

SHALOM *y'all*

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



2020: A YEAR OF VISION

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TWENTY YEARS OF SOUTHERN JEWISH LIFE

The Goldring/Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life (ISJL) opened its doors on February 13, 2000. This year marks our twentieth anniversary.

There are so many wonderful milestones, memories, and meaningful partnerships to look back on—but in this issue, we're looking forward. (Don't worry, we promise some nostalgic content over the course of this year, too.) We're calling 2020 our Year of Vision, and we're inviting all of you to participate in envisioning the future of southern Jewish life.

In the year leading up to 2020, our staff conducted Listening Tours in each of the thirteen states we serve. It was important to us to hear directly from the communities in our region about current and emerging needs. We're wrapping the tour soon, and will then compile the insights and trends emerging from the conversations, identifying common threads and sharing some of the initial results with our supporters and community partners.

As a follow-up to the Listening Tour, we will also be continuing to gather input through a Survey of Southern Jewish Life. If you want to be included in the email when the survey is distributed, drop us a line at information@isjl.org and we'll be sure you're on the email list! The survey link will also be available on the main page of our website, www.isjl.org, in March.

The staff and board of the ISJL will also be immersing ourselves in a Beyond 2020 Strategic Planning process, mapping out our goals for our next several years of service... a process which will be directly influenced and informed by the results of the Listening Tour and survey.

We're doing all this to ensure that when it comes to envisioning the future of southern Jewish life, we're all working together. The future of the ISJL will not be determined simply by looking inward as an organization—but by looking outward, listening, and continually inviting all of our partners to share their visions for vibrant Jewish life in the South.

We hope you'll enjoy reading about some of the department-by-department hopes and dreams for the future—and keep sharing your own hopes, dreams, and feedback with us!

L'shalom,
The Board & Staff of the ISJL



FROM THE CEO



Michele Schipper
CEO

IN MANY WAYS, THE GOLDRING/Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life (ISJL) is something no one saw coming. Twenty years ago, who would have guessed that a dynamic, trans-denominational Jewish organization would be serving more than a hundred communities, training the next generation of Jewish leaders, re-shaping how we think about communal programming... and doing it all from a headquarters in Jackson, Mississippi?

I'm proud that over the years, our organization has always partnered with visionaries who supported our work even when it was something new and unexpected. I'm thankful for those who have continued to partner with us, ensuring that the ISJL is rooted and secure, looking ahead to many more years of serving southern Jewish communities.

So what happens next for the organization no one saw coming?

Over the years of doing the communal work of the ISJL, I have come to believe all the more deeply that the strongest vision is

a shared vision. As we begin 2020, the ISJL's Year of Vision, we invite you to share your thoughts on the ISJL's work, now and down the road, through a survey available on our website throughout March. Our team is beginning the process of a new round of strategic planning, to

“OVER THE YEARS OF DOING THE COMMUNAL WORK OF THE ISJL, I HAVE COME TO BELIEVE ALL THE MORE DEEPLY THAT THE STRONGEST VISION IS A SHARED VISION.”

envision the decade ahead. We have a lot of ideas and excitement already, within the board and staff; we've been in touch with community partners and conducting our Listening Tours; but there is room for more vision. More voices. More excitement.

I encourage you to share your thoughts, and hope you will also deepen your commitment to the

ISJL by considering becoming a monthly donor to support the ongoing work of the organization. In this issue, you can also learn more about including the ISJL in your legacy giving plans, and you'll meet our new Director of Development, Risa Herzog, who is excited to have conversations with you about your giving goals.

Before closing out my message, I also want to offer my heartfelt thanks to Rachel Reagler Schulman, who recently concluded her term as the ISJL's Board Chair. Rachel saw the ISJL through these past few years of transition and impact with grace, commitment, and generous leadership. I also want to welcome Jay Hesdorffer, our newly-installed chair. Jay's energy and attention to detail will be crucial in continuing to advance the ISJL's mission in the years ahead.

The vibrancy of the ISJL, twenty years into its existence, is due to the vision of our leaders, our partners, and our supporters. The ISJL at thirty will continue to be shaped by your contributions. Thank you!

L'shalom,

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

FROM THE BOARD CHAIR



Jay Hesdorffer
ISJL Board Chair

AS WE WELCOME 2020, we have much to celebrate. This is the 20th year of the Goldring/Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life (ISJL). As we acknowledge our impressive history, we simultaneously kick off our “Year of Vision.”

In this spirit, I asked each of our department heads to share their visions for the future. Taking it a step further, I urged them to dream big, as if they had a magic wand and could achieve their ultimate visions. I believe their answers will make you proud — as the ISJL’s new board chair, they certainly inspired me.

Dave Miller, ISJL’s Director of Community Engagement, would love to expand our footprint and leverage our work by training other organizations to provide our programs.

Nora Katz, Director of Heritage & Interpretation, wants to tell the stories of Jews in the South via a podcast.

Rabbi Matt Dreffin, our Director of Education, sees our Fellowship program, which has trained more than 50 Fellows, as a premier program to be used before entering rabbinical or cantorial school, and a model of immersive service-

learning that prepares young professionals for any career they choose to pursue.

