

SUMMER 2012

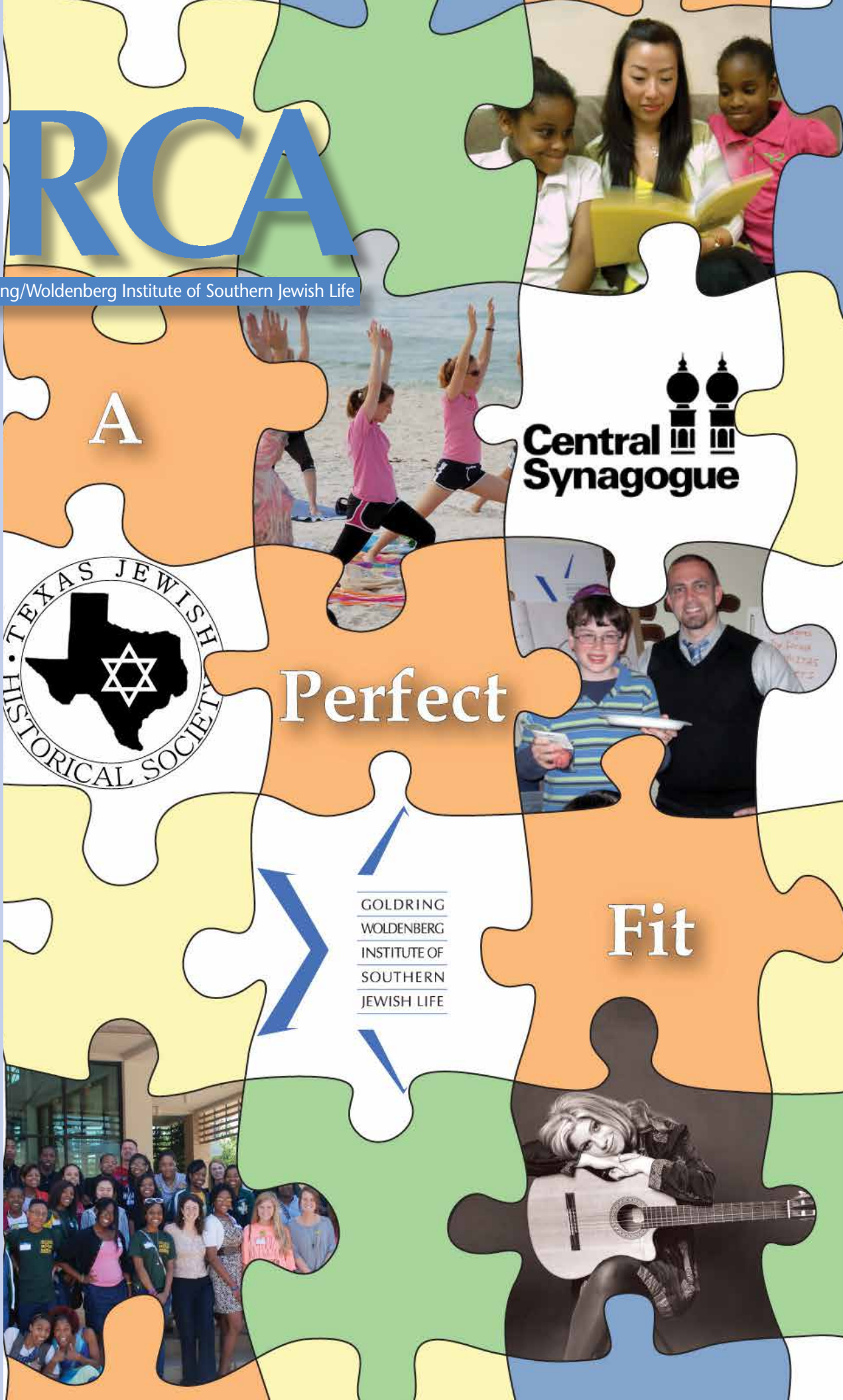
CIRCA

Newsletter of the Goldring/Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life

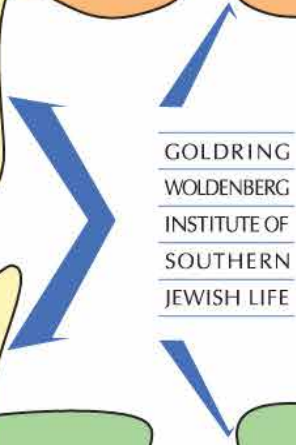
INSIDE

PARTNERSHIP!

- Central Synagogue
- MS Museum of Art
- Texas Jewish Historical Society
- Batsheva
- Americorps
- and YOU!



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Fit



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CIRCA

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Message from
ISJL Board Chair
Rayman L. Solomon

Eleven years ago I attended a “friend-raiser” for the ISJL in Philadelphia. I wanted to see if there was a way the Institute could help my parents and the rest of the members of Temple Beth El in Helena, Arkansas plan for the future of their beautiful building. The congregation was then fewer than 20, and the average age of the members was over 75. They knew they did not have the resources to make repairs and maintain the building beyond a few years, and no one could tolerate allowing it to fall into disrepair. I went on the Board of the ISJL to continue to work on this problem and over the next few years Macy helped the congregation weigh a number of options.

The solution turned out to be one that did not directly involve the Institute. Through the hard work of a former State Senator and his wife, the congregation reached an agreement for an agency of the State of Arkansas to take over the building in order to use it as community meeting space. However, the Institute was involved in implementing the plan. In 2006 members and former members of the Congregation from throughout the U.S. came together for a weekend to conduct the last services to be held in Temple Beth El’s sanctuary. The ISJL Rabbi at that time, Debra Kassoff, led the services, and the ISJL historian, Stuart Rockoff, gave a lecture on

the history of the Jewish presence in Helena. The ISJL helped to arrange the disposition of the religious artifacts. The Sunday school tables and chairs went to Etz Chaim in Bentonville, which was the first non-urban congregation to be formed in the South in a generation. The Ner Tamid and the Ark have become part of the Levy-Cooper Chapel at Temple Israel Cemetery in Memphis. The Torahs were given to new congregations in the former Soviet Union, and the rest of the ritual objects and books were accessioned by the Institute’s Museum of the Southern Jewish Experience.

