

Summer 2016

CIRCA

Summer Style

Newsletter of the Goldring/ Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life





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Contents

President and Board Chair Messages 3

Rabbinic 5

Staff 6-7

Programming 8-9

Fellow Alumni Network 10-11

SIHS Conference 12-13

On the Road 14-15

Contributions & Tributes 16-19

Board Chair's Message



ISJL Board Chair
Rachel Reagler
Schulman

Dear Friends,

I'm starting my summer with gratitude, and it's all because of you. Thank you.

Earlier this year, the ISJL was given a challenge—if we could raise a million dollars in gifts and pledges by the end of March, we would receive half a million dollars in matching funds. Our supporters responded, we met our goal, and this year we are on firmer footing because of those vital gifts.

We are so grateful for each and every gift. The work that the ISJL does is made possible by the contributions that come in when we have an exciting challenge opportunity— and also those we receive when there is no specific challenge or deadline. Throughout the year, year after year, we are committed to serving Southern Jewish communities, working alongside our neighbors, and making a difference. That work is sustained by all of us committed to contributing to the ISJL. It's made possible by you.

This summer, we'll be welcoming new staff, hosting our annual Education Conference, putting people and programs on the road... all thanks to your support. So on behalf of all of us at the ISJL - the Board of Directors, our staff, and the communities we serve - thank you.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rachel R. Schulman".

President's Message



ISJL President
Macy B. Hart

Summertime, and the living is... hectic, for all of us at the ISJL!

Each summer brings new energy, as the departing second year Education Fellows leave for their next adventure, first year Fellows rise to the leadership level of their second year, and a new cohort begins their two-year journey. This year, a new Community Engagement Fellow and a summer Rabbinic Intern round out our staff expansion.

Year after year, the annual infusion of fresh faces and ideas keeps us moving forward. The extraordinary work of all our staff (past, present, and future) proves time and again that bringing Jewish life and opportunities to communities across our 13 state region is meaningful, enriching, and "good for the Jews."

Throughout the summer and all year long, the energy here reverberates near and far. My phone rings, emails come, letters arrive by snail mail—people constantly reach out from all over the country and even internationally to express a variation on the following: *We love what you're doing, we want to be a part of it! How can we become an ISJL community?*

This sentiment is gratifying, but also disheartening. As I have explained many times, the problems we address down here are not uniquely Southern. But the people calling and writing me already know that. They want to access our regional approach to Jewish education, rabbinic support, and more. The ISJL has set an example of what can be when it comes to Jewish communal life.

That's the recognition that is truly needed: realizing that our model can work elsewhere. If you're calling me from a small town in Ohio, you can't become an "ISJL community," but you could be part of helping found an IMJL – Institute of Midwestern Jewish Life. I'm often asked if there are any other organizations like the ISJL around the country. The answer is there aren't any others like the ISJL... but there could be. Offering practical, sustainable, innovative solutions to our communities is what it's all about. Touching lives, forging connections, in the South and elsewhere—it's not just smart, it's good for the Jews.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Macy B. Hart".



Above, left: Rabbi Jeremy Simons and Bar Mitzvah Sam Schulman at Mishkan Israel in Selma, AL. Right: Rabbi Matt Dreffin at Congregation Shomrei Torah in Tallahassee, FL, during Passover Pilgrimage and at Congregation Beth Shalom in Auburn, AL for Purim celebration.

Summer in the Rabbinic Department

Spring and summer have seen the ISJL's Rabbinic Department logging a lot of miles. In addition to welcoming our summer intern, Student Rabbi Rob Friedman, who will also add to the mileage count in the coming months, throughout the spring, Rabbi Jeremy Simons and Rabbi Matt Dreffin were busily traversing the South. This year, the two of them collectively visited eighteen communities to lead seder celebrations during the Passover Pilgrimage. Some of the highlights Rabbis Dreffin and Simons shared from this year's journey include:

"At the St. Philip's Episcopal Church seder, we had 15 adults searching for the afikomen - and I still had to give them hints!" - Rabbi Dreffin

"In Vicksburg I had the opportunity to use my great grandparents' Haggadah, published in 1923." - Rabbi Simons

"Seeing a couple in Gulfport at whose wedding I officiated two Decembers prior, and getting to celebrate this holiday with them." - Rabbi Dreffin

"Successfully completing 1,728 miles, 24 cups of Manischewitz, conducting seven seder celebrations, and making it safely home!" - Rabbi Simons

The Rabbinic Department continues offering year-round support and services to communities with no full-time rabbi of their own. Recently, Rabbi Jeremy Simons traveled to Selma, Alabama to officiate the Bar Mitzvah of Sam Schulman at Temple Mishkan Israel.

