we will continue moving forward. We wish all of you health and hope in the months ahead, as we support one another every step of the way.

L'shalom,
The Board & Staff of the ISJL



FROM THE CEO



Michele Schipper
CEO

IN YEARS PAST, WHEN PEOPLE would ask me, “How are you?” my response was almost always a cheery, smiling: “Great! How are you?”

That changed about a year ago.

My typical response of “Great!” became instead “We’re doing the best we can.”

If we’re honest, the pandemic changed a lot of things—including how we’re doing day-to-day, and including the work of the ISJL. But we truly are doing the best we can, and what I’ve been grateful for lately is the realization that *the best we can* is actually pretty inspiring.

My team here at the ISJL has been so committed to doing all they can do to be responsive, responsible, and tenacious as we shifted programming to address our communities’ ever-changing needs. To our sometimes-surprise, these shifts have yielded important changes in our approach to our work, and even deepened our connections with our communities.

That’s the surprising thing about support: it can look differently than expected, and be even better than initially imagined.

We began 2020 by celebrating the ISJL’s twentieth anniversary—a celebration that was quickly overshadowed by the realities of COVID-19. Our world changed. As public spaces shut down, and

remote programming became the norm, I began, as so many others, to turn to our faith for strength. The words of *Pirkei Avot (Ethics of our Fathers)* have given me comfort and guidance in the past and during this pandemic. In particular, I’ve found solace in these words:

The world is based on three things – on Torah, on service, and on acts of loving-kindness.

.....
“WE BRING LEARNING INTO EVERYTHING WE DO. WE SUPPORT COMMUNITIES AND INDIVIDUALS IN PURSUING ENRICHING, ENGAGING JEWISH LIFE. WE APPROACH OUR WORK, ESPECIALLY NOW, WITH A DEEP SENSE OF LOVE FOR OUR COMMUNITIES.”
.....

Torah, meaning learning; *service*, meaning supporting others in the name of God; and *loving-kindness*, as the baseline of behavior to which we should all aspire. To me... that sounds like the ISJL.

We bring learning into everything we do. We support communities and individuals in pursuing enriching, engaging Jewish life. We approach our work, especially now, with a deep sense of love for our communities.

As you read this issue of *Shalom Y’all*, the ISJL is celebrating our 21st anniversary, and we have truly come of age. Despite difficulty, we have ensured no interruption in the support we offer Jewish communities and individuals across the South. My pride in our staff has only grown as I have witnessed so much generosity of spirit, a true *esprit de corps* as we have all worked together.

I am also profoundly grateful for the acts of loving-kindness and support from our donors, who have helped us continue our work. I am equally grateful for the trust and partnership of all the congregations, who have shared resources and programming, and for all the individuals in my personal and professional life who have placed their faith in us, asked what they can do to help, or offered a kind word of encouragement. In a year that brought so much upheaval and pain, the power of such support has carried us through.

If you are able to support the ISJL at this time, through word, deed, or donation, please know how grateful our entire team is to have you as partners in our ongoing work. Be well, and here’s to an even more supportive future.

May we continue to go from strength to strength,

FROM THE BOARD CHAIR



Jay Hesdorffer
ISJL Board Chair

ONE DAY IN THE DISTANT future, your kids or grandkids may ask you, “*What did you do during the COVID-19 pandemic?*”

Your response might be something along the lines of, “Well, life slowed down—a lot. We no longer commuted to work. We worked from home. We didn’t go out with family or friends. We connected through FaceTime and Zoom. Travel, concerts, and social gatherings were all cancelled or totally reimaged.”

“*What did you do for fun?*” might be the curious response.

“It wasn’t so bad,” you might say. “I remember going to a live-streamed Chanukah concert in December 2020. It was marvelous. A well-known Jewish musician named Julie Silver sang holiday favorites and took special requests. More than 460 households logged in. I saw lots of people, even some old friends, singing along and celebrating Chanukah together... even though everyone was in their own home. It was pretty special.”

“*How did this happen?*” your youngster might ask.

“We were lucky,” you replied. “There was an organization called the Goldring/Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life. The ISJL did all sorts of cool things to support Jewish communities in the South. When it was unsafe to travel, the

ISJL created a Virtual Vacation. You could go on the ISJL website or follow them on social media, and take a virtual tour to selected destinations across the South. It was like having a pandemic getaway...

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“WHEN IN-PERSON VISITS BECAME IMPRACTICAL, THE ISJL DIDN’T MISS A BEAT. IT WENT VIRTUAL... THAT WAS THE MAGIC OF THE ISJL. WE SUPPORTED COMMUNITIES AND THOSE COMMUNITIES SUPPORTED US!”
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“And the ISJL didn’t stop there. It kept us connected to Jewish holidays, education, and each other. Before the pandemic, the ISJL provided rabbinical visits to congregations with no rabbis and Education Fellows traveled to congregations across the South to help deliver Jewish programming to almost 4,000 kids. When in-person visits became impractical, the ISJL didn’t miss a beat. It went virtual. Even with its community engagement programming, like Our Reading Family—where entire families celebrated literacy together—virtual learning was in full force. In fact, I remember hearing one of our staff members tell the story of a parent who was thrilled because both of

her children who participated in the program exceeded their reading goals the next semester in school. What happened next was amazing: this mom donated almost 70 books to the fall book drive for Our Reading Family!

“That was the magic of the ISJL. We supported communities and those communities supported us!”

“*So, what happened to the ISJL?*” is the delighted follow-up question.

Hopefully, that part of the story goes like this... and you’re the ones who can help make this fairy-tale ending come true:

“In 2020–2021, the ISJL was fortunate to receive a matching gift challenge from an anonymous foundation. The ISJL could receive up to \$250,000 in matching funds if it raised up to \$500,000 for capacity building. With the help of their supporters, the ISJL raised those important dollars despite the pandemic—and then went on to keep receiving and providing vital support. The ISJL is still going strong, supporting, connecting, and celebrating Jewish life in the South.”

And if you’re wondering why this story has four questions...well, that’s a hint of what’s to come. The ISJL looks forward to bringing you a streaming Passover seder this spring. Here’s to the next chapter in our shared story!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jay Hesdorffer". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "J" and "H".