In May, following six years of renovations the building, now named the Beth El Heritage Hall, was dedicated and became one of three historic locations operated by Helena’s Delta Cultural Center. The State has brought the structure back to its original beauty, including the magnificent Tiffany-like glass dome with its Star of David in the center. At the ceremony Stuart Rockoff again gave an interesting and informative talk on the history of the Helena Jewish community. One of the themes that Stuart developed was the leading civic role the members of Beth El had played in Helena over the 150

years of its existence, and the close interdenominational cooperation that has always existed between the Temple and the town’s churches. The ISJL Board launched our Community Engagement Department under the leadership of Malkie Schwartz in order to preserve and to expand those historic roles traditionally played by Jewish communities throughout our region.

As the ISJL develops its Cultural Corridors tours and more people begin to travel from Memphis to New Orleans to explore both the unique history of music and the Southern Jewish experience, I hope they will include Helena. Among the three buildings of the Delta Cultural Center they will be able to learn about the history of the Delta, the history of one of the most influential centers of the blues, and the rich history of the Jews in the region.

My gratitude to the Institute for its role in assisting my community is matched by that of countless others in our thirteen-state region. It is why I support the ISJL and hope that you will join me in that support so that its scope and impact can increase.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "R. Solomon". The signature is fluid and cursive.



Message from
ISJL President
Macy B. Hart

A few weeks ago, we held a strategic planning retreat with our board and staff. During the weekend, we envisioned what the next ten years would look like at the ISJL. This is a crucial time for us as we are getting ready to enter our thirteenth year. In many ways we are like that young person preparing for her Bat Mitzvah. Many of us think the process of becoming bar or bat mitzvah largely entails a crash course in Torah reading to be ready for the big moment, as well as a gigantic exhale as soon as it's over. In truth, preparation for this event began with our first infant cry and continued with all of the subsequent experiences that have shaped and guided us along life's path. My own life experiences inspired me to be a part of the creation of the ISJL in 2000.

This series of life influencing moments, which are far too numerous to mention here, made it clear to me that we need to change the culture in the Jewish world. As we enter our thirteenth year, I remain committed to our goal of promoting this culture change. Some have heard me say that trying to change culture is a very difficult enterprise. Nevertheless, the ISJL is hard at work in being a force for change on a range of different issues.

There are many Jewish congregations across the country that are no longer thriving. They have lost considerable population and struggle to educate their children and provide enrichment for themselves and their neighbors. While these congregations have spent decades participating in the grander Jewish community, they have received no "pension." This is a part of the culture that must be changed. Congregations that have "paid their dues" deserve attention and assistance, since they have produced the generations that have

resettled in major cities and filled the pews of their synagogues and the coffers of their federations. Too often, the Jewish community has forgotten its roots.

The ISJL is fighting to provide access for Jews in communities both large and small. We want access for children to a quality, subsidized Jewish education. We want congregations without rabbis to have access and enjoy visits from rabbis for events other than funerals. We want access for these congregations to wonderful enrichment programming, not only for themselves but for their non-Jewish neighbors as well. Large congregations can help provide this access by sending programs out beyond their own zip code, instead of expecting people to "be present to win." We want access for the opportunities that will ensure that the legacy of these Jewish communities live on.

Our work is just as crucial for larger communities as for smaller ones. Our education program works with both the largest and the smallest congregations in our region. The ISJL wants to provide access for the urban congregations to enjoy a greater sense of community by connecting them to the places where their future members will come from. If we can ensure that these small-town Jews are exposed to educational and enriching Jewish experiences, they will be much more likely to become active in the Jewish community once they move to the big city.

We are about to enter our adolescent years, the hardest period in the non-

profit world for a start up like the ISJL. We need more advocates to help the ISJL provide the access discussed above. We are a grassroots organization that was founded to address the crucial issues facing the Jewish community today. While we have been nationally recognized as one of the most innovative organizations in the Jewish world, we are still dependent on grassroots support. The ISJL will only survive if we can find more foundations and individual donors to fund our work since most of our programs do not support themselves. The best examples are our Education and Rabbinic departments, which account for 38% of the ISJL total budget. The income derived from delivering those programs totals a mere 7% of the total ISJL budget. There is no way that the communities we serve can pay the entire annual costs of these programs. The culture change the ISJL seeks is for large, mid-size, and small Jewish communities to pool their resources, which would sustain the dignity of the smaller communities while ensuring the future health of the large communities. The long term viability of these two programs will depend upon communal dollars as well as major funders.

I am proud to lead the ISJL and to be one of its original players. Thanks for your assistance and support over the years. I solicit and challenge you to become investors, regardless of the size of your support, and feel the breeze generated by the winds of culture change.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Macy B. Hart". The signature is stylized and fluid, with the first name being the most prominent.

A Familiar Face

New Development & Communications Coordinator



We are pleased to announce that **Beth Kander** has re-joined the ISJL team as our new Development & Communications Coordinator. Kander first worked at the ISJL as an Education Fellow, hired in 2003, at the inception of the now-thriving ISJL education department. After completing her two year fellowship, she attended the University of Michigan, earning a Master of Social Work degree with a focus on human resources and nonprofit management. She also earned graduate certificates in Judaic Studies and Communal Service through the Sol S. Drachler Program, where she was named the Berman Fellow.

Kander has worked with the ISJL in various capacities ever since, most recently freelancing as a grant-writer. For the past four years, she worked full time at a creative agency (film production,

branding, and advertising); her roles there included production manager, copywriter, community outreach coordinator, and ultimately serving as the inaugural director of their social media department. The experience she gained at the creative agency is now being put to great use, helping the ISJL take their communications and development efforts to the next level.

“I really love the team at the ISJL, the work that we do and the communities that we serve,” says Kander. “It’s great to be working here again on a more consistent basis.”

Kander is working directly with Macy B. Hart, Michele Schipper, and the Jackson office staff, as well as with the Board of Directors, and the ISJL’s three development representatives, Lotty Brodsky (Dallas), Charlett Frumin (Houston), and Susan Jacobson (Atlanta). She will work with the whole team to coordinate development strategies, as well as all

communications elements, from social media to press inquiries to raising the ISJL’s brand profile.

Kander is based at the Jackson office, works Monday through Thursday, and is available by email at kander@isjl.org. When not at the office, she is continuing to pursue her writing career. She can also often be found at the theater, or volunteering with the Women’s Fund of Mississippi or the Animal Rescue Fund (ARF). Feel free to drop her a line, welcome her back, and send any suggestions her way. We’re glad to have her around the office again!

2nd Annual ISJL Passover Pilgrimage

Making a pilgrimage on Passover is nothing new. For generations, our people have observed this Festival of Freedom by venturing to the Temple in Jerusalem, from far flung places, to offer and partake of the *pesach* sacrifice with other sojourners. The individual's pilgrimage, and subsequent communal feast, brought an intimate awareness of the great strength born from the interconnectivity of the overall Jewish community, as we shared the bounty of our blessings with others.