That’s just a taste of the clear vision and dedicated leadership guiding the work of the ISJL. Throughout the pages of this issue, you’ll hear more about the vision of our staff and their impact on our program partners. Those program partners are indeed critical to our vision for the future. Through our Listening Tours this past year, our

“I SEE US EXPANDING OUR REACH BY ATTRACTING MORE SUPPORT AND ADVOCACY FROM ACROSS THE U.S., PARTICULARLY FROM FOLKS WITH TIES TO THE SOUTH.”

program partners were also able to weigh in on the needs, hopes, fears, and dreams of Jewish life in the South—and we’ll keep listening to what our partners have to say.

My vision for the ISJL board is simple. I see us expanding our reach by attracting more support and advocacy from across the U.S., particularly from folks with ties to the South. I’m proud of our board’s commitment and selfless investment of intellectual capital.

I hope to continue to create opportunities where all of our board members’ participation is driven by their personal passions.

The ISJL has a unique role. We are an anchor for southern Jewish communities regardless of size, and we’re a source of empowerment for the broader communities we serve. Our Jewish Education program serves approximately 4,000 students across the South, providing curriculum, Fellow visits, training and connectivity for teachers, and more. Our Community Engagement programs teach families to read and kids to mediate conflicts. Our History Department has a one-of-a-kind Encyclopedia of Southern Jewish Communities which is digital and freely available (check out our website if you haven’t seen it yet). Our Rabbinical Services department provides rabbinical support to communities too small to have their own full-time clergy in place. Our Heritage & Interpretation department gives people meaningful, hands-on experiences with southern Jewish stories past and present. And our Cultural Programming brings Jewish theatre, music, and artists to all corners of 13 southern states.

We have an amazing story at the ISJL; my dream is for more people to hear the story, and add their voices and vision to it.

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

EDUCATION

REFLECTING ON THE FUTURE

BY RABBI MATT DREFFIN, MAJE
DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION



THE HEBREW WORD FOR glasses, *mish'kafayim*, and the Hebrew word for binoculars, *mish'kefet*, have the same root. The root, *shin-kuf-fay*, means to “reflect,” “indicate,” or “show (the way).” In other words, we need to reflect on what we have done so far if we truly want to visualize where we would like to go in the future.

In the ISJL's education division, we started with two Education Fellows serving a handful of congregations back in the summer of 2003. In a little over a decade and a half, we've expanded into 13 states and over 60 religious schools. We grew the curriculum and expanded our offerings, solidifying our commitment to lifelong learning by recently making the move to have our education program include Adult Education congregation partners.

That's a big-picture glance back at what we've done. Now let's use our binoculars to look forward.

How do we continue to stay relevant in an ever-shifting educational landscape? More often than not, inquiries from potential new partner communities are specifically about our curriculum. As we continue to overhaul it piece by piece, we will also need to explore new ways in which we can use that curriculum. More and more schools are looking to upend their “traditional” models of religious school, and we want to support every congregation with our resources and talent. We will need to continue to update our current curriculum, so it evolves with the best practices in education and the changing needs of our constituents.

What does that look like? It looks like incorporating more new media.



Designing additional “add-ons,” including in-person experiences. Having constant conversations around content. Those are some of the ways we'll continue keeping our program dynamic.

One of the unique aspects of our program is the relationship-building that happens between Fellows and their communities. It's one of the highlights of the Fellowship for most Fellows—traveling, meeting new people, experiencing different styles of worship, and autonomously implementing creative and experimental learning. Some of our congregations have expressed a desire to look at different ways in which they can use their Fellow. We've looked at alternative days for visits, and alternatives to the usual pattern of three visits per year.

Related to that personal connection, we want to make the ISJL Education Program the premiere Jewish pre-professional program for those seeking to become rabbis, educators, cantors, and non-profit leaders. That starts with continuing to recruit the

best and brightest to take on our fellowships. To that end, in a more competitive marketplace we're exploring partnerships with various institutions to send candidates our way to increase and continually improve our Fellow applicant pool. We believe we can have the best training ground for candidates who are thinking of spending their lives working in the Jewish field. Every Fellow sent our way will, two years later, be an emerging professional heading on to their next great adventure, inspired by their immersive experiences hitting the road for the ISJL.

We also want to become more sustainable, more supported, and more connected to those who have worked with us, past and present. We're looking forward to convening our Fellow Alumni Network (FAN) group again soon, and deepening our relationships with everyone who interacts with our education team.

How do you see yourself interacting with the ISJL's education team? Drop us an email—we'd love to hear from you.

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

FELLOW ALUMNI NETWORK

MEET MISSY: THE NEW FAN CHAIR!

THE ISJL FELLOW ALUMNI NETWORK (FAN) IS A GROUP OF INSPIRING young professionals whose careers and studies span a variety of fields, but all have one thing in common: they spent two immersive years as ISJL Education or Community Engagement Fellows! We're excited that the new Chair of the FAN group is 2012–2014 ISJL Education Fellow Missy Goldstein Gleisser, and we were thrilled to chat with Missy about her ISJL memories, what she's up to now, and her vision for FAN in 2020 and beyond.