Although Sam lives in Baltimore, his family is originally from Selma. His Bar Mitzvah was the first held in Selma since 2014—when his older brother Eli was also called to the Torah in their family's hometown. Sam's service began with a welcome from the Mayor of Selma, the Honorable George Patrick Evans, who presented Sam with both a key to the city and an official proclamation declaring March 26 be known as Sam Schulman Day. It was a truly wonderful day, made possible by the warmth and hospitality of the entire Selma community, especially the synagogue members who opened their doors to welcome again the Schulman family and celebrate Sam's emergence into Jewish adulthood.

Are you a Taste of Torah subscriber? Get words of wisdom from our Rabbinic Department weekly by signing up: www.isjl.org/taste-of-torah

Around the Office This Summer

Summer is always a busy time at the ISJL. In addition to the Education Conference and all of our staff on the road, we also feel energized by all the transitions and visitors the warm weather brings! Our new Fellows begin their two-year fellowship, and our summer interns spend three months immersing in Southern and Jewish culture. We also bid farewell to our departing Fellows, all of whom are off to new adventures! Here are some of the faces and updates around the ISJL office this summer.

Welcome, 2016-2018 Education Fellows!

Gabi Cohn just graduated from the Undergraduate Joint Program shared between Columbia University and the Jewish Theological Seminary (JTS) where she earned two Bachelor of Arts degrees: one in Psychology from Columbia, and one in Modern Jewish Studies from JTS. She is really excited to come to work for the ISJL and experience a wide variety of Jewish communities all over the South. She can't wait to get started and share her passion for Judaism with others while helping to strengthen the field of Jewish education as a whole. When not at work, you might find Gabi wandering around town exploring nature and new places. She loves to take in the world around her, and can't wait to explore Mississippi!



Rachel Fraade grew up in Connecticut, but fell in love with the messiness (and food) of the South when she came to Duke University four years ago. She's finishing up an undergraduate degree in Sociology, with minors in History and Religious Studies. In addition to her studies, she works to build interfaith community and action through her roles with both the Jewish Student Union and Voices for Interfaith Action. She is currently finishing up an honors thesis on faith and grassroots activism in North Carolina, which has exposed her to the wide and wonderful world of religious progressivism in the state. Rachel is excited to explore new parts of the South and see the ways that Jewish community is developed in different contexts. Jackson surpassed her expectations in even just a weekend, and she's looking forward to another two years of surprises, connections, and educational work. In her spare time, Rachel can usually be found in coffee shops, bookstores, running paths, or anywhere with dogs. She loves exploring new places - from local businesses to foreign countries - and can't wait for all the new adventures to come.



Shira Muroff originally hails from Los Angeles but spent the past 4 years at the University of California at Davis (near Sacramento) as a Human Development major. She is excited to visit Southern Jewish communities as an Education Fellow and meet people throughout all of them. She has spent a lot of time working at temples and Jewish summer camps and is excited to bring what she loves about Jewish communities into creating new programs. When not working next year, Shira is excited to explore the Mississippi outdoors and have time to cook and read!



Leah Wittenberg is graduating from Tufts University in May with a degree in Judaic Studies and Spanish. Throughout college, she has been actively involved in the Jewish community and most recently served as the Vice President of Spiritual and Religious Life at Tufts Hillel and as the Senior Youth Group Advisor for Temple Aliyah in Needham, Massachusetts. Leah has previously lived on the West Coast, in the Midwest, and on the East Coast, and she can't wait for the opportunity to explore a new part of the country. She is especially excited to gain new perspectives on Judaism and make meaningful contributions to Southern Jewish communities. When Leah isn't having conversations with others about their Jewish identities, you can find her sweating at a spin class, blogging for the Huffington Post, babysitting, reading one of Vince Flynn's novels, and/or singing along to country music.