This profound message of Passover continued to be heard this year as Rabbi Marshal Klaven traveled 2900 miles, across four states, reaching nearly 600 individuals in seven synagogues, two churches, one university and one prison on the second annual ISJL Passover Pilgrimage. In addition to *matzah*, *maror* and all the fixings, Rabbi Klaven brought with him the celebratory spirit of the holiday. "The Rabbi's enthusiasm and energy spread throughout the whole congregation," stated Nort Goodman, President of UCJC in Crossville, TN. "It seemed everyone came alive!"

Rebirth and renewal are common themes for many faith celebrations in this season. So, along the way, Rabbi Klaven was wonderfully welcomed into Our Home Universalist Unitarian Church in Ellisville, MS and St. Philip's Episcopal in Jackson, who wished to experience Judaism's approach to the season. "In passionately teaching on the universal messages of freedom and equality, Rabbi Klaven won over all our hearts at Our Home Church," stated Lay Pastor Linda Foshee. "In fact, I consider him my Rabbi, my caring teacher!"

Teaching, reinforcing and spreading these essential values in our culture was the purpose of the Pilgrimage. "We were instructed," explains Rabbi Klaven, "to proclaim liberty throughout all the land, unto all the inhabitants therein.' Because," continued Rabbi Klaven, "more than nourishing our bodies; Passover was meant to nourish our souls, as we partake in a real human interest story, one which may inspire us – as it did our ancestors – to act better in the world. Because, when we come together, there is nothing we can't do!"

If your congregation would be interested in being part of next year's ISJL Passover Pilgrimage, please do not hesitate to reach out to Rabbi Klaven. You can email him at mklaven@isjl.org or call him at 601-362-6357. Wherever your Passover celebration took place this year, we pray that it was not only filled with the spirit of freedom, but overflowed with it, so that spirit of justice, equality and freedom may spread throughout the land and throughout the year. *L'shanah haba'a*, perhaps next year, the Pilgrimage may be in your community!





Above: B'nai Brith Literary Society Club House, Anshe Chesed, Vicksburg, MS



Above: Isaac, winner of Afikomen search, Beth Shalom, Auburn, AL



Left: URJ Camp Coleman, Cleveland, GA



Left: B'nai Israel, Natchez, MS



Left: Interfaith forum on Service, TN Tech University, Cookeville, TN

ISJL - Central Synagogue Cooperation

For years, ISJL President and CEO, Macy B. Hart has been a prophetic voice in the Jewish world, informing congregations and organizations near and far on how they can better serve the needs of small and isolated congregations throughout the United States. And now, under the leadership of Senior Rabbi Peter J. Rubinstein, the renowned Central Synagogue in New York City has answered the call.

This year, Rabbi Klaven has arranged for six individual trips for Central Synagogue's three rabbis and two cantors to bring their outstanding community building skills to 18 Southern congregations in need. These five clergy, which include Rabbi

Rubinstein, will go beyond conducting lively Shabbat and worship services; beyond presenting engaging adult and youth educations; and far beyond representing our people brilliantly in interfaith gatherings. This exceptional clergy team is truly fulfilling the meaning of *k'lal Yisrael* (the community of Israel).

So often, North American congregations form meaningful partnerships with Jewish communities around the world: in Israel, Argentina and the Former Soviet Union. Yet, what about those struggling congregations closer to home? What about the underserved Jewish communities here in the United States that may also benefit from these relationships?

Rabbi Michael Friedman on the first ISJL Central Synagogue Cooperation Trip in Ft. Smith, AR at the United Hebrew Congregation for Shabbat Services and Torah Study March 23th & 24th.



Well, that question has been answered decisively in the inspiring work of Central Synagogue's clergy. In this ground-breaking collaboration with the ISJL, they are re-forming the concept of Jewish communal service. For, as we have come to understand, only through such sharing can we hope to fulfill our shared goal: ensuring our collective Jewish future through strengthened Jewish identities and values.

If you or your congregation would be interested in forming similar relationships and engage in this sacred transformative work, please don't hesitate in contacting ISJL Director of Rabbinic Services, Rabbi Marshal Klaven. He can be reached at mklaven@isjl.org or at 601-362-6357. The ISJL is always interested in working with you to find innovative ways to address the challenges presently facing our congregations, regardless of size or affiliation.





Rabbi Friedman in Seminole, OK at Seminole Hebrew Center, for an interfaith forum. March 24th



Rabbi Friedman in Bentonville, AR at Etz Chaim March 24th for an adult education program.



Rabbi Maurice Salth on the second ISJL Central Synagogue Cooperation Trip in Jackson, TN at B'nai Israel, Shabbat services April 27th & 28th.



Rabbi Salth in Tupelo, MS at B'nai Israel, leading Havdalah and adult education April 28th.

ISJL partners with two Jewish exhibits in Jackson, MS

This spring Jackson welcomed two Jewish exhibits to town and the ISJL served as a partner organization to both exhibitions. The Mississippi Museum of Art opened *Curious George Saves the Day*, curated by the Jewish Museum in New York on March 4th. This exhibition delves into the remarkable lives and works of authors Margret and H. A. Rey and their escape from Nazi-occupied Europe. The ISJL helped to develop material for their family guide, resources for their docent training and Dr. Stuart Rockoff was featured in their lecture series, discussing the experiences of Jewish refugees to the United States in the years before and during World War II, which is when Margret and H. A. Rey emigrated from Europe to the U.S.



Tougaloo College opened *Beyond Swastika and Jim Crow* from the Museum of Jewish Heritage also in New York on February 24th. The exhibit tells the story of Jewish professors who fled Nazism and came to America finding teaching positions at historically black colleges in the South. The exhibit features Professor Ernst Borinski, a German Jewish émigré who taught sociology at Tougaloo College in Jackson from 1947 until his death in 1983. The ISJL, as a part of the planning committee, helped to plan a series of public programs featuring the work of Ernst Borinski.



In order to take full advantage of both exhibits in town, the ISJL served as a natural bridge between both institutions. On April 11th, 43 high school students toured both exhibits and participated in an anti-bias workshop led by four Anti-Defamation League facilitators who came from New Orleans. For many students it was the first time they learned about the Jewish experience in Europe during WWII which helped them to understand how the Jewish community in the South stood behind other persecuted minority groups. The workshop helped to unpack this information by creating dialogue on a variety of types of discrimination and what we can do in our everyday lives to combat it. Funding for this trip was made possible through the generosity of the Julian and Kathryn Wiener Charitable Fund of the Community Foundation of Greater Jackson.