Missy with her husband Rob and their dog Gertie

Shalom Y'all: So, Missy—where has life taken you, post-ISJL-Fellowship?

Missy: After finishing my

fellowship, I began my studies at Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion (HUC-JIR). I completed the Joint Master's program, earning an M.A. in Jewish Education and an M.A. in Jewish Nonprofit Management. During my year in Israel, I also met my now-husband, who is currently finishing his final year of rabbinical school! These days, I'm the Esther and Maurice Becker Networking and Mentoring Coordinator (YAD Engagement Officer) at the Jewish Federation of Cincinnati. I meet with young adults who are new to the city, moving back to Cincinnati, or newly looking to get involved here, to tell them all that our Jewish community has to offer. I plan events where everyone can gather and meet new people, and I connect young adults

to one another. I love being able to help young adults find community in a new and unfamiliar city and make it feel more like home.

SY: What are some of your favorite memories from your time as an ISJL Fellow?

M: My favorite memories are from incredible road trips with fellow Fellows. It's a great way to get to know what people like and what they do for fun. I geocached with Elaine Barenblat, sang Taylor Swift at the top of my lungs with Alachua Nazarenko, listened to NPR with Abby Klionsky, visited college campuses with Leah Apothaker and took lots of pictures with state signs. I also loved all of our brainstorming to create fun and innovative programs for our communities. Sometimes we would start with our worst and

Monthly gifts to the ISJL are an easy way to make a meaningful impact.



Join the Chai Club today and help us support southern Jewish communities!

Visit www.isjl.org/donate to learn more.



From left, Missy with her Fellow cohort... now, and then!; JFNA General Assembly selfie with Amanda Abrams; First Day as Second Year Fellows



craziest ideas and sometimes an amazing program would come from it. Other times, it got the bad ideas out of our system to make way for great ones. It's a very useful skill to be able to generate good and bad ideas, identify which are which, and go with the best ones!

SY: What's your vision for FAN in 2020 and beyond?

M: My vision for the Fellow Alumni Network is to keep this fantastic group of former Fellows connected to the work and mission of the ISJL and to link us to one another. The ISJL Fellowships are such unique experiences and there's a strong connection to those who

have come before and after us, even if we've never met. I've run programs that they've written, and I'm sure someone after me used something that I created. If I'm at a conference and there's a Fellow who I've never met who's also there, I make sure to find them, introduce myself, and get a picture with them (in a non-creepy way, of course). Our FAN board implemented a mentoring program to connect with current and recently "graduated" Fellows and help them on their future paths. And we share and rejoice in each other's *simchas* (celebrations), like weddings, graduations, babies, and more! We also know all the hard work that the

ISJL team puts in everyday to make sure that Judaism is accessible across the South and that we're giving back to our local communities. We've done the work, and now I want to make sure that FAN is helping sustain that work. I'm looking forward to representing FAN on the ISJL Board of Directors, planning for an in-person FAN gathering in the not-too-distant future, and hearing what other FAN members are hoping our group will do!

SY: Finally... what's your current favorite Jewish pop culture offering?

M: I recently binged *The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel*, and it was wonderful!

SURVEYING SOUTHERN JEWISH LIFE

WHAT DO YOU SEE? WHAT DO YOU THINK?

We want to hear from you — take the survey on southern Jewish life!

Available on our website throughout the month of March: www.isjl.org.

Please take the survey and share your thoughts — we want to envision the future with you.

Want to get an email alert when the survey goes live? Email information@isjl.org and ask to be added to the email list.

ZADECK TAP MENTORS

THE ISJL IS HONORED and humbled to share the news of a recent gift from the Zadeck family of Shreveport, Louisiana. They are endowing a program to support the ISJL's Talk About the Problems (TAP) Peer Mediation Program, funding annual training for the mentors who guide the student mediators. The Zadeck TAP Mentors will embody the family's values of guiding, advising, and supporting people.

Donald and Frances Zadeck have long committed themselves to bettering their world, and inspired their children to do the same. Theirs is a unique, engaging southern Jewish story: Donald came to Louisiana at the age of ten, when his family in St. Louis sent him there during the Great Depression to live with his aunt. In Shreveport, Donald met Frances Katzenstein—a Shreveport native whose family had emigrated from Hungary and Germany in the 1880s.

Donald and Frances always believed in supporting their community not only through philanthropy, but also through direct service and guidance. Says their son Kenneth, a member of the ISJL's Board of Directors: "My father is an extremely generous person; not just with money, but with his time and expertise. He was



respected for his business ethics and practices, all that he gave to the local community and to his family. My mother, too, always gave back; she became interested in dyslexia, volunteered at a local public school, served as Secretary of the Council of Jewish Women at B'nai Zion Temple, was a member of the Shreveport Opera Board and was a member of the Board of the Strand Theater."