The ISJL Education team supports communities no matter what.

EDUCATION

EDUCATIONAL SUPPORT SYSTEMS

RABBI MATT DREFFIN
DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION

BETHANY BERGER
ASSISTANT DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION

WE'VE ALWAYS CARED ABOUT supporting communities taking on the sacred task of Jewish education. While we were anxious about a global pandemic, that desire to provide an excellent experience for southern Jews did not go away. In fact, our support may have ramped up even more. Everyone got stretched super thin. Directors and teachers have been stressed—working at home, trying to educate their children as public schools closed or went remote, all while also trying to sustain Jewish education.

We saw that we still needed to support our communities, but we needed to find new and different avenues to be more effective in such

a wildly different environment than that of the ISJL's first twenty years. Religious school this year looks different from the outside. Still, from the Education Department's side of the Zoom screen, great programming is happening.

These evolutions have been exciting and sometimes better for the environment: all of our paper materials are now digital! We expanded our website and PDF-formatted offerings! We developed video-conference-friendly classroom experiences and lesson plans!

We worked hard to finish adapting our standard curriculum into engaging one-hour lessons

that communities can implement over virtual platforms. Teachers and directors access these lessons as we create, edit, and upload in real-time. They can easily download the lessons as they need them, and they also have access to accompanying slide presentations that help students stay focused and engaged with the material.

We have continued our professional development offerings this fall with deeper dives and refresher courses on how best to teach over Zoom. Our Fellows learn these best practices, and then they are able to model virtual lessons and help come up with new ways to teach using digital tools. One Fellow

even taught a lesson about being kind online to a group of teenagers!

“Virtual visits” have enabled Fellows to connect with their communities. One Fellow led a Shabbat service for a small community, and the Fellow’s own family was able to join, adding

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**“THESE EVOLUTIONS
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BETTER FOR THE
ENVIRONMENT: ALL OF
OUR PAPER MATERIALS
ARE NOW DIGITAL!”**

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special meaning to their work. Fellows virtually visiting places they have visited in person get many private messages when they show up to Zoom services asking how they have been, warmly schmoozing through the screen.

We know that our online learning tools are great, but virtual school is not for everyone. One of our most significant projects this school year has been creating asynchronous learning kits for all ages. Each kit allows students to explore Jewish topics through multiple modes of learning. Each activity can be done alone or with a family member. These kits allow students with Zoom fatigue to connect and engage with Judaism in a way that works best for them.

But we aren’t the only ones supporting our partner communities—they have been supporting each other. Our closed Facebook group, ISJL Education Partners, has been more active in the past year than in all previous years, with community members and staff sharing a plethora of resources—both those created in-

house and free resources from across the globe. This spirit of support has led to religious schools from across geographic locations combining their classrooms. This situation has allowed kids from Lubbock, Texas; Midland-Odessa, Texas; Tallahassee, Florida; and Greenville, South Carolina, to get to know one another and share resources. Montgomery, Alabama, was already a uniquely “combined” religious school made up of students from two synagogues, and they added in a third from Mobile, Alabama.

The three Alabama synagogues saw an opportunity that didn’t appear clear to them before the need for a switch to a digital platform. Jeff McKinney, one of their co-directors, knew that prepping for a normal lesson requires some time and energy, and that was compounded by both the digital environment and the addition of new personalities. But, by tackling all the various challenges associated with this supportive educational endeavor, Jeff is experiencing personal and professional benefits: “I have enjoyed getting to know Rabbi Silberman better. Sometimes he and I will chat before the kids start logging on and school begins. The kids are also getting the opportunity to meet other Jewish kids their own age who they may not have been able to meet before.”

We’ve had to adapt significantly to make sure that *am Yis’ra-eil chai* (the Jewish people live) safely. But, as evidenced by all of our southern and Jewish support, we’ve also found ways to make sure *am Yis’ra-eil* thrives!

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Children throughout the region enjoyed our virtual Chanukah children’s program, where they really did make dreidels out of clay!



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

FELLOW FLASHBACK: AMANDA WINER



THE ISJL FELLOW ALUMNI NETWORK (FAN) IS A GROUP OF INSPIRING young professionals whose careers and studies span a variety of fields, but who all have one thing in common: they spent two immersive years as ISJL Education or Community Engagement Fellows! Two FAN members, Claire Solomon Nisen and Gabi Cohn, are spearheading FAN membership and engagement efforts. One of the fun tasks they've taken on is collecting profiles of former Fellows. In this issue we're excited to feature Amanda Winer, who served as an ISJL Education Fellow from 2012–2014.

Hi, Amanda! Can you tell us how you became an ISJL Education Fellow?

My dad saw the listing on JewishJobs.com and sent it to me. He wrote, “Don’t even *think* about it, but doesn’t this sound perfect for post-grad?” Despite his hesitation about my moving so far away, the fellowship definitely fit the experience and learning I was looking for. After interviewing, I realized how connected I was to the ISJL and its staff. I also remember finding out that I got the job while I was giving a college campus tour. I warned the families ahead of time that I was likely going to get a phone call from a potential post-grad job. Once I got off the phone, they all cheered. I was particularly grateful that during my first month of the fellowship there were three outgoing Fellows—Michelle Blumenthal, Lauren Fredman, and Mark Swick—who were all there to support me during the transition (plus Michelle made sure that I had a truly epic birthday party). It confirmed for me that I was in the right place.

What did you learn during your time as a Fellow?

You know the book *All I Really Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten*? Well, the title of mine could be *All I Really Need to Know I Learned from Rachel Stern!* Jokes aside, [former ISJL Education



Director] Rachel Stern’s mentorship really supported me while I figured out some of my life goals and next steps. During the first year of my fellowship, we were working on a year-long project to rewrite the Hebrew curriculum. My task was to develop a method for writing, translating, and transliterating Hebrew; with her support, I realized that there was a way to work more systematically at transparency and equity in Jewish education, which inspired my doctoral program

search. Working for the ISJL taught me so much about adaptability and flexibility.

What are you up to these days?