L-R Beverly Hogan President of Tougaloo College & Historian/Author Jessica B. Harris

On April 12th, ISJL staff helped organize the first Passover Seder ever held on the campus of a historically black college. The Seder titled “Healing the Wounds: A Freedom Seder” brought together both the Jewish and African American community to emphasize common themes in the histories of both communities. The night began with a lecture by culinary historian and author Jessica B. Harris, followed by Rabbi Valerie Cohen of Beth Israel Congregation in Jackson leading a Passover Seder focused on the themes of freedom.



Mississippi Humanities Council Award



Rachel Jarman, ISJL Museum and Special Projects Coordinator was selected for the 2012 Humanities Educator Award by the Mississippi Humanities Council.

The Humanities Educator Award goes to an individual or organization whose work moves beyond the classroom, and uses innovative techniques and formats to reach a wide audience with the ideas and techniques of the humanities.

Jarman, a Connecticut native, has worked for the ISJL since 2008. She served two years as an Education Fellow, before taking on the role of Museum and Special Projects Coordinator in 2010.

“I’m delighted, because I’m so proud of the program that this award acknowledges,” says Jarman. “I wanted to tell the story of immigration, while also introducing teachers and students to Jewish material they would not normally encounter. That’s what led

to the creation of our ‘trunk program,’ which can travel from school to school and group to group. Like so many ISJL programs, the materials and lessons in the trunk program are intended to lead all students and participants to understand, engage with, and appreciate cultural and religious diversity in their communities.”

The MSJE traveling trunk has traveled to five schools across Mississippi and reached over 300 students in its pilot year.

New Assistant Director

Ezra Flom Joins Education Team



The ISJL is pleased to announce that in addition to our next class of Education Fellows, the education department has another great new addition: Ezra Flom, joining our staff as the department's Assistant Director. For the last decade, Ezra has crafted experiences for learners both young and old that ignite an excitement for learning and Judaism. He has led educational experiences as far North as Quebec, as far West as Catalina Island, as far South as Costa Rica and as far East as Baltimore, MD. His programs have ranged from teaching gardening

to preschoolers to leading retirees on hikes. He also taught 4th grade in Jewish Day School, igniting a love for learning in Hebrew School students, and even co-taught university courses in service learning and rock climbing. Clearly, Ezra knows there's no "one way" to experience Judaism!

Ezra has California Teaching Credentials. He earned a BA in Spanish Culture & Literature from CSU Long Beach, and an MA in Education from American Jewish University. More importantly than his formal education, Ezra is proud

to be an Eagle Scout, and has been awarded the President's Volunteer Service Award for his work in New Orleans and Galveston. He is currently wrapping up a year of providing perspective-changing Jewish nature education to teens, presenting the Jewish lifecycle to 4th graders, and teaching 6th grade Judaica and Hebrew at Valley Beth Shalom in Encino. Relocating from his hometown of Seal Beach, CA Ezra is looking forward to bringing his enthusiasm for life and learning to Jackson, Mississippi and across the southern region.

From the 2010-2012 Ed Fellows:

New Adventures for "Graduating" Fellows!



Sara, Claire, Mark, Michelle and Lauren

We value each and every relationship and experience we have had and it has been a privilege and an honor for us to work with "all y'all," We couldn't thank you enough for the gifts you have given to us along the way! Here's where our next adventures will be taking each of us:

- **Michelle Blumenthal:** Program Associate at Hillel of Broward and Palm Beach, Florida
- **Lauren Fredman:** JCCA Scholar, Hornstein Program at Brandeis University (MBA Nonprofit Management/MA, Jewish Professional Leadership)
- **Sara Silverman:** URJ Greene Family Camp Summer Education Director and then, 4th grade Reading teacher at Beth Yeshurun Day School in Houston, TX
- **Claire Solomon:** Program Officer at the Covenant Foundation, New York
- **Mark Swick:** Community Liaison, Yaschik/Arnold Jewish Studies Program at the College of Charleston

Fellowship Highlights: Learning from the Best



The ISJL Education Fellowship is an incredible opportunity. Recent college graduates spend two years on the road, delivering invaluable resources, support, and excitement to the communities they serve. It is our hope that not only do the Fellows benefit these communities – but also that the Fellows themselves get truly meaningful benefits from their time at the ISJL. That’s why we’re so excited to share some of the wonderful learning experiences for the Fellows that have been made possible by some of the brightest minds and most influential leaders in the Jewish world.

As a highly sought-after group of budding young

professionals, desired and recruited by graduate programs and other Jewish institutions, our Fellows have caught national attention. The ISJL has subsequently received numerous requests for recruiters to speak to the Fellows about possible graduate programs and future jobs and projects. This year, we took some of these requests and turned them into learning opportunities.

This has produced some of the most wonderful lessons for the Fellows. Our guest presenters thus far have included Michael Zeldin from Hebrew Union College, Miriam Heller Stern from American Jewish University, Michael Shire from Hebrew College, and Kerry Olitzky

from the Jewish Outreach Institute.

None of these teachers have requested honoraria. They see our Fellows as an investment in the Jewish future – as do we. One of the most amazing aspects of these enrichment opportunities for our young professionals is that what they learn is shared with the communities they serve.

If you’re interested in learning more about the Fellowship, supporting the work of the education department, or just getting more information about what we do every day, contact the ISJL Education Department Director Rachel Stern at rstern@isjl.org.



New Education Fellows

Amanda Winer, a graduate of Binghamton University in upstate New York, is from Westborough, Massachusetts. She has served many roles on her campus, including: President of the Class of 2012, Faculty-Student scholar, a campus tour guide, and a tutor and marketing intern at the Writing Center. In addition, Amanda was the recipient of Binghamton's Exemplary Student Award. She is very involved in Challah for Hunger, serving as the Operational Coordinator of the Binghamton chapter and the Chair of the International Education and Advocacy for chapters worldwide. Amanda founded a Jewish Environmental Initiative, called Shoreshim, and is a proud alumna of the Jewish Farm School, Eden Village Camp, NFTY Northeast, and URJ Eisner Camp. Amanda is looking forward to joining the ISJL team because she loves to travel, meet new people and engage others in living Jewishly.