Community Engagement Fellow

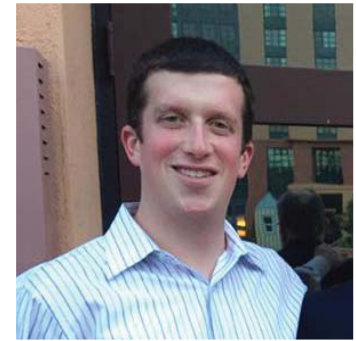
Rachel Savannah Glazer is just like her name—Jewish all around, with the South at the center of it all! Born and raised in Gainesville, GA, she worked at URJ Camp Coleman for four summers while earning her B.S. in Psychology at the University of North Georgia. At UNG, she also worked as a Diplomat for Diversity and can't wait for the opportunity to reach new communities seeking to expand their understanding of social justice. She's also looking forward to guiding students in Mississippi schools through becoming confident readers, compassionate listeners, and leaders in the classroom. Rachel loves performing on stage and hopes that when she asks if there is an improvisational comedy troupe in town, the answer will be, "Yes, and!"



Summer Intern

Rabbinic: Student Rabbi Rob Friedman

Rabbinic Intern Robert (Rob) Friedman was born and raised in Cincinnati, Ohio. He first experienced the South when he attended Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tennessee, and first experienced the Deep South when he was the ISJL Museum Intern in the summer of 2010. After graduating from Vanderbilt, where he studied Jewish Studies and Middle East History, he moved to New York City for a Master's Degree in Hebrew Bible at the Jewish Theological Seminary. He is currently finishing his second year at the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion in Los Angeles, CA. He is incredibly excited to be working again with the ISJL and to experience Southern culture once more!



The 2016 ISJL Education Conference



This year's ISJL Education Conference is taking place in Jackson June 26-28. We are thrilled that our keynote speaker is Rabbi Dr. Michael Shire, the Chief Academic Officer and Dean of the Shoolman Graduate School of Jewish Education at Hebrew College. He was born and raised in the United Kingdom, where he studied Hebrew Literature at University College London; he also staffed URJ camps in the USA and then enrolled for a Master's Degree at Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion in New York. Following that, he swapped coasts and completed a PhD in Jewish Education at HUC-JIR and USC in Los Angeles. His doctoral dissertation grappled with the enhancement of spirituality in adolescents. He met his wife to be at HUC, Rabbi Marcia Plumb, who hails from Houston, making the South a second home for all the family, including Anya aged 17 and Micah aged 14. Rabbi Dr. Shire became the Head of Jewish Education for the Reform Movement in the UK and then Vice-Principal of the London based Leo Baeck College rabbinic school. In 2011, he returned to America to begin his current tenure as Dean and Professor of Jewish Education at Hebrew College, a pluralistic graduate school and seminary in Boston. Dr Shire has written extensively on the spirituality of children and adolescents and he founded the educational methodology called Torah Godly Play. He and his family live in Needham, Massachusetts.



Fellow Farewells



Leah Apothaker

When I first started my Fellowship, I thought I was going to have an adventure full of sweet tea and its natural pairing-- Jewish-themed travel. I've gotten that and so much more: I gained an understanding that there isn't a monolithic "Southern Judaism," I've had the chance to experience incredible hospitality, and I've also learned about 15 different ways to pronounce pecan. What a two years it's been!

My favorite ISJL memories are all about spending time on the road with community members and Fellows. Community members have shown me the best parts of their cities, giving me the opportunity to experience their museums, beaches, college campuses, and even a rodeo! Equally as fun have been the road trips with the best co-workers anyone could hope for. From the Branch Davidian compound in Waco, to Wakulla Springs where they filmed *The Creature from the Black Lagoon*, we've taken advantage of downtime on and in between visits.

When I finish my fellowship, I'm transitioning from Education Fellow to Education Contact as the Director of Congregational Learning at new ISJL Partner, Temple Beth-El in San Antonio, Texas. I'm very excited to be staying in the region!

Bethany Berger

When I first started my ISJL Education Fellowship, I came in with almost no expectations. I arrived in Jackson straight out of college, not knowing anyone and not even really knowing a whole lot about the vast world of Jewish Education. The amount that I have learned in the past two years is incredible. I loved visiting communities like Greenville, Mississippi. At a Purim carnival last year, Benjy Nelkin of Greenville's Hebrew Union Congregation sang a jingle he wrote for the Great Latke Hamentaschen Debate. The best line from the song was "Hamentaschen are delish, they go so well with gefilte fish!" I'm not sure yet what I will be doing next but I am looking for a new job and Southern-and-Jewish options are definitely under consideration!