I’m currently an Adjunct Professor and PhD Candidate at NYU’s Steinhardt School of Culture, Education, and Human Development. My research is about the perceptions and positionality contemporary American Jews hold, especially millennials living in urban areas. I split my time between research, teaching, and consulting. I teach research methods and data science classes to undergraduate, master’s and doctoral students across NYU. I also run a few research laboratories for students to get hands-on experience with social psychology research. As a consultant, I work with organizations to make data-driven improvements, incorporate more digital technology, prioritize EDI (equity, diversity, and inclusion), and create more sophisticated ways to evaluate their impact. I am also a registered yoga teacher and spend a lot of time practicing with clients. I specialize in teaching “any body” yoga, supporting beginners, curvy folks, and/or those with physical limitations. I’m also planning my wedding, which has been impacted by the pandemic—but will be wonderful no matter what.



These terrific Fellow flashback images are all courtesy of Amanda Winer.





We miss being together in the room, but are still supporting students over Zoom!

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

OUR (VIRTUAL) READING FAMILY

RACHEL GLAZER

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PROGRAM MANAGER

I MISS PUBLIC PLACES. I LONG to pop by the synagogue to gather supplies for my Sunday school class, or catch up with a friend over coffee, and I especially yearn to visit the library. Libraries are some of the few public places that anyone can access without an expectation that they will spend money. They truly exist as a public service, to provide a safe place to seek and gain knowledge.

They are also the home of one of the Community Engagement Department's literacy programs, Our Reading Family. What I miss most of all is walking through my local library's doors each Saturday to greet our elementary school participants and their caregivers. Any other year, we would be circling up on the carpet to play games, tell stories, and challenge each other to use literacy skills as tools

for imaginative exploration as well as academic success. The grown-ups would network with each other over lunch and share strategies for advocating for their children at school. Libraries aren't just places to

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"THIS NEW MODEL ACTUALLY REMOVES SEVERAL BARRIERS TO PARTICIPATION. IT IS COST-EFFECTIVE, AND REQUIRES LESS PREPARATION TIME AND VOLUNTEER POWER TO MAKE IT HAPPEN."

sit quietly and study; they are fertile ground for families to grow a love of reading together.

When everything shut down, our department's greatest challenge became how to maintain the support we provide. Specifically, how could we create a virtual environment that reflected that sense of community, fun atmosphere, and feeling of being surrounded by the potential for so much learning? Our first move upon transitioning to a virtual platform was to shave the sessions down from six to four Saturdays, and trim each session to 90 minutes. We distilled the activities down to a family literacy activity, a journaling exercise, a moment to share digital resources, and a parent workshop while the children read independently. We packed up all of the materials families would need to participate and handpicked four books for each child and each caregiver to add to their home library.



We piloted this model over the summer and have since hosted three online cohorts with great success. Although I miss the high-fives from our students and watching them form literacy-related connections in person, I have been pleased to find that this approach has had several benefits for our participants as well as for our facilitators.

This new model actually removes several barriers to participation. It is cost-effective, and requires less preparation time and volunteer power to make it happen. It is a great way to bring valuable literacy resources to families in your area who are seeking supplemental programming, and provides safe, meaningful connections with you and volunteers from your organization. Since families join the session from their homes and can clearly show us what their at-home dynamics look like, we can tailor our support to fit their needs around virtual and hybrid learning, creative use of space and technology, and

social distance. Best of all, families practice making literacy fun in their own spaces.

During Week One, "Team Building in Families," students and caregivers work together to brave an obstacle course using verbal dialogue and teamwork. Parents discuss their goals for their children's literacy journeys. Week Two is all about Descriptive Language. Families play a charades game to illustrate shades of meaning of different adjectives, and parents discuss creative tactics for building their children's phonological awareness. In Week Three, we explore Literacy in the World Around Us. Families learn about environmental print (the print we see in everyday life) and put together a commercial to attract visitors to their favorite vacation destinations as a way to acknowledge literacy in the world around us. Parents explore fun studying techniques and strategies to help their children with test



"WITH ALL OF THESE FUN AND INFORMATIVE ACTIVITIES HAPPENING AS A FAMILY, OFTEN ON THE COUCH OR AT THE KITCHEN TABLE, WE CAN SEE FAMILIES ADAPTING THESE STRATEGIES TO FIT THEIR SITUATIONS IN REAL TIME."



anxiety. Finally, we tackle Wacky Words in Week Four, competing in a game show of synonyms and antonyms, and parents write the story of a cherished family recipe to share with their children.

With all of these fun and informative activities happening as a family, often on the couch or at the kitchen table, we can see families adapting these strategies to fit their situations in real time. I get the feeling that they will be more likely to play with wacky words while washing dishes or tell the tale of a certain entree over dinner now that they have practiced connecting literacy to their lives at home.

Another exciting update? This new format of Our Reading Family is more accessible than ever for our partners across the region. With libraries closed, it is up to us to bring these services to our communities. You, too, can help families read, play, learn, and grow together—even while we're apart. If you would like to bring the joy of reading to families in your area, please reach out. You can also stay up-to-date on our literacy programs by signing up for our quarterly email newsletter, Word Play. Visit www.isjl.org/our-reading-family for more information or to get involved!



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



Ann Gerache and family in Vicksburg, Mississippi

DEVELOPMENT

PIONEERING SUPPORT FOR THE ISJL

An Interview with Ann Grundfest Gerache

RISA KLEIN HERZOG
DIRECTOR OF DEVELOPMENT

ON A RECENT WINTER afternoon, my day was brightened by a conversation with Ann Grundfest Gerache. Talking with Ann was a pure pleasure and privilege! As a pioneer donor, she has supported the ISJL from the very beginning.

Ann is a proud third-generation Mississippian, an active member of her small but mighty Vicksburg Jewish community, a southern Jewish ambassador to the broader community, and a patriotic American. Her grandparents Morris

and Mollie Grundfest came to New York from Russia and eventually made their way to the Mississippi Delta. Morris traveled throughout the South selling thread and cloth, always returning to the Delta with items customers requested. He bought land to farm cotton—land still farmed today by Ann's nephew, Mike Lamensdorf, in Cary, Mississippi. Her pride in all of these things, as well as her dedicated Jewish practice, heritage, and tradition, guides her in the important causes she supports. Ann's consistent and generous

support of the ISJL is illustrated in all of the meaningful insights she shared in this interview.