Amanda Winer

Dan Ring hails from Reisterstown, MD, and is a graduate of University of Maryland College Park. He has received a double degree in History and Secondary Education. In college, he spent some serious time exploring his Jewish identity, and has come to appreciate the wisdom and wide diversity of all types of Jewish thought throughout the ages, so much so that Jewish philosophy has become some of his favorite reading material! He also really enjoys learning the different and unique ways by which people experience and live as Jews across cultures and across the world. As an ISJL fellow, he is especially excited to learn about, assist, and become a part of the Southern Jewish experience!



Dan Ring

Elaine Barenblat received her bachelor's degree in Early Childhood and Special Education from the University of North Texas in 2011. Growing up in San Antonio, Texas, her Jewish identity in the conservative movement has always been strong. She regularly attended services, did faith-based community service projects, worked at a Jewish summer camp, lead a weekly children's service, and so much more. She is thrilled to be joining the wonderful family at ISJL because she feels her values and goals are not only respected, but are shared with the other fellows and staff members. Elaine looks forward to two wonderful years serving Jewish communities in the southern United States!



Elaine Barenblat

Adam Wassell is a graduate of the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. He majored in Political Science with a minor in History. During his time at UNCG he was very involved with the campus community. He served as President of Hillel, was a member of the Pi Kappa Alpha Fraternity, taught Religious School at Temple Emanuel, and worked for Undergraduate Admissions. In his free time he loves to play guitar and spend time with friends. Adam is extremely excited to move to Jackson to be a part of the ISJL team, and is looking forward to experiencing Jewish life in a variety of communities.



Adam Wassell

Samantha Kahan is originally from Baltimore, Maryland. Her undergraduate degree is from the University of Maryland, Baltimore County where she designed a major to focus on Unity and Diversity of the American Jewish Community. She is fascinated and energized by the diversity that encompasses the American Jewish Community. She feels that coming to the South to learn about the rich Jewish history, is a fantastic opportunity. Samantha is excited to be joining the ISJL team, and looks forward to meeting everyone!



Samantha Kahan

Summer Interns

History

Abby Klionsky, from Chicago, is finishing her sophomore year at Princeton University and majoring in history. She is most excited about working at the ISJL this summer and having an opportunity to explore Jewish communities in the South.

Diana Clarke, from Worcester, MA, studies Creative Writing and Yiddish at Columbia University. Diana is excited to get to know the American South, and not just for the food. She's interested in stories, personal and historical, and in how to tell them.

Oral History

Jonayah Marie Jackson—Jo for short—was born and raised in Brooklyn, New York. She attended Williams College, where she majored in Anthropology and completed a concentration in Africana Studies. Jo's dream is to combine historical preservation with ethnographic research, and she is excited at this opportunity to do so.

Rabbinic

Student Rabbi **Lisa Kingston**, originally from Hartsdale, NY, graduated Phi Beta Kappa from Skidmore College and earned a Masters of Arts in Religious Education from the Hebrew Union College (NY) in 2009. Before coming to the ISJL, she served as an intern for the Department of Lifelong Learning at Temple Emanu-el in NYC as well as the Student Rabbi for Temple Israel in Uniontown, PA. As a recipient of the Bonnie and Daniel Tisch Fellowship, Kingston spent last summer learning about congregation leadership with Rabbi Jim Prosnit at B'nai Israel in Bridgeport, CT. She now works as the Education Intern at Congregation B'nai Jeshurun, where she is creating a new experiential Jewish history curriculum for the Religious School. After devoting her time and her talents to our Southern ISJL congregations this summer, she will return to B'nai Jeshurun as their Rabbinic Intern, while completing her rabbinic studies as HUC-JIR (expected ordination, 2013). Student Rabbi Kingston is looking forward to experiencing the very best of Southern Jewry from our ISJL congregations, as she invests her exceptional rabbinic and educational skills in support of their valiant work!

Museum

Caroline Gillespie is from Oxford, Mississippi. She is a senior at the University of Mississippi working on a degree in History and Southern Studies. She is delighted to be a part of the museum this summer and excited to learn about Southern Jewish history and culture!



Abby Klionsky



Diana Clarke



Jonayah Marie Jackson



Lisa Kingston



Caroline Gillespie

Batsheva – Reflections from the Road

I have been travelling across the American South, singing to my people in Yiddish, Hebrew, Ladino and English and talking about the legacy of song, the path of history and the heritage of the Jewish people. What I have discovered in the data-saturated lives of American Jews, a great satisfaction from the audience in the hearing of the history; its import; its ramifications in American culture and its songs. I am also finding something of a chasm between the nineteenth, twentieth and

twenty-first centuries with regard to Jewish knowledge and its effects on continuity and the status of the State of Israel.

I am encountering a thirst for knowledge accompanied and transmitted through music. I am encountering wonder. There is a collective, sometimes unconscious memory that seems woven into melody. The audiences seem to be transfixed by the songs and the information. I always provide lyrics to accompany the concert and

people follow closely and sing – even if they have never heard the song – or the language, they sing!

The story that I tell is the history of Sephardic and Ashkenazic Jewry as it pertains to the songs, drawing their direct relevance to contemporary North American culture – both Jewish and non-Jewish. This telling – a Magid, if you will, seems to speak directly to the Jewish zeitgeist as I am finding it in the South.

For more information on a Batsheva concert or any of our Presenters:

Ann Zivitz Kimball

Director of Programming akimball@isjl.org



Batsheva has toured Canada extensively for many years giving solo concerts before enthusiastic audiences in every corner of the country, as well as parts of the United States and Israel. Signed with the Golden Land Theatrical Agency in New York, BATSHEVA appeared on stage and has recorded with some of the most well-known Yiddish artists of our time. She worked as a singer in Israel, appearing for the Israel Broadcast Authority.

Her original songs are award-winners; including her “Song of Remembrance” which is part of the official archives of Yad Va-Shem, the Holocaust Memorial in Jerusalem.

In 2008, she released her CD, “I, BATSHEVA, SINGER... to a standing-room only crowd at the Ashkenaz Festival of Jewish Music and Culture in Toronto, Canada. The CD has continued to receive wide audience and critical acclaim in Australia, Israel, Canada and the US.

Texas Section of Encyclopedia Completed

We are pleased to announce the addition of 55 histories from Texas to the Encyclopedia of Southern Jewish Communities. These 55 Texas histories, which cover the entire state, are based on original research into synagogue records, local newspapers, public documents, the Federal Census, oral histories, as well as numerous published works.