Abby Klionsky

I thought I knew what I was getting myself into when I began my Fellowship, since I had been an intern in the History Department in 2012. But when I actually moved down and started the Fellowship, there were so many more components than what I had seen during the summer I was here! My favorite memory of my two years as a Fellow was having the very first Shabbat service I ever led as an Education Fellow livestreamed and broadcast (from Shreveport, Louisiana) for the world to see! My grandma got to watch me lead and give the *d'var Torah*. I'm still figuring out what my next adventure will be, but I'm hoping to get back into the world of history and research, doing something that combines those interests with my enthusiasm for making knowledge accessible and available to a broader audience.

Arielle Nissenblatt

When I first started my Fellowship, I didn't understand humidity, the general geography of the south, or the intricacies of the U.S. Interstate Highway System. Now, I've figured out how to deal with hair on humid days, I have been to all 13 states of our region (and can name all 82 counties of Mississippi), and could give you a tutorial of the Interstate System... if you really want me to do so! While working with the religious school of Temple Israel in Paducah, Kentucky, we traveled to Metropolis, Illinois, to run an anti-bullying program at a French and Indian War Reenactment Ceremony. That program and multi-state partnership is the type of innovation in Jewish programming that I learned through the ISJL that I'll never forget! My future career is still TBD, but I'm looking to work for a company or organization that will let me explore my quirky affinity for memorizing geographic and Jewish facts.

Hot Off The Presses: Cool ISJL Summer Program Updates!

Visit the Encyclopedia of Southern Jewish Communities

It's been more than a decade since we launched the online Encyclopedia of Southern Jewish Communities, a tremendous virtual resource documenting the stories of every Southern town that ever had a Jewish presence. This spring, we completed a comprehensive overhaul of the Encyclopedia. Every single entry has been updated with more recent information if available, re-formatted to highlight more stories and unique information, and more!

When you're enjoying some indoor AC time this summer, check out the Encyclopedia, or scroll through on your phone. This project is ongoing, so whenever you spot something that should be added or amended, email information@isjl.org and together we'll keep expanding and enhancing the Encyclopedia of Southern Jewish Communities



Current Performer Opportunities

The ISJL Programming Department is in the midst of vetting a slew of new opportunities. We are so honored that so many performing artists, musicians, scholars, comedians, and more, are reaching out to connect with the ISJL. As we expand our roster of talented presenters, we're also always excited to work with other ISJL departments to spread the word about how our regional approach to bringing cultural programs to Southern communities raises the bar and lowers the barrier to amazing Jewish programming!

One of the best ways that we showcase what the Programming Department has to offer is by bringing one of our Southern States Jewish Programming Series Artist Roster presenters to the ISJL Education Conference. This year, comedian Dave Goldstein will be performing as the entertainment headliner at the conference. He won't just be bringing laughs—he'll also be an ambassador for the quality of cultural programs we make available to all of our communities.

Learn more about our presenters here:

<http://www.isjl.org/southern-states-jewish-programming-series.html>



FAN Club: ISJL Education Fellow Alumni Network (FAN) Brings Together Former Fellows

The ISJL launched our Education Department in 2003 with two Education Fellows. Thirteen years later, we have eight Education Fellows supervised by two full-time Master Educators, serving dozens of communities across thirteen states. The Fellowship itself has become a nationally-recognized opportunity for recent college graduates, providing dynamic, on-the-ground training in Jewish education, communal service, and so much more.

In the thirteen years since its inception, the Education Fellowship has produced 38 “alumni,” former Fellows who spent two immersive years on the road with the ISJL. For the first time ever, thanks to the generosity of Lawrence Magdovitz z”l, we were able to bring together this collection of alumni to begin cultivating an organized network and leverage the brainpower and commitment of these young professionals. All in all, it was an incredible weekend of reconnecting, recalling the impact of the past, and conversing about all the potential impact this group can have together in the future.