Ann, can you tell me about your connection to the ISJL?

It began when Henry S. Jacobs Camp opened in Utica, Mississippi, where all four of my children either were campers or counselors. My kids are Robert Emmich, Kathy Grundfest Friedman, Ellen Emmich, and Gail Emmich. The camp is how I first connected with [ISJL founder] Macy B. Hart. Parents were invited to the camp for seminar weekends

throughout the year, which connected us to our fellow southern Jewish community members. It broadened our Jewish education and heightened our awareness of our own Jewish experiences in the South. Macy, who was director of Jacobs Camp for 30 years, began his next adventure and founded the ISJL. I knew about it from the earliest days, and I'm so proud of all the resources this organization provides.

Why do you support the ISJL? As a "Pioneer Donor," can you share a meaningful experience you have had with the organization?

I have supported the ISJL for all of these years so that we will continue to have a Jewish presence in this area. My congregation in Vicksburg, Anshe Chesed, has benefited from the ISJL's rabbinical visits over the years, for Shabbat and High Holiday services. One of my fondest memories is of a *tashlich* service down by the waterfront. After the morning service, the rabbi led the congregation of twenty down to the Yazoo River. With bread crumbs or rice in hand, my fellow congregants and I symbolically threw our sins into the water. I found it meaningful to purge sins together as a community.

Growing up in Cary, Mississippi, the Jewish community consisted of my family and just a few others. It was a very ecumenical upbringing. We went to temple in Vicksburg, and sometimes Greenville—and I also attended church with my friends, just as my Christian friends still attend synagogue services with us in Vicksburg to this day. When you're Jewish in the South, you're aware of that identity all of the time. Everyone knows you are Jewish.

I always try to behave accordingly, because I know that I am representing our people!

How do you choose to give to the ISJL?

I often make my donation to the ISJL through appreciated stock. I also like matching challenges that help increase donations. [A note for our readers: We have a matching challenge going on right now!] I have made donations in honor and in memory of friends and loved ones, so that the gifts appear here in *Shalom Y'all* magazine. I like to give throughout the year rather than waiting until the end of the year to show my support.

How does the ISJL differ from other causes you support?

I must support the ISJL and Jewish causes if I want them to exist. It's not exactly an obligation, but it is something that is important. I understand the value of the ISJL, as it helps provide opportunities for people to have Jewish experiences in their lives. There are other causes I support that align with my pride and respect for veterans, Vicksburg, Mississippi, and America. But nothing is quite like the ISJL!

And just for fun, what is your favorite Jewish food?

Chopped liver!



Ann is deservedly proud of her homemade chopped liver. I'm not sure I'm at liberty to divulge any of her secrets, but let's just say that she always has some chicken fat in her freezer and that the hard-boiled-egg-to-chicken-liver ratio is key!

We are so grateful to Ann and to all of our supporters. There are many ways that you can show your support. Currently, we are in the midst of a matching challenge which will leverage new and increased gifts to the ISJL on a one-to-two basis, allowing your gift to stretch even farther! We also are growing our monthly giving society, known for years as our "Chai Club." Another popular way to show support is through tribute and memorial gifts in honor or in memory of friends and loved ones.

Regardless of how you give or whether you are a long-time or new donor, we appreciate your gifts that allow us to support, connect, and celebrate Jewish life in the South. Thank you!

To learn more about ISJL development efforts or how you can support our work, email development@isjl.org.



Clara Posner and Elias Levey-Swain, 2020 History and Heritage Externs.

HERITAGE & INTERPRETATION

PUBLIC HISTORIANS PAY IT FORWARD

NORA KATZ

DIRECTOR OF HERITAGE & INTERPRETATION

IT TAKES A LOT OF coincidences, connections, and strokes of good luck to end up working as the Director of Heritage and Interpretation at the ISJL. In every moment I spend as an ISJL staff member, I am reminded that I stand on the shoulders of mentors who gave me opportunities to do the hard work of public history before I took on this role: from interpreting the history of whaling in New Bedford, Massachusetts; to interviewing site-specific theatre-makers in Dublin, Ireland; to coaching students on exhibition

design and development at Carleton College in Northfield, Minnesota.

When I started working at the ISJL, I knew I needed to pay it forward. The world of public history is complicated, challenging, and ever-changing, and the work that future public historians do while they're in college is crucial to their career and academic development.

That's why our History and Heritage Internship program means so much to me. It is an honor and a privilege to give students the types of opportunities I had while I was in school. As a delightful

bonus, our internship program is an opportunity to connect with college students who are doing interesting and nuanced work, and who bring their energy and expertise to the ISJL. When we had to cancel our annual summer internship due to the pandemic, my colleague Dr. Parshall and I were truly disappointed.

But in a year of so much darkness, all was not lost. I am a proud alumna of Carleton College, a small liberal arts college in Northfield, Minnesota. Carleton has a long-running externship program that connects current students ("Carls," as they're affectionately called) with alumni and parents working in diverse fields all over the world. The students spend a few weeks over winter break with these alumni and parent volunteers, working on projects and seeking professional development opportunities. When the Carleton externship program went virtual, I jumped at the opportunity to work with fellow Carls and bring their enthusiasm, creativity, and intellectual curiosity to the ISJL.

This past December, we welcomed Clara Posner and Elias Levey-Swain (virtually) to the History and Heritage & Interpretation Departments. Clara is originally from New Hampshire, and is currently a junior at Carleton, where she is majoring in psychology. Elias is originally from New York, and is currently a senior majoring in history and minoring in Gender, Women's, and Sexuality Studies.

Among many other incredible projects—including conducting oral history interviews—Elias and Clara each developed an episode of the ISJL Virtual Vacation, a video series that introduces viewers to the big themes in southern Jewish history and takes them to important sites in the Jewish South, all while celebrating the South's vibrant cultural heritage and ongoing

legacy of Jewish community. Seeing Clara and Elias uncover new sources, learn about the history of the Jewish South, ask big questions, and bring their fresh perspectives to this program was an utter delight.

The ISJL Virtual Vacation and the externship are all about support. Support for folks who are itching for opportunities to learn about history when museums and historic sites are inaccessible and in-person events can't happen. Support for students who are in college during a tumultuous time, and who need to gain experiences that will help propel them toward future jobs and academic opportunities. Support for ISJL staff members who need a reminder about the importance of our work.