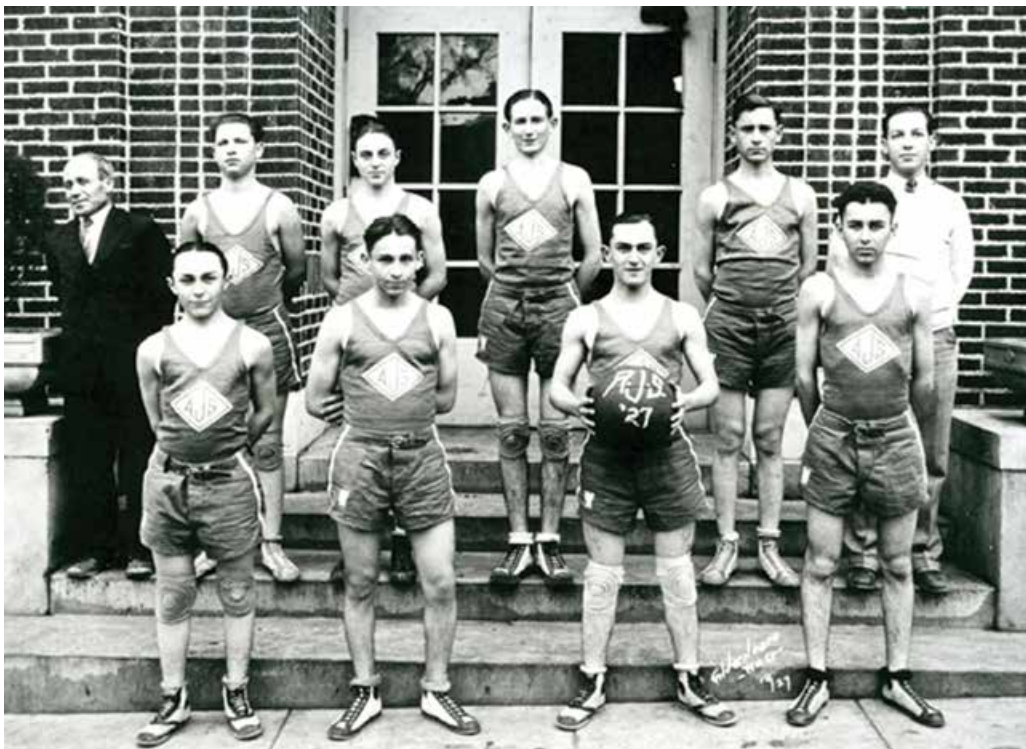
The Texas section of the Encyclopedia includes histories of such large Jewish

communities as Houston, San Antonio, and Dallas, as well as smaller towns like Palestine and Brenham. According to the Director of the ISJL History Department, Dr. Stuart Rockoff, "large Jewish communities like Houston probably don't need us to ensure that their history is preserved, but for many smaller communities, several of which have long been extinct, their encyclopedia history might be the only remaining vestige of what was once a flourishing community."



To date, there are online histories for over 220 Jewish communities across the South. Having completed Texas, the ninth state featured, the ISJL History Department is currently working to add Oklahoma to the Encyclopedia. The research for the Texas section was made possible by generous grants from the Texas Jewish Historical Society and Humanities Texas. To experience the Encyclopedia of Southern Jewish Communities, go to www.isjl.org.

Members of the Congregation Agudath Jacob Basketball Team Waco, TX - 1927
Photo courtesy of the Texas Collection, Baylor University



A Refined Community: The Jews of Midland/Odessa, Texas

Over the last century, the fortunes of the Permian Basin, and its two largest cities, Odessa and Midland, have risen and fallen with the price of oil. Yet it was Midland's ranching economy that drew the first Jewish family to settle in the area. Henry Halff had established the Quien Sabe Ranch in Midland County with his father Mayer. After Mayer died in 1905, Henry, a native of San Antonio, inherited the family ranches and moved to Midland to oversee them. Halff built a grand mansion along with a downtown office building to house his livestock and real estate businesses. He was also a major promoter of dry land farming in the area, touting the benefits of irrigation in self-published booklets. While Halff was active in the Jewish community in San Antonio, he was not affiliated with any Jewish community in Midland since there were not yet enough Jews in the Permian Basin to establish a congregation.

This would change after oil was discovered in the 1920s as Odessa went from a sleepy town of 750 people in 1925 to a burgeoning city of 5000 four years later. Midland



Henry Halff

experienced similar growth. With oil money flowing through the Permian Basin, a handful of Jewish merchants were drawn to the area.

Despite the arrival of the oil industry, the Permian Basin's Jewish community was slow to grow initially. In 1937, Midland had only seventeen Jews while Odessa had fewer than ten. Once the oil industry recovered from the Depression in the late 1930s, the Jewish community began to grow. By 1941, about twenty Jewish families lived in the Permian Basin, when they first started to meet together in rented buildings for religious services. World War

II was an important catalyst. Demand for oil skyrocketed while a new army air base in the area further energized the local economy. The area's Jews met at the air base and organized the Jewish Service Club, which offered worship services and social events for Jewish soldiers stationed there.

After the war, the Jewish community built on this momentum by establishing Temple Beth El in December, 1945. Ben Glast was the first president of the congregation. The group immediately voted to raise money to build a synagogue. They broke ground in March, 1946, and completed the modest building by September. The women of the congregation established a sisterhood and created a religious school which they oversaw.

This burgeoning Jewish community was made up

of recent arrivals drawn to the area during the wartime boom. Of the leaders of Beth El who were listed on the new synagogue's cornerstone in 1946, none had lived in Odessa or Midland in 1937. Abe Gerson moved to Odessa in 1946 to open a jewelry business. Roy Elsner came to Odessa in 1947 to take a broadcasting job at a local radio station. After working his way up to manager, Elsner started the first commercial FM station in West Texas in 1961.

Odessa's population grew from 29,000 to 80,000 people during the 1950s as the city became a center for petrochemical production. Not surprisingly, this growth had an impact on Beth El and the Jewish community. By 1952, Beth El was able to hire its first full-time rabbi, Pizer Jacobs, who had received his training at the Reform Hebrew Union College. Rabbi Jacobs did



not stay for more than a year or two, and was replaced Rabbi Phillip Weinberg, who was more traditional. Rabbi Weinberg kept kosher and insisted that musical instruments not be part of Shabbat services. In 1957, Beth El voted not to renew his contract, and began to look for a rabbi who would best fit the unique congregation. According to the board minutes at the time, while the congregation preferred Conservative services, they wanted to hire a Reform rabbi since they thought he would better into both the Jewish and larger community.