The Zadecks' zest for everything included enjoying golf, opera, and hunting. They were active on all fronts, and believed in making things better at a local level. Over the years, they have supported the causes they cared about so deeply, from their local synagogue to large-scale contributions to health and welfare. Donald served as Chair of the Foundation for Louisiana State University's Medical School for twelve years, and in that time took it from a \$500,000 endowment

to an endowment of \$40 million.

With their children and grandchildren, the Zadecks are now supporting an initiative that embodies their own Jewish values, civic engagement, and commitment to helping children. Their son Kenneth works with the ISJL and other organizations; their daughter Julie is an active volunteer in the community and continues the tradition of giving of her time, as well as raising funds for many causes. The family legacy of philanthropy and hands-on volunteering shapes every generation.

"Whenever my parents were 'tapped' to help, they helped," says Kenneth. "We try to do the same. So the mentors for the TAP program bearing the Zadeck family name is particularly fitting."

TAP is a peer mediation program making a difference in schools throughout the South. Students are trained as mediators, then work in pairs to assist their peers who are in conflict reach meaningful, mutually agreeable resolutions—stopping conflicts before they escalate to violence, detention, or suspension. TAP empowers students to strengthen their schools by building communication and leadership skills that will last a lifetime and bolster an environment that is ideal for teaching and learning. The Zadeck TAP Mentors will guide, advise, and support students as they improve their communities—just as the Zadeck family continues to guide, advise, and support communities as they work to better the world.

**If your family is interested in endowing a program or position at the ISJL, email development@isjl.org.
Thank you!**



THE ISJL 2020 EDUCATION CONFERENCE

will be in

Jackson, Mississippi

June 28–30

**Early bird
registration is
open now and
runs through
April 15 –
sign up now
to save!**

WWW.ISJL.ORG/REGISTER-FOR-THE-CONFERENCE

DEVELOPMENT

INTRODUCING RISA KLEIN HERZOG, ISJL DIRECTOR OF DEVELOPMENT



THE ISJL IS DELIGHTED TO welcome our new Director of Development, Risa Klein Herzog. Risa hails from Nashville, Tennessee, and will remain there working remotely for the ISJL and traveling frequently on the organization's behalf.

Risa brings thirty years of development experience to the team, having worked for twenty-two years at the Jewish Federation of Nashville and Middle Tennessee, and eight years in the secular nonprofit world at the Cystic Fibrosis Foundation and the Tennessee Performing Arts Center.

An empty nester now, Risa is the proud mother of two daughters. She and her husband Drew Herzog are active in the Nashville community, and Risa is excited for this new southern Jewish professional opportunity.

"I've kept an eye on the ISJL as it developed over the years," says Risa. "My hometown, Nashville, is a larger southern Jewish community, and my husband, Drew, grew up in Meridian, Mississippi. So I've long known of the importance the ISJL has and how it impacts so many southern Jewish communities, never forgetting the smaller and under-served communities like Meridian while also partnering with larger communities like Nashville. I'm honored to join the ISJL at such an important time in the organization's history, and I'm so excited to connect with communities and help take the ISJL to the next level."

As Risa connects with our communities and hits the road for the ISJL, she's looking forward to meeting many of you. Don't hesitate to reach out if you would like to schedule a conversation or visit!

SAVE THE DATE

JUNE
28–30
2020

To get in touch with Risa, email rherzog@isjl.org.



MEET THE DONOR: MAX SCHULMAN



THE ISJL IS THRILLED to periodically feature some of our supporters, and get insights from them into why they give and what drives their passion to support our communities. Here are some inspiring insights from one of our younger donors, Max Schulman, of Charlotte, North Carolina.

Shalom Y'all: Max, what's your connection to the ISJL?

Max: I am extremely proud to say that I am the son of former ISJL Board Chair, Rachel Reagler Schulman. My mother was born and raised in Wynne, Arkansas, where being Jewish was not easy. Traveling to synagogue, youth group events, and Jacobs Camp was something she and her family had to do to connect with Jewish life. But I think I can speak for her when I say she wouldn't change a thing about the time and commitment required to form and strengthen those Jewish bonds. Those experiences led her to the ISJL.

But the question was, what is *my* connection to the ISJL.

After all, although my mother is from Arkansas, I was raised in suburban Chicago. When I was 13, I had multiple Bar/Bat Mitzvah celebrations to attend every weekend. My synagogue was 15 minutes away from my house and we passed three other synagogues on the way to ours. So where is the connection? I would say the connection is two-pronged: I have a personal southern connection, and I'm proudly Jewish. Very recently, those prongs connected—in my support of the ISJL, and my recent relocation to Charlotte, North Carolina.

But even before living in the South, my connections here were strong. We came to Arkansas multiple times a year to visit my Mum and Pop (grandparents), my biggest fans and inspirations. To this day, I am a die-hard Arkansas Razorbacks fan. I have a hog on my keychain at all times. And of course, being Jewish certainly makes up a big piece of who I am and I am proud of that. I was fortunate that growing up, I had a strong Jewish foundation. I want to help others access Jewish life, too.

SY: Why did you decide to donate to the organization?