Your ongoing support of the Institute of Southern Jewish Life during a time of turmoil makes this work possible—we could not have hosted our externs, or developed the ISJL Virtual Vacation in the first place, without it. Our supporters inspire me to keep doing public history work—telling stories of the diversity, complexity, and joy of the southern Jewish experience. You also inspire me to pay it forward—to bring new voices, new perspectives, and new creativity to the work we do.

I hope that the Heritage and Interpretation Department provides the same support to you. And I hope that you'll continue to tune in as we tell stories of the Jewish South, no matter where the (virtual) road takes us.

The Jewish section of Lexington Odd Fellows Cemetery in Lexington, Mississippi, featured in the ISJL Virtual Vacation.



MAZEL TOV TO RACHEL GLAZER AND NORA KATZ!

The ISJL's Rachel Glazer and Nora Katz have both been accepted into the Up Start Change Accelerator program! This honor will bring them together with other phenomenal young Jewish leadership from across the country.

UpStart's Change Accelerator equips "intrapreneurs"—committed leaders making meaningful change within our community's Jewish institutions—with a set of lifelong skills, tools, and mindsets to adapt to any challenge. The six-month program will draw on the frameworks of design thinking and adaptive leadership as participants learn to think like entrepreneurs, gaining a new understanding of how to think strategically, change course quickly, and create bold solutions to any challenge they face.

To learn more about Heritage and Interpretation, email heritage@isjl.org.



“One of the hardest aspects of coping with the pandemic has been foregoing opportunities for our faith congregations to strengthen our bonds. I look forward to learning more from your office about future gatherings, virtual or otherwise. Meanwhile, know that your work inspires us all.”

CYNTHIA BIVINS
HATTIESBURG, MS

“I wanted to thank you for making these programs available and possible. You are doing a great job making sure we all have access to Jewish programming during the pandemic. Thank you!”

RABBI KATHY COHEN
ROANOKE, VA



“Daniel and Peyton met their accelerated reading goal without any problems thanks to the program we attended with you all.”

**OUR READING FAMILY
PARTICIPANT**
JACKSON, MS

“I really like how you use the ISJL platform to promote civil rights. Also, it’s really important that you are documenting and sharing your work online for people to see.”

JASON SNYDER
CRYSTAL SPRINGS, MS

WHAT Support LOOKS LIKE



“Thanks for checking in on us! We LOVE the mini lessons that families can do at home. Thanks!”

HANNAH RUBIN-SCHLANSKY
DALLAS, TX

“The ISJL Virtual Vacation is an immense asset! I look forward to it each week, for it offers the opportunity to learn so much.”

BOB MORRIS
NEW YORK, NY

“Thanks! I just sent [the ISJL’s online learning resources] out to all of my families. They look great! Thanks so much!”

NORMA JAMES
KNOXVILLE, TN

PROGRAMMING

ZOOMING ALONG SUPPORTING STRONG CULTURAL EXPERIENCES

ANN ZIVITZ KIENTZ

DIRECTOR OF PROGRAMMING

THE FIRST NIGHT OF Chanukah is always special—but this year it was also a record-breaker for the ISJL's Cultural Programming

Department. To kick off the Festival of Lights, the ISJL hosted 460 households for one amazing concert. The event, featuring Julie

Silver, a celebrated performer of contemporary Jewish music, was coordinated by the ISJL and co-sponsored by 22 partner



"In spite of the limitations placed upon us by COVID-19, Congregation Shomrei Torah in Tallahassee, Florida, has continued to engage its members and carry out its commitment to maintain contact with our membership through socially distant activities. We have joined with Temple Israel, Tallahassee Jewish Federation, and Beth Am of Longwood, Florida, in co-sponsoring several successful ISJL cultural programs. Our members have responded enthusiastically to these presentations and continue to support them."

MONTE FINKELSTEIN

PRESIDENT, CONGREGATION SHOMREI TORAH, TALLAHASSEE, FL



"ISJL shared cultural programming has given Temple Beth Torah in Humble, Texas, the chance to enjoy a wide variety of exciting Jewish adventures, like Joe Buchanan's "Americana with a Jewish Soul;" the interactive, educational comedy of The Bible Players; and the Julie Silver Chanukah concert. Our members are excited to experience new ways to love Judaism!"

RABBI DAN GORDON

TEMPLE BETH TORAH
HUMBLE, TX



"The goal of the Jewish Council is to increase awareness, knowledge, and understanding of Jewish life and history through cultural and educational experiences in the Lake Norman area of North Carolina. Our partnership with the ISJL's Cultural Programming Department expands our opportunities to provide a larger range of diverse Jewish events. This partnership has been a lifeline during these challenging times and helped increase our visibility."

MONA LIEBERMAN

CHAIR, JEWISH COUNCIL OF LAKE NORMAN, LAKE NORMAN, NC

To learn more about the ISJL's Cultural Programming, email programming@isjl.org.

organizations/congregations representing 18 communities in 10 states (and four time zones)!

When I told Julie about our registration numbers, her playful response was, "WHAT?"

As with all of our presenters on Zoom, she was a total mensch while sharing her amazing talent with our ISJL communities. Everyone who signed on that night experienced something meaningful and joyful. I want to give a special shout-out to the creativity of Norma Levens, Director of the JCC in Corpus Christi, Texas. They hosted an outdoor event with the Julie Silver concert projected onto a large screen at the JCC. Along with some additional community members viewing the concert at home in Corpus Christi, 25 families enjoyed a socially distant dinner, candle lighting, and the concert together in safety and solidarity!

Our mission is always to support Jews in the South across the region, as well as within their own communities. Last year, of course, changed everything. The ways in which we connect to each other had to change, but our mission remains the same. Our bonds with rabbis, cantors, program directors, educators, and volunteer leaders in synagogues, JCCs, and Federations across the region have grown stronger as we have worked very hard together to assure that our cultural programs are of the highest quality, affordable, and accessible.

Through these programs, the bonds and partnerships inside of communities have grown. Through fostering local partnerships, the ISJL has helped make it possible for even the smallest organizations to be able to participate.