This effort to hire a new full-time rabbi was sidetracked by the need of the congregation for a new building. After only ten years, Beth El had outgrown its synagogue. By the end of the 1950s, they had 50 member families, twice as many as they had when their building was dedicated in 1946. After flirting with the idea of adding an adjacent education building, the congregation voted to sell their temple and build a new one on a different site. The temple board decided that they could not afford a full-



time rabbi as well as a new synagogue, so they relied on members to lead services while they raised money for the new building.

The new synagogue on North Grandview Street was dedicated on January 7, 1962 in ceremonies led by Rabbi Arthur Kahn and Cantor David Silverman of Conservative congregation B'nai Emunah in Tulsa, Oklahoma. The dedication banquet started with the song "God Bless America" and ended with "Hatikvah," the Israeli national anthem. The new building had seven classrooms to accommodate the growing religious school, which had about 50 kids in the 1960s. The congregation served Jews from throughout the Permian Basin. At the time of the new temple's dedication, about 20 of Beth El's member families lived

in Odessa, while another 20 lived in Midland. About 10 families lived in small towns like Crane, Fort Stockton, and Hobbs, New Mexico.

While some Odessa Jews still owned retail stores during the postwar years, over time, more professionals and people affiliated with the oil industry joined Beth El. Of the eight officers listed on the cornerstone of Beth El's 1962 synagogue, three were either engineers or executives for local oil companies. Robert Taubman, the temple president at the time, was Vice-President of Buffalo Petroleum. Only one of the officers, Abe Gerson, owned a retail store.

Since Beth El was the only congregation in the Permian Basin, it had to accommodate members of various Jewish backgrounds.

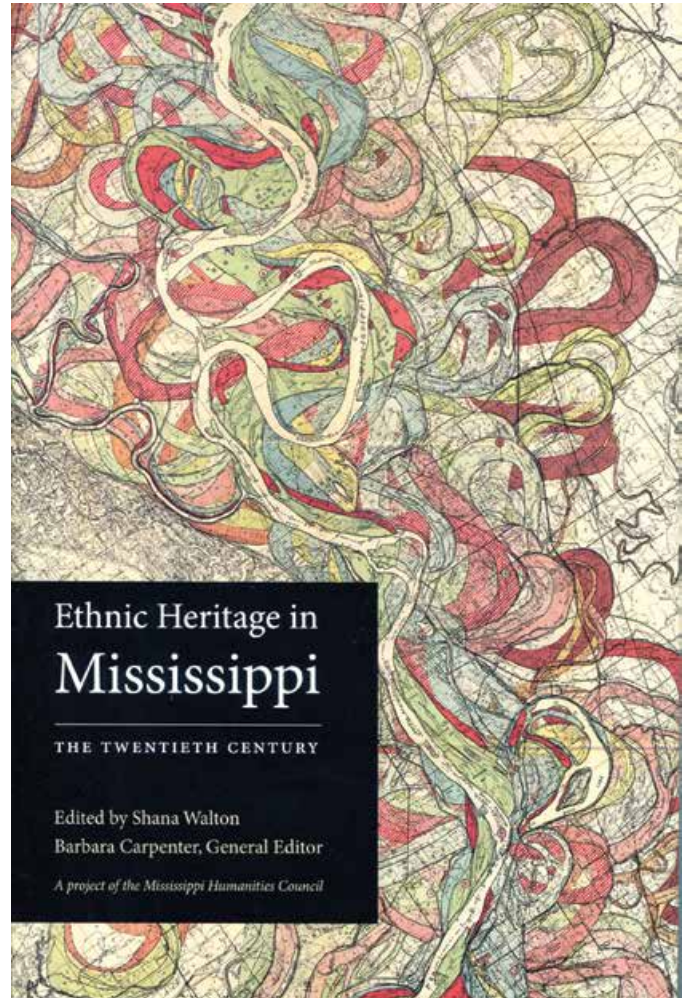
When they did not have a full-time rabbi in the late 1950s, Beth El contacted both Hebrew Union College and the Jewish Theological Seminary looking for student rabbis for the high holidays. Beth El's kitchen was dairy-only to preserve the Jewish dietary laws.

While services were more Conservative-oriented, the congregation hired both Reform and Conservative rabbis over the years. When the congregation decided to affiliate with a national movement in 1982, it joined both the Reform Union of American Hebrew Congregations and the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism. In 2012, Beth El continued to belong to both the Reform and Conservative movements.

(continued on page 18)

ISJL Historian featured in New Book

Director of the ISJL History Department, Dr. Stuart Rockoff, has published an essay in the new book *Ethnic Heritage in Mississippi: The Twentieth Century*. Entitled “Chai Cotton: Jewish Life in Mississippi,” the essay explores the fascinating history of Jews in the Magnolia State, including their early settlement in Mississippi, their important role in the state’s commercial economy, their assimilation to local culture, and the demographic trends that have reshaped the state’s Jewish community in recent decades. Copies of *Ethnic Heritage in Mississippi*, signed by Dr. Rockoff, can be purchased from the ISJL’s Peddler’s Cart.



MIDLAND/ODESSA, TEXAS
(continued from page 17)

The Permian Basin Jewish community has benefitted greatly from its local B’nai B’rith chapter. Founded in 1963, the local B’nai B’rith was able to secure a bingo permit in the early 1980s. Ever since, the group has run bingo games that raise money to support the local Jewish community. These bingo proceeds have been used to create a camp and college scholarship fund for local Jewish youth. In recent years, bingo money has been

used to support Beth El with a fund to help pay for a full-time rabbi.

While their numbers have shrunk a bit in the last few decades, Beth El and the Permian Basin Jewish community remain strong. Beth El had 80 member families in 1990, though this figure has dropped to around 65 families today. Beth El still has a small but active religious school. In

2011, Beth El hired Rabbi Holly Cohn, its first full-time spiritual leader in over twenty years.

To read the unabridged version of this Odessa history, visit the Encyclopedia of Southern Jewish Communities at www.isjl.org.

Oral History

A commissioned oral history interview by the Goldring/Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life is a perfect gift for parents, grandparents or other loved ones. Interviews are lasting mementos for recipients and those closest to them, and the interview process itself is a rewarding experience.

After extensive pre-interview research with friends, family, and the interviewee, a skilled interviewer with a strong background in Southern Jewish culture and history will film an extended

conversation with your loved one. This footage will be edited into a high quality DVD that accents the interviewee's achievements, and preserves his or her memories and personality for friends and family, as well as for generations to come.

In addition to honoring the recipient with a lasting record of his or her experiences, your gift supports our History Department's documentation and preservation of the Jewish experience in the American South, as well

as the array of religious, educational, and cultural programming offered by the ISJL.