FAN: The First Gathering

The first Fellow Network Alumni (FAN) Summit was held in Jackson, Mississippi, February 26-28, 2016. The first day was spent in the ISJL office, and the rest of the reunion's professional development sessions were held in the conference room at the Cabot Lodge hotel and conference facility. We brought in a professional development facilitator, Robin Axelrod. Robin is a veteran of the Jewish communal service world; she is the former director of the Sol S. Drachler Program in Jewish Communal Leadership at the University of Michigan, and currently serves as the Education Director of the Holocaust Museum in metro-Detroit. As a Wexner Fellow alum, she also has deep knowledge of the power and potential of alumni networks.

Of the 38 current alumni, a total of 18 participated in the initial summit, most in-person and a few online; all of the remaining 20 are being individually contacted following the reunion by one of the participants to get a debrief and invite their participation in the planning of the next gathering. Three of the former Fellows brought their children with them; being able to share updates on marriages, families, careers, and more—not only with Fellows who knew one another, but also with those staggered years apart meeting for the first time—was one of the most touching elements of the gathering.

The three-day event included professional development and alumni-network planning with Robin Axelrod; presentations from ISJL staff, including Macy B. Hart and all of the department heads, to bring alumni up-to-speed on current ISJL initiatives and impact; Friday night Shabbat services at Beth Israel Congregation; a Shabbat dinner celebration at the Hart home; a Saturday morning creative minyan led by Rabbi Matt Dreffin and former Education Fellow Alachua Haskins; a participatory program on



Talmud to share an example of one of the new Education Department offerings; and social time to explore Jackson, have dinner together, and informally connect and catch up.

Bringing this group together was inspiring, exciting—and plans are already underway for a 2017 gathering! The FAN members participated in the Challenge by pooling resources to make an initial FAN Giving Circle gift; in the future, we can't wait to see what the goals and achievements of this collective will be.

Upcoming SJHS Conference in Natchez November 4th-6th, 2016

For over 35 years, The Southern Jewish Historical Society (SJHS) has worked to foster scholarship about the experience of southern Jews. Through their annual conference, academic journal, and active grants and awards programs, the society has helped to move southern Jewish history from the margins of the American Jewish narrative into the mainstream. From the early days of the Museum of the Southern Jewish Experience, and today as the ISJL, our organization has always appreciated our long, productive partnership with SJHS.

This fall, we are looking forward to hosting SJHS for their annual conference, as they gather in one of the smallest yet most historic Jewish communities in the region: Natchez, Mississippi.

From a beautiful historic synagogue with museum exhibits on display to a beautiful setting on the Mississippi River, the history and charm of Natchez makes it a perfect location for the SJHS event. For the full conference experience, attendees will gather in Jackson on Thursday, November 3rd. On Friday morning, all participants will board a bus and take a leisurely and educational trip down to Natchez, with tour-guided-conversations along the way.

Stopping first in **Vicksburg**, conference-goers will meet with the remaining members of the **Congregation Anshe Chesed**, visit the town's historic Jewish cemetery, which is on the National Register of Historic Places, and have lunch in the beautifully restored "**B.B. Club**," once the home of the town's thriving Jewish social organization. After lunch, the buses will continue down Highway 61, stopping in the historic town of **Port Gibson**, site of the oldest standing synagogue building in Mississippi, **Gemiluth Chased**.



Upon arrival in **Natchez**, attendees will hear about the establishment and development of the state's oldest Jewish community, while seated under the gorgeous dome of **Temple B'nai Israel**. Friday night services will be led by **ISJL Director of Rabbinic Services Rabbi Jeremy Simons**, and then award-winning reporter and editor **Robin Amer** will give a live performance of her radio story exploring the past traditions and current challenges of the Natchez Jewish community.

All in all, it will be a weekend packed with panels (covering topics such as the impact of disease and natural disasters on southern Jewish communities, the interactions of Jewish congregations and communities with the larger non-Jewish world, southern Jewish memoirs, and more!), Natchez walking tours and antebellum home tours, and socializing.

If you are not currently a member of SJHS and are interested in attending a unique and memorable weekend of programming, you are invited to join SJHS and the ISJL together in Natchez, November 4th-6th, 2016, and become a member of the society.