We hope your southern community will join us for our upcoming spring events!



TIFFANY SHLAIN

"The Making of a Mensch"
Thursday, March 11, 2021
7 PM Central

Tiffany Shlain is celebrated by NPR as a Best Commencement speaker, and was listed by Newsweek as one of the women shaping the 21st century. She is co-founder of 50/50 Day, Character Day, and the International Academy of Digital Arts & Sciences.



RABBI JOSH GARROWAY

"More Than Just an Uprising:
Jewish Resistance in the
Warsaw Ghetto"
Yom HaShoah
Thursday, April 8, 2021
7 PM Central

Rabbi Garroway, Associate Professor at Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion in Los Angeles, will discuss the incredible spiritual and cultural resistance in the Warsaw Jewish community,



BENJI LOVITT

"Israeli History through Comedy"
Thursday, April 15, 2021
7 PM Central

Comedian Benji Lovitt leads the audience through an entertaining historical journey, using film and TV clips in this Zoom experience to track some of the paradigmatic periods and transformative events in Israel's history, all through the lens of humor.



DR. JOEL HOFFMAN

"The Surprisingly Modern
Message of the Ancient
10 Commandments"
Thursday, May 13, 2021
7 PM Central

Perfect for Shavu'ot! Joel Hoffman brings the Bible to vivid life with energy, scholarship, and humor. He has delighted and enriched audiences worldwide at churches, synagogues, universities, and more.



RABBINICAL

CHAZAK CHAZAK V'NITCHAZEIK

Be Strong, Be Strong, and We Will Be Strengthened

RABBI CAROLINE SIM

DIRECTOR OF RABBINICAL SERVICES

JEWES HAVE A LONG HISTORY of supporting one another. In many ways, the foundations of how we can support and assist each other are built into our religion, or at least in the traditions that have come about through practicing it.

Some of us might know that when we read Torah during prayer services, there is often another person standing next to the Torah reader. Although this person neither gives the Torah blessings nor reads the Torah scroll itself, they serve a very important function. Traditionally, the name of this person is a *gabbai*. (In some communities, this person is called a *shamash*, the same term used for the candle used to light the other candles during Chanukah. In this context, *shamash* would mean "beadle," or synagogue assistant.)

The word *gabbai*, depending on your source, is either a Hebrew or Aramaic word, but regardless, it comes from the Hebrew word *gav* (back). The text in the Torah scroll itself has only the Hebrew letters, which makes reading it a challenge. It is the *gabbai's* job to stand next to the reader with a copy of the text that has both vowels and trope

(cantillation marks that indicate what music or melodies to chant), and offer the reader support. The *gabbai* acts as someone who can help if the reader loses their place or pronounces something incorrectly, in a manner that is discreet enough to remain between the two of them, but also ensures that the Torah is read correctly. In this way, quite literally, the job of the *gabbai* is to have the reader's back.

As we continue to navigate this pandemic, we have had to think of new ways to exist as Jews, as well as how to support and assist ourselves and each other with practicing Judaism and being Jewish. The ISJL has always sought to support southern Jewish communities, and the Rabbinical Department serves those small communities with no full-time clergy. We are primed to step forward and offer support and assistance during these trying times.

For the High Holidays, the ISJL created the High Holiday Helper, an extensive online collection of sources and resources to help communities plan their High Holiday experiences this year. The ISJL also hosted its first streaming High Holiday services,

available to anyone to attend. In addition, I have gone on a number of digital Shabbat synagogue visits to individual communities, and have more scheduled in the future.

The ISJL Rabbinical Department has also been brainstorming ways that it can serve communities in the absence of in-person visits, while recognizing that virtual visits may not necessarily be feasible for all communities. Starting in January, the ISJL Rabbinical Department will be offering a number of new programs online to foster Jewish community and connection. We hope to serve and support Jews and Jewish communities who may not be able to meet regularly or offer this kind of programming, as well as Jews who may not currently be affiliated with a synagogue. These programs will also serve to connect Jews across our entire region.

First, we are going to offer adult education opportunities, where we will explore various topics in Jewish practice, history, culture, and interpretation. These adult education sessions can cover the hows and whys of what we practice as Jews. For example, one session

To learn more about ISJL's Rabbinical Services Department, email rabbi@isjl.org.

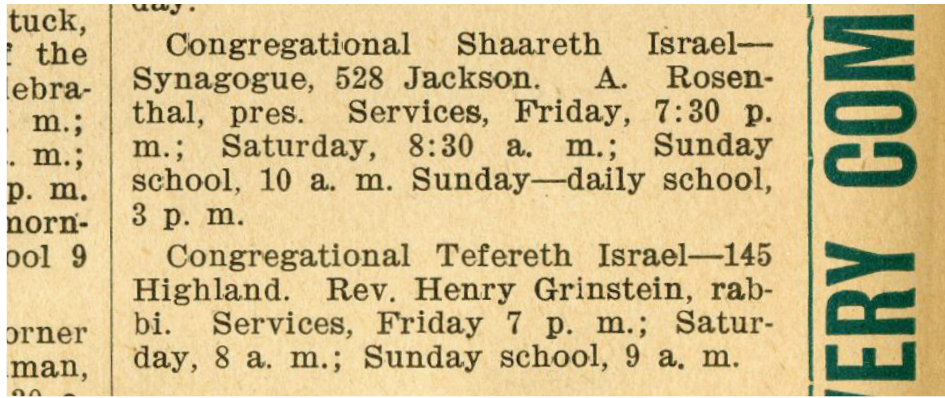
may explore why some Ashkenazi Jews don't eat *kitniyot* (legumes and related foods) during Passover. Other sessions can be about various ways that people have interpreted biblical text, such as by exploring how the Tenth Plague has been represented in visual media through the centuries. There may also be sessions dedicated to Jewish history both abroad and in the States.

The Rabbinical Department will also begin offering digital text study, where we will explore the *parashat hashavua* (the weekly Torah portion) and discuss it together with whomever would like to join, just as if we were coming together in a physical study space. Even for those who are already used to having text study with their own synagogues or communities, this new ISJL program will enable us all to hear new voices, opinions, and points of view. Of course I'd love to hear from the community, so if there is any subject, topic, or program you'd like to hear more about, or that you think people would find particularly engaging, please feel free to send suggestions to rabbi@isjl.org.