M: I have witnessed first-hand the work the ISJL does in the communities they serve. Visiting Hot Springs frequently, I was able to sit in on the Sunday School that my cousins participated in and that my uncle taught. Allowing our children to establish Jewish connections is how we keep our wonderful traditions and heritage thriving. The mission and the results produced by this powerful organization are just amazing. The core values and beliefs are displayed at all times

which drives successful outputs.

However, there's another important reason I give: the people of the ISJL. With my mother being the Chair of the Board, I was fortunate enough to meet her fellow Board members and the executives of the organization multiple times. Immediately, I knew this organization was in good hands. Being an auditor at KPMG, I know that "tone at the top" is extremely important in the business world. If you cannot trust the leaders and decision makers of an organization, you really have a big problem. The leaders and decision makers of the ISJL are the reason I continue to give. The amount of time, effort, and hard work that goes into this organization is truly inspirational.

I think it's safe to say that I am not a top donor of the ISJL. Hopefully one day I can be! But their CEO Michele Schipper makes me feel like one every time I get my handwritten personal note thanking me for my donation. Everyone is treated with the utmost respect and makes you feel like family. That is what the ISJL is about.

SY: How did you decide to give?

M: Being an employee at KPMG where giving back is in our DNA, I don't think twice about donating to my favorite causes. Every year during the holiday season KPMG sends out an email promoting KPMGiving where the firm facilitates donating to any organization I want.

The ISJL is the first organization I donate to, and knowing that my employer contributes as well is a huge motivation driving my support.

I want to stress that donating comes in all forms and sizes. It is imperative that our society has the notion of giving back to others and helping others. Giving back does not have to be a big check. It can be donating your time, it can be simply promoting a cause, it can be participating in a run or walk for a cause, and in 2020 it can even be sharing something on social media. Anything can make a difference. How do you want to leave your legacy and how do you want to be remembered? I want to be remembered for being kind, honest, loving, and a person people can rely on. Donating and helping others gets me closer to my goal.

SY: Finally, just for fun... what's your favorite Jewish food?

Very tough question. If you give me a spoon and a tub of chopped liver, I am a very happy man. But I know that's gross, so let's all just pretend that I said "noodle kugel."



**We're so grateful to Max for his enthusiastic support of the ISJL and for sharing his donor story!
If you would like to share your donor story, or learn more about contributing to the ISJL,
email development@isjl.org.**



GET READY FOR THE PASSOVER PILGRIMAGE!

Taking place April 8–15 in towns across the South, the Passover Pilgrimage brings seder celebrations to communities, brings neighbors together, and brings joy to all.

Watch our social media for maps and updates as we prepare for the eleventh annual #ISJLPassoverPilgrimage

RABBINICAL



CAN YOU SEE YOURSELF IN A SMALL SOUTHERN TOWN?

THERE'S ONE DEPARTMENT at the ISJL with a unique vision. While the rest of our organization serves communities of all sizes, the Rabbinical Services department maintains a singular mandate: to serve the smallest of southern Jewish communities, those with no full-time clergy of their own. Our vision is to keep engaging in this sacred work, with ever-deepening commitment.

One of the early trends that has emerged in the Listening Tour conversations is a growing concern in today's small-to-midsize communities that their numbers will dwindle, and they will find themselves in need of Jewish services and support. They fear being unable to fill their building, to hire a

rabbi, to maintain the community that means so much to them.

This has long been a worry with which small congregations in our region have struggled; and it is the niche our Rabbinical Services Department will continue to address.

This department offers video-conferenced marital counseling, conversion studies, and b'nei mitzvah preparation; clergy traveling directly to small towns for holiday, Shabbat worship, and lifecycle events; weekly Taste of Torah emails; and so much more. We're committed to meeting the needs of our smallest southern Jewish communities... and we're not going anywhere. We'll keep showing up and demonstrating our belief that anywhere a Jewish person

lives, they deserve the same Judaic support and sense of community as anyone living anywhere else.

To that end, we invite you to envision a few things with us.

First, consider our Passover Pilgrimage, which for a dozen years now has brought seder celebrations to communities across the South. Is there a Pilgrimage stop near you, or near folks you know? When our map goes live on our website and on social media shortly, we urge you to check it out. These celebrations, attended by a diverse cross-section of every town in which they take place, truly exemplify the best of southern Jewish life in fellowship with our neighbors. If you can see the Pilgrimage taking place in your town, reach out and let us know!

Second, if you know of rabbis who have recently retired, are on sabbatical, or may have some flexibility in their schedule—please tell them about our Rabbis on the Road program! We love coordinating opportunities for rabbis and cantors, including those from outside our region, to spend a Shabbat, a weekend, or a more extended time visiting our small communities. The experience is enriching for the visiting clergy as well as the local congregants, and is a meaningful way to connect.

Finally, if you can imagine a way that Jewish life can be enhanced through the work of our department—dream big, and share your dreams with us! Programs like the Linda Pinkus Memorial Labyrinth, a portable maze with accompanying program, and our Taste of Torah recipe-and-Torah-portion book sponsored by the Bear Family Foundation, both came from supporters with vision for meaningful Judaic outreach. We'd love to hear from you!