For more information, please contact Josh Parshall at the Goldring/Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life by email (jparshall@isjl.org) or telephone (601.362.6357).

Clockwise from upper left: Muriel Phillips, Si Davidson, Flo Selber and Les Norton



How do YOU say “Repair Our World”?

Does your Congregation call it Tikkun Olam, Social Action, Social Justice? “A Rose by any other name would smell as sweet.” And all of these beautiful committees are Community Engagement.

It is hard to believe that the Department of Community Engagement is nearing the completion of its 3rd year. As we approach this milestone, we are giving serious thought to how we can make the programs we developed, the lessons we’ve learned and the resources we’ve gathered available to an inaugural group of communities in Mississippi and neighboring states. Specifically, we are reaching out to Mississippi, Alabama, Arkansas, West Tennessee and Northern Louisiana. The goal is to reach a representative from each congregation who will help determine how the ISJL can be a resource for congregations committed to social justice.

Each congregation has been contacted to find out if they have a Community Engagement committee or initiative and, to determine who the point person is. A survey is sent to each

point person to learn what communities have been working on, the impact they are having in their community and how the ISJL can be a resource. If you live in these areas and have not heard from us, please contact Malkie Schwartz at mschwartz@isjl.org or 601-362-6357. Your help will ensure that we have a solid understanding of the Community Engagement landscape in the region, and we can use this information as a basis for future programs to enrich the experience and impact of Community Engagement activities in our region.

The ISJL already has some exciting initiatives underway. Would you like information about our T.A.P. Peer Mediation Program or Read, Lead, Succeed Initiative? Do you have an existing relationship

with a school or other community organization that needs strengthening? Does your Congregation wish to engage more with the community and simply isn’t sure where to start? The ISJL is your resource for Programs and Ideas we’re always happy to talk with you about these and other opportunities. Regardless of how congregations refer to initiatives that repair our world, we want to hear about the work that is being done and how the ISJL can help enhance the experience and impact of your congregations’ efforts.

Read, Lead, Succeed!!!



The ISJL Department of Community Engagement recently partnered with the Urban League to launch the “Read, Lead, Succeed” program at Operation U.P.W.A.R.D.—a community based after-school program. Members of the National Urban League Young Professional (ULYP) volunteer auxiliary serve as reading tutors for middle school Reading Leaders who attend Operation U.P.W.A.R.D. In turn the Reading Leaders read to elementary school students.

Read, Lead, Succeed intends to provide a fun reading experience for all participating students. Through enriched reading sessions, students should develop an enhanced appreciation for reading, and thus motivation for building advanced reading skills would result. The program benefits both middle school and elementary school students by allowing both groups of learners to have a one-on-one reading experience and practice their reading skills. It also makes it possible for ULYP members to actively promote literacy in their community.

In mid-April, the 10 week program began with a training session led by ISJL staff. The session prepared 10 ULYP members and middle school students to effectively implement the Reading for All Learners Program (RALP). 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.

The ISJL is monitoring the impact that this program has on the students’ literacy skills. We hope that through this experience we will be able to offer effective resources to congregations in our region seeking to provide positive and instructional reading experiences for students in their communities.

*AmeriCorps Member Julia Miao
ISJL Community Engagement Department
working with students in Jackson, MS*

Thank You to Our Contributors!

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 from January 1, 2012–April 15, 2012 to enable our important work.

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*Rabbi Gary Gerson –
Rabbi-on-the-Road*
Temple Sinai-Lake Charles, LA

Gail Goldberg
Ellen & Steven Hirsch

*Bill Goldring receiving the
Times-Picayune
Loving Cup Award*
Jennifer & Jack C. Benjamin

Bea Gotthelf's birthday
Susan & Macy B. Hart

Julian Hart's recovery
Reva & Ellis Hart
Susan & Macy B. Hart

Macy B. Hart
Dolores M. Galea
Isa & Bill Aron
Katherine & Larry Buck

*Reva & Ellis Hart's Great
Grandchildren: Jamie Hart &
Eli Tennen*
Phrose & Maurice Raphael

Susan Hart's birthday
Ann & Rick Streiffer

*Mindy & Clay Humphrey's
anniversary*
Susan & Macy B. Hart

Susan Jacobson
Joyce & Henry Schwob
Valerie & Bill Needle
Maxwell Lyons

*Marriage of
Rachel Jarman & Chris Myers*
Charlett Frumin
Susan Jacobson

*Harriet & Jerry Kauffman's
Anniversary*
Marilyn & Alvin Wexler

*Boaz Kelner becoming a
Bar Mitzvah*
Jan Abby Liff

*Ann Kimball, ISJL Director of
Programming*
Saundra K. Levy

Rabbi Marshal Klaven
Temple Sinai-Lake Charles, LA
Hal Samuels
CCA of TN
Temple Meir Chayim-
Dermott, AR
Congregation B'nai Israel-
Fayetteville, GA

Congregation Emanuel-
Statesville, NC
Congregation Beth Israel-
Meridian, MS
Dr. Gwen Cooper
Springridge United Methodist
Church-Terry, MS
Temple Emanu-El-Longview, TX
Melanie & Will Dann & Family
Susan & Lee Cahn & Family
Temple Adas Israel-
Brownsville, TN
Anshed Chesed Congregation-
Vicksburg, MS
Congregation B'nai Israel-
Natchez, MS

Gerald Kline's birthday
Rabbi Hava Pell & Michael Kline

Fica & Harry Konfino
Peggy & Denny Galis

Connie Kruger
Paul Ackman

Jordan Magidson
Dolores M. Galea

*Josh Parshall & the Oral History
Program*
Muriel Folloder Phillips

David Rayman's birthday
Mary Lou Neth Kahn

Dr. Stuart Rockoff, ISJL Historian
Jeri & Marc Shapiro
Shirley & Marvin Rich

Larry Rosenwasser's good health
Celia & Charlie Dubin

Susan & David Saltz' marriage
Patricia S. Skott

Michele Schipper
Dolores M. Galea

Flo Selber's birthday
Michael Kantrow Families
Leanne, Alan & Seth Silverblatt
Brett, Oz, Ben & Jack Friedmann

Claire Solomon, ISJL Ed Fellow
Dr. Gwen Cooper

Dean Rayman Solomon
Katherine & Larry Buck
Maeva Marcus

Rachel Stern
Dolores M. Galea

Rachel Stern's birthday
Susan & Macy B. Hart

Dr. Rick Streiffer's birthday
Susan & Macy B. Hart

J. Edward Wise's birthday
Marilee & Frank Sher



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- A decent bottle of wine
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