For more information contact Rachel Myers at rmyers@isjl.org or 601-362-6357



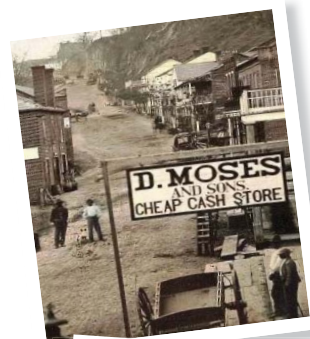
Highlighted SJHS Speaker: Robin Amer



“Growing Up with the Last Jews of Natchez” Robin Amer, Friday Night Keynote Address

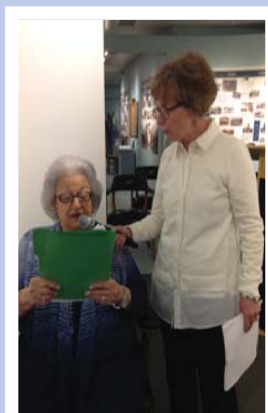
There has been a Jewish community in Natchez, Mississippi for more than 175 years—and Robin’s family has been part of it for 160 of them. But now the number of Jews in Natchez has dwindled to only a handful. Although Robin grew up on the east coast, she made frequent trips to Natchez to see her 98-year-old grandmother and late grandfather, who died in March at age 99. She went back to Natchez to report and produce a story for the James Beard Award-winning Southern Foodways Alliance podcast *Gravy*. In her live performance of the piece, she explores what traditions, culinary and otherwise, might disappear when the community is gone.

Robin Amer is an award-winning reporter and editor based in Chicago. She’s the Deputy Editor for news at the Chicago Reader and the winner of WNYC’s Podcast Accelerator competition. She’s currently piloting her show “The City” with WNYC Studios.



For full program, online registration, travel and lodging information visit
www.isjl.org/sjhs-natchez-program.html

Recent Museum Programs and Donations



Rachel Myers organized the first Yom Hashoah event in Greenwood, Mississippi in partnership with the Museum of the Mississippi Delta. Over one hundred members of the Greenwood community came to participate in an interfaith memorial service, candle lighting ceremony, and survivor testimony by Greenwood community leader, Ilse Goldberg. Mrs. Goldberg shared her story of fleeing Nazi Germany, stay-

ing briefly in Shanghai, China, and ultimately making her home in Memphis and later Greenwood. Local community leaders and clergy participated in the ceremony to signify that only together as a community can we reflect on the need for respect of all peoples, and work to promote human dignity and confront hate whenever and wherever it occurs.



Congregants of Beth Israel in El Dorado, Arkansas recently donated their 1955 building to a local congregation, and donated artifacts from their sanctuary to the Museum of the Southern Jewish Experience. Janey and Richard Pillsbury donated the historic Torah, *ner tamid*, standing menorahs and plaques. The Judaica will be preserved and possibly replanted within active congregations in our region to honor the legacy of Jewish life in El Dorado. To learn more about the El Dorado Jewish community, visit the Encyclopedia page: www.isjl.org/arkansas-el-dorado-encyclopedia.html



Snapshots from the Road



1



2

1. HATTIESBURG, MISSISSIPPI

Joel Hoffman gives a lecture at the University of Southern Mississippi to promote his new book "The Bible Doesn't Say That."

2. NEW ORLEANS, LOUISIANA

Education Fellow Elias Chajet led Shabbat services for residents at Lambeth House Retirement Home.

3. HOUSTON, TEXAS

Education Fellow Leah Apothaker leads students in a song session during her visit to Congregation Beth Israel.

4. FAYETTEVILLE, GEORGIA

Education Fellow Becca Rosenthal competes in the first annual Passover Golf Cart Scavenger Hunt at Congregation B'nai Israel.



3



4



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6

5. SHREVEPORT, LOUISIANA

Education Fellow Abby Klionsky and students from B'nai Zion pose with their *b'tzelem elohim* self portraits.

6. JACKSON, MISSISSIPPI

Rachel Myers and students from Yale University on their Alternative Spring Break trip spent the morning talking about college with young scholars at Midtown Public.

7. FORT MILL, SOUTH CAROLINA

Education Fellow Arielle Nissenblatt and students made groggers for the Temple Solel Purim celebration.



7

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In these CIRCA pages, you can see the impact our education, history, museum, cultural, community engagement and rabbinic programs have on thousands of people just like you. With deep appreciation, the Goldring/Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life extends thanks to everyone who made a contribution or pledge from January 1-April 25, 2016 to enable our important work.

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