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



HISTORY

THE FUTURE OF HISTORY AT THE ISJL

BY DR. JOSH PARSHALL
ISJL DIRECTOR OF
HISTORY

HISTORY IS NEVER COMPLETE—nor is the work of curating, parsing, and sharing historic documents and insights. That’s certainly true of the work of the ISJL History Department.

In 2019, the ISJL’s online Encyclopedia of Southern Jewish Communities reached 300 entries in 13 states. With the addition of our Florida section, the local histories are, in a sense, complete. We know, however, that the Encyclopedia will require regular updates and revisions as communities develop and change, and as new information becomes available.

We can also improve the Encyclopedia by paying more attention to diversity. Where southern Jewish histories overlap,

as they often do, with the histories of indigenous nations, African Americans, and other minority or marginalized groups, we have to address those interactions sensitively as well as accurately. We have already begun to do so in our newest entries and with small revisions to older essays. At times, this may obligate us to tell challenging stories about the realities of history in our region and within our communities. Our vision is to provide an honest and rigorous accounting of Jewish history in the region.

As an example, we received an email a few years ago from Adam Lewis, son of one of the ISJL’s board members, Morris Lewis. Adam had uncovered an error in our history of



Want to learn more about southern Jewish history? Email history@isjl.org.



Ralph Franco (top)
and Albert Capp (bottom)

Jewish life in Lexington, Mississippi. We had written that Adam's ancestor Jacob Sontheimer owned land near Lexington prior to the Civil War, but that he had farmed it without using slave labor. Lewis had conducted his own research and produced evidence that Sontheimer had in fact enslaved more than a dozen African Americans during that period. Based on the new information and after some additional research, we changed the Lexington page to provide a more accurate history. In the coming years, we will continue to address inaccuracies and omissions such as this.

We also find diversity within southern Jewish communities with regard to race, gender and sexuality, language, place of

origin, religious practice, and so on. Jewish scholars and activists have become increasingly aware of how Ashkenazi culture often serves as the default in American Jewish culture and history. While Ashkenazi Jews (migrants from Central and Eastern Europe and their descendants) have made up the majority of southern Jews since the mid-19th century, Sephardic and Mizrahi Jews do live in the South and have formed their own congregations in the larger cities. Last summer, History and Heritage intern Mimi Brown, a graduate student at Vanderbilt University with an interest in Sephardic-American history, reviewed our Montgomery entry, and felt that we had not provided enough information on

Etz Ahayem, the city's historical Sephardic congregation. As part of her summer work, she not only revised our Montgomery entry but also added a short video that features archival oral history interviews with congregants Albert Capp and Ralph Franco. In it, Capp and Franco discuss some of the *minhagim* (customs) that differentiated Etz Ahayem from other congregations.

As we continue to revise and update the Encyclopedia of Southern Jewish Communities in coming years, we look forward to providing accurate and complex histories, sharing interesting and unexpected Jewish experiences, and keeping the encyclopedia up-to-date with the changing landscape of the Jewish South.



HERITAGE & INTERPRETATION

2020

**A YEAR
OF STORIES**

BY NORA KATZ

DIRECTOR OF HERITAGE & INTERPRETATION



.....

FOR THE HERITAGE AND INTERPRETATION Department, 2020 will be a year of stories. The department's mission has always been to interpret and share the rich legacy of Jewish life in the American South, and I've had the opportunity to tell that story through our Southern Jewish Heritage Tour program, our Immigration Traveling Trunk program, and our work on historic preservation projects, especially at Temple B'nai Israel in Natchez, Mississippi.

In 2019, I had the pleasure of traveling across our region exploring and telling the stories of southern Jews, and thinking about the ways in which southern Jewish history intersects with American history and the themes of memory, identity, migration, and community. The story of southern Jewish life is the story of American Jewry, southern culture, and American immigration.

In January 2019, I heard the transcendent sounds of Broadway, opera, and art songs ring out in the historic sanctuary of Temple B'nai Israel in Natchez at the first

annual Cabaret Under the Dome. In February, I spent a few days with Temple Emeth of New Jersey following in the footsteps of Civil Rights heroes in Alabama. In April, we brought diverse communities together at the Mississippi Freedom Seder at the Mississippi Civil Rights Museum and the Museum of Mississippi History. In May, we welcomed our amazing History and Heritage Interns, who spent the summer developing and cataloguing the ISJL Institutional History Archive.

There was no slowdown over



Opposite page: The garden at the Philbrook Museum in Tulsa. Above, from top: The Aiken Rhett House in Charleston, where visitors can begin to understand the striking differences between the lives of enslaved people and enslavers; Nora with History and Heritage Interns Rose and Mimi exploring the ISJL Institutional History Archive; Nora teaching visitors how to tie tzitzit at the Mississippi Museum of Art's Family Day in November.