Our current situation, both as Jews and as individuals, is challenging. Nonetheless, there are still many ways we can connect with and support each other, both in being Jewish, practicing Judaism, and in forming and maintaining community. The tools and methods we find to support ourselves and each other during this time will ultimately put us in a stronger position once the pandemic ends. The "normal" that we will establish after social distancing ends will be different from the "normal" we had before it began. May it be that the support and connections we find and make during this time of crisis help to affirm and uphold the creation of the new "normal" in the time that follows.

And remember, the ISJL always has your back.





HISTORY

HISTORICAL SUPPORT

DR. JOSH PARSHALL
DIRECTOR OF HISTORY

I OFTEN WRITE ABOUT ALL THE partners out there in the Jewish South who support our historical research by sharing photographs, documents, community updates, or family stories. That relationship goes both ways, however, and we often receive inquiries from people in and beyond the South about the places, people, and stories we document in the Encyclopedia of Southern Jewish Communities. Not long after the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic last spring, I noticed an increase in the number of emails and calls that I received from people looking for help with family or local history research. Anecdotally, at least, it seems that a number of people have turned to genealogy as a safe hobby during the period of social distancing.

As the summer rolled on, I actually developed a backlog of inquiries. Like many other Americans, I found myself balancing parenting duties with work, even as new pandemic information and political unrest often pulled my attention away from research and

writing. Additionally, I have been working from home since March 2020, so I don't have access to all of the physical records that the ISJL History Department has amassed over the years. But even in fits and starts, working my way through the emails has provided me with interesting puzzles and welcome moments of human connection in a disorienting time.

Here are a few examples of recent inquiries:

◆ I have corresponded with a local historian in the German town of Lombsheim, who is tracking the migrations of Jewish townspeople in the 19th century. It seems that Lombsheim Jews are among those buried in the old Jewish cemetery in Osyka, Mississippi.

◆ I heard from a woman in Louisiana who is searching for her grandmother's birth parents. She has reason to believe that her grandmother's biological father was Jewish, and she wanted to know if I had information that would help her.

◆ Rabbi Aaron Benson of Long

Island got in touch about an earlier Rabbi Benson, who served a number of Deep South communities in the late 19th century. I was able to provide him with a few references that helped to piece together the historical rabbi's movements around the United States.

◆ Another inquiry came from the great-granddaughter of Rabbi Hennoch (Henry) Grinstin, a rabbi who worked in Dallas in the early 20th century. The Dallas entry in our Encyclopedia of Southern Jewish Communities mentions that an unnamed individual served as a religious leader for two local congregations, Tiferet Israel and Shearith Israel. I was able to confirm that her ancestor was the unnamed rabbi from our article and pointed her to the Portal to Texas History, an excellent online platform that pools resources from repositories across Texas.

Occasionally, I can provide detailed answers. More often, I find that these researchers have about the same information that I do, but I can often recommend sources that will at least corroborate what they have put together themselves. I'm also able to offer some context for their stories, explaining why a given case is typical for its time or suggesting plausible explanations for some aspect of a family story. Sometimes, especially in cases where someone is seeking lost relatives or hoping to unearth family secrets, I have less to offer.

All of these emails—along with suggestions, corrections, and notes of appreciation—affirm the significance of Jewish history in the South, whether for descendants of our historical subjects or other interested parties. In addition to supporting our audience with public programs and online resources, it's meaningful (and sometimes reinvigorating) to field these research inquiries, even when I don't have all the answers.



Household	Name	Age	Sex	Color	Married	Profession	Place of Birth	Place of Birth	Place of Birth
1 1	Highlow Lazar	18	M	1	1				
1 1	Wolf Samuel	17	M	5/4	1	Merchant			
	— Harriet	17	F	5/1	1	Keeping House			
	— Carrie	17	F	1/6	1	at School			
	— Leon	17	M	1/1	1	at School			
1 1	David Kaganoff	17	M	2/1	1	Merchant			
	— Fannie	17	F	2/0	1	Keeping House			
	— Isaac Jacob	17	M	1/1	1	at School			
1 1	Wolf Schman	17	M	5/4	1	Merchant			
	— Miriam	17	F	5/0	1	Keeping House			
1 1	Isaac Emil	17	M	2/5	1	Merchant			
	— Sara	17	F	2/6	1	Keeping House			
	— Sara	17	F	2/9	1	at School			
	— Barbara	17	F	2/7	1				
	— Eschella	17	F	2/5	1				
	— Lennor	17	F	2/8	1				
	— Michel	17	M	2/8	1				
1 1	Abner Rubin	17	M	2/5	1	Laborer			
	— Mattie	17	F	2/30	1	Keeping House			
	— Henry	17	M	1/19	1	at School			
	— Joseph	17	M	2/2	1				
	— Samuel	17	M	2/2	1				
1 1	Isaac Wolf	17	M	2/5	1	Merchant			
1 1	Schneidman	17	M	2/5	1	Cooper			
	— Mary	17	F	2/5	1	Keeping House			
	— Harriet	17	F	2/0	1	at Home			
	— Mary M	17	F	2/2	1				
1 1	Isaac Robert	17	M	2/22	1	Laborer			
	— U. Maranda	17	F	2/20	1	Keeping House			
	— Martha	17	F	2/3	1				

This page, top: photo from the Osyka cemetery, taken summer 2001; bottom: 1880 United States Census, Osyka, Pike County, Mississippi. First and third households are members of the Wolf family. Opposite page: John F. Worley & Co. Dallas City Directory, 1902, book, 1902; Dallas, Texas. Credit: Dallas Public Library.

MEET THE BOARD



SALLY SCHNEIDER HUEBSCHER

SALLY HUEBSCHER GREW UP IN Memphis, the place that will always be home to her—her family has been in Memphis for over six generations. Passionate about Jewish education, Sally has been on the ISJL Board since 2013. Sally has been active at Temple Isaiah in Lexington, Massachusetts, for over 30 years as a program volunteer and a past president of Sisterhood. She works as a community

volunteer in Lexington, helping build a community playground and contributing to organizations that bring food to people facing hunger and seeking community. She graduated from Tufts University School of Engineering and worked in the energy conservation field. She graduated from Harvard University with a Master's in Education that informs her interest in curriculum as well as child, adolescent, and adult development and the power of story to inspire, engender confidence, and educate. Sally and her husband Bob support Friends of the Israeli Defense Forces and Metiv, Peace of Mind for Released Combat Soldiers from Israel.