From top: mural of Woody Guthrie outside of the Woody Guthrie Center in Tulsa; Mississippi Department of Archives and History Director Katie Blount welcomes Mississippi Freedom Seder participants; making the pilgrimage across the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma.



the summer: June saw our annual Education Conference, where I had the pleasure of welcoming conference participants to Tougaloo College to consider the complex legacy of Jews in the Civil Rights Movement, and to explore the important community-building work of Dr. Ernst Borinski. In July, our interns and I traveled to the Mississippi Delta to visit the sites painstakingly preserved and truthfully interpreted by the Emmett Till Memory Project. The Southern Jewish Historical Society Conference took place in Charlottesville, Virginia, in October, which gave us the opportunity to hear from the city's Jewish community about the aftermath of the white supremacist violence in the city in August 2017.

The fall proved busy, too. In November, I traveled to Charleston, South Carolina, for a Listening Tour stop, and got to experience firsthand the historic city that was once home to the largest Jewish community in the United States. In

December, I drove through Arkansas and Oklahoma for Listening Tour stops in Tulsa and Bentonville, and had the opportunity to experience incredible works of art, stunning landscapes, and themes of resilience and change in the histories of the Trail of Tears and the Dust Bowl.

These experiences across our region have me thinking: how do we most effectively tell and share these stories, knowing that many people in our country might not have the opportunity to take road trips through Arkansas or spend time with congregations in Virginia, Alabama, Mississippi, and Oklahoma? How does southern Jewish history intersect with the institution of slavery, the Civil War, Native American history, the Civil Rights Movement, southern foodways, architecture and design, political and economic history, and environmental history? How do we explore the complexities and joys of southern Jewish life in a way that is accessible, meaningful, and engaging?

There's a lot on the horizon for 2020 in the Heritage and Interpretation Department, addressing all of the above: more Southern Jewish Heritage Tours than ever before, a new and improved Traveling Trunk available in all thirteen states in our region, internship opportunities for college students with interest in public history, even more excellent programming at Temple B'nai Israel, and even more projects we have yet to announce... including, perhaps, a podcast.

Stay tuned—these are stories you won't want to miss.

To learn more about the work of the ISJL's Heritage & Interpretation department, email heritage@isjl.org.



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COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

ENVISIONING A BETTER WORLD – AND WORKING FOR THAT WORLD!

BY DAVE MILLER

DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITY
ENGAGEMENT

ELEVEN YEARS AGO, MALKIE Schwartz became the ISJL's first Director of Community Engagement. Over her tenure and mine, we have worked to create a department that meets two big goals. First, we aim to define what Jewish social justice is and provide opportunities for Jews in the South to learn about and engage with these core concepts in a creative and meaningful way. Second, we establish secular programming that reflects our values and meets the needs of the community.

These two goals led to the creation of ASK (Act, Share, Keep), TAP (Talk About the Problems), Our Reading Family, and the Literacy Achievement Bonanza (LAB).

As the ISJL celebrates its 20th anniversary, the Community Engagement Department wants to set two resolutions for 2020:

1. Reach all 13 states in the region with our ASK and TAP programs

2. Empower more communities to locally adopt and implement the Our Reading Family program.

So which of these resolutions can you help us meet? That all depends on your vision for the years ahead!

Do you want to learn about Jews and baseball, infuse *chesed* (kindness) into your family's daily life, increase your resiliency, bring



together multiple generations, or reflect on how we can all be a blessing? If so, ASK is the program for you. With over two dozen different ninety-minute modules, the content is appropriate for congregations, religious schools, interfaith groups, JCCs, Federations, camps, retirement communities and more. And of course, since this is the ISJL, you won't find any lectures here; all the modules are interactive, creative, engaging, and fun.

Conflict is part of life, but we have created the TAP Workshops to help any person or organization learn how to approach it constructively. Similarly to the ASK modules, these too are ninety minutes and highly interactive. Some of our topics for teenagers and adults include emotional advocacy, understanding conflict, communication and conflict, and managing conflict. For children, we have the shorter Keep it Cool workshop. During our time together we explore how to express one's feelings and successfully manage conflict in day-to-day life.

Lastly, we all know that literacy is an essential component of a successful career and life. In a time

when parents are busier than ever, it is increasingly difficult for them to learn with their children. Our Reading Family helps people of all ages engage with literacy. The six-week program brings families together and engages them in a variety of fun literacy activities. Children have the opportunity to reinforce critical skills while parents can learn with them as well as participate in their own specially-designed workshops. Here's the best part: we can train you to provide this program in your community. No need to reinvent the wheel; we have created everything for you. All you need to do is attend our Facilitator Training, and we will support you as you implement the program.

We know that in almost every community, money is tight and time is short. Therefore, all of our programs are incredibly cost-efficient and accessible. You can even attend the Our Reading Family Facilitator Training at the Education Conference this summer. Together we can deepen our relationship with Jewish values, positively impact our communities, and make 2020 our best year yet!

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



**BECAUSE
I BELIEVE**

**IN THE
FUTURE OF
SOUTHERN
JEWISH LIFE**

LEGACY is more than what we LEAVE BEHIND.

It's what we SEND AHEAD to those we love.

It's how we IMPACT THE FUTURE, starting today.