Why I initially got involved with the ISJL: I got involved with the ISJL for one reason: to hang out with Gail Goldberg. We have been friends since our high school days in BBYO. She has always been my mentor for all things good (and daring!). Gail's life in Greenwood, Mississippi, and her commitment to Judaism inspired me to be involved. A few years ago, with the support

of Rabbi Matt Dreffin, we hosted a Passover Seder in Greenwood for clergy and community from many faith traditions. Being able to be with Gail and Mike twice a year and to come to know her community in Greenwood has been a blessing.

My favorite aspect of southern Jewish identity: I believe strongly in lifelong Jewish education. I think that children are best educated alongside their parents and grandparents who are continuing to learn. I think the role of the ISJL in training our Fellows and interns brings light to the world. These young people will go on to be rabbis, educators, community leaders, and family educators (by which I mean parents or family members who create those lasting family memories that bring Judaism to life). In this past year I have also come to realize how special it is to see Michele Schipper lead this organization. She inspires me to stay connected and to continue contributing to the ISJL. Coming to know the ISJL staff and other board members enriches my life.



STEVE LIBOWSKY

STEVE LIBOWSKY IS A NATIVE Atlantan who traded Georgia summers for Chicago winters in 1984 after finishing a clerkship for a federal district court judge in Atlanta. Steve is a graduate of Vanderbilt University (where he majored in math and political science) and the University of Georgia School of Law. He and his wife Sue Berman have been married for over 37 years and have three children: Sam, Sarah, and Ruth. Steve serves as head of Dentons' US Competition and Antitrust practice,

spending his time in trials and appeals, counseling clients on a wide range of antitrust and competition issues, and navigating deals through the United States Department of Justice Antitrust Division, the Federal Trade Commission, and competition agencies globally. Steve has received nearly every major award for his extensive pro bono practice, which regularly involves many of today's cutting-edge civil rights and liberties issues. He joined the ISJL Board of Directors in 2015.

Why I initially got involved with the ISJL:

The Atlanta I grew up in had about 12,000 Jews, and only a handful of synagogues and one temple—a far cry from the large number of Jews and Jewish institutions in the city today. Being Jewish was never taken for granted and regularly meant being “different” and explaining customs and beliefs to others—not too different from many of the communities served by the ISJL today. Growing up in Atlanta in the 1960s also meant seeing and being a part of the Civil Rights Movement—recognizing terrible injustices and experiencing great changes. Atlanta was the center of the universe for the American Civil Rights Movement, and pulpit rabbis were a part of that movement. Going to synagogue, the JCC, and Hebrew school was not only

a part of life but also a small way to participate in the changes occurring in the South and the nation. My childhood experiences taught me to understand my Jewish identity and never take for granted the ability to practice being Jewish. My brother, who was a Kroger store and zone manager for his entire career, opened and was the first store manager for the original “Kosher” Kroger in the Toco Hills neighborhood of Atlanta. Every January he would gather orders from families, synagogues, and temples throughout the South for Passover foods. He would then place the orders with vendors throughout the country, and during the weeks before Passover he would have dozens of truckloads of Passover goods arrive for sorting into boxes to be picked up by cars, vans, and trucks

for Jewish families, synagogues, and temples all over the South so they could have what they needed for the holiday. Being Jewish outside of the few Jewish major metro areas takes some extra work, and I hope to do my small part, through the ISJL, to make that work a bit easier.

My favorite aspect of southern Jewish identity:

I never take anything for granted, and I understand that important, worthwhile things take significant time and effort. Growing up Jewish in a distinctly non-Jewish world gave me the ability to appreciate and thrive in very different situations—skills that I use every day in my personal and professional life. To this day, in the Chicago area, I still have to explain that Jews live and thrive in the South and that we southern Jews learned long ago how to live and work with others.



MORRIS “LEW” LEWIS

MORRIS “LEW” LEWIS, WHO joined the ISJL Board of Directors in 2016, grew up in Indianola, Mississippi, and Atlanta, Georgia. While living his adult life in the New Jersey suburbs near New York City, Lew has maintained ties to the Jewish communities of his youth, as well as the small Jewish community

of Lexington, Mississippi, where his family settled in the mid-1840s. Lew recently retired from Pfizer, where he was most recently Global Head of Corporate Affairs for Pfizer Consumer Healthcare. He now consults with global consumer healthcare organizations on public affairs and policy issues. His experience in public affairs brings a different perspective to the Board, a conscious eye toward the views of external stakeholders. Lew holds two undergraduate degrees from Washington and Lee University and an MBA from The Wharton School of The University of Pennsylvania. Lew and his wife, Stacey, have three grown sons, two of whom are married, and, most recently, welcomed the addition of their first granddaughter. They live in Caldwell, New Jersey, and are long-time members of Congregation Agudath Israel (CAI), where Lew is actively involved with the Tzedek Initiative, CAI’s racial justice and equity program.

Why I initially got involved with

the ISJL: Since leaving the South, I am often met with surprise when I mention my southern Jewish heritage. That response has given me greater appreciation for the southern Jewish experience and made me more conscious of the precariousness of small-town Jewish life in the South. When ISJL founder Macy B. Hart approached me about joining the Board, I jumped at the opportunity to help preserve the unique history of southern Jews. More importantly, I want to help ensure a robust future for Jews in the South, particularly those in smaller communities.

My favorite aspect of southern Jewish identity:

As an amateur genealogist, I am fascinated by the role that the tiny Jewish community has played in the growth of small towns and large cities in the South. I am amazed how the Jewish community has been able to retain its identity—while also becoming part of the fabric of the South—for more than 300 years.

GIFTS & GRATITUDE

THANK YOU TO OUR SUPPORTERS

IN THESE PAGES, YOU CAN SEE THE IMPACT THE ISJL HAS 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 – December 31, 2020, to enable our important work.

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