What is a "legacy gift" or "planned giving"?

A planned gift is a charitable gift that you decide now to make at some time in the future as part of your estate planning. A planned gift can benefit you and loved ones that you name. At the same time, it stands as a lasting reminder to your children and succeeding generations of the values and charitable works that are most important to you. Wills, trusts, and endowments are all examples of planned giving and legacy gifts.

How can the ISJL help?

Whether it's preserving southern Jewish stories, putting rabbis on the road to small towns, furthering Jewish education, or making our world a better place through literacy and life-changing community engagement initiatives—whatever touches your heart and resonates with your legacy will shape the conversation of how together, we can plan for a meaningful future.

**The ISJL's Legacy Giving program can help you meet your planned giving goals.
To learn more, visit www.isjl.org/planned-giving or email development@isjl.org.**



PROGRAMMING

CULTURAL EXPERIENCES CONTRIBUTING TO COMMUNITY

BY ANN ZIVITZ KIENTZ
ISJL DIRECTOR OF PROGRAMMING



.....

2019 WAS A RECORD-BREAKING YEAR FOR the ISJL's Cultural Programming department! We coordinated thirty-seven joyful programs in eleven states over the course of the year.

The spotlight beamed on Joe Buchanan, The Bible Players, and the Jewish Women's Theatre as the most frequently booked presenters. Joe Buchanan and The Bible Players are gearing up for another busy year with the ISJL in 2020, as they are already booked for several venues January through March! The Jewish Women's Theatre did an amazing whirlwind six-state tour in eight days covering Georgia, Florida, Alabama, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Tennessee. They performed *The Matzo Ball Diaries* and *The Art of Forgiveness*. The shows drew raves, and we're so excited to announce that this theatrical group will be touring with us again in 2020!

What have we learned over these last few years, and what is our vision for programming in the years ahead?

We know that Jews in small towns and big cities all have the

same desire for affordable, high quality Jewish programming. In order to serve the most communities, the shared-expense tours have been a serious focus of the ISJL's programming efforts. An example of a shared-expense tour from 2019 was when Joe Buchanan was booked by Temple Israel in Columbus, Georgia, for a concert. We went to work reaching out to nearby communities, and Joe was soon booked for a concert at nearby Temple Beth Israel in Macon, the day after the one in Columbus. Both of these congregations benefitted from the travel expenses being split in half!

The Bible Players have also been a part of several shared-expense tours including this December at Adat Chaverim in Plano, TX, and Shearith Israel in Dallas, TX. Over the course of 2019, Tim Lorsch, Eric Goldman, Eliana Light, Peter Maer,

and of course The Jewish Women's Theatre all traveled the region on shared-expense ISJL tours!

We want to continue this trend in 2020. Our presenters cover a wide variety of topics and you can see the current list anytime on our website.

Jewish programming isn't only entertainment, though that is very important. Our cultural programs also build community, celebrate Jewish identity, and foster acceptance. They expand our knowledge on a wide variety of topics. Whether you are programming for seniors, empty-nesters, young adults, teens, or children, we can provide ideas and programs to enrich your community.

I invite you to dream BIG with me for 2020! How can I help to bring more Jewish programming to your community? If you have ideas or comments, please feel free to contact me at akientz@isjl.org. Whether you have partnered with any other department of the ISJL or not, I invite you to reach out to me, invite me (virtually) to one of your board meetings and we can discuss ways to connect your Congregation, JCC, Federation or any other organization with ISJL Programming. Here's to a great year!

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



RABBI MATT DREFFIN WINS POMEGRANATE PRIZE

FIVE EMERGING JEWISH educators received the 2019 Covenant Foundation Pomegranate Prize, joining 40 others, who, since the Prize's inception in 2011, have trailblazed a path toward the most dynamic, responsive, inclusive, and creative ideas in Jewish education.

The 2019 recipients were Rabbi Matthew Dreffin, Director of Education at the Goldring/Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life (ISJL) in Jackson, Mississippi; Natan Kuchar, Director of Edah in Berkeley, California; Na'amit Sturm Nagel, English Teacher and Associate Director of The Shalhevet Institute at Shalhevet High School in Los Angeles, California; Shara Peters, Head of School at Adat Ari El Day School in Valley Village, California; and Beverly Socher-Lerner, Founding Director of Makom Community in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

The Pomegranate Prize is designed to honor rising leaders who have been in the field of Jewish education for up to ten years. By

encouraging Prize recipients in their pursuits, and enabling them to accelerate their professional development and amplify their impact on the field, The Covenant Foundation aims to nurture Pomegranate Prize recipients in an intentional way, and empower them to take risks and make a difference in the field of Jewish education.

"The five 2019 Pomegranate Prize recipients are truly multi-talented, which is reflective of an important trend in Jewish education," said Cheryl R. Finkel, Board Chair of The Covenant Foundation. "By enhancing their educational practice with skills in visual arts, music, literature, community engagement strategies, and creative problem solving, they offer the learners they

work with a more well-rounded and rich Jewish learning experience. We are so excited about the potential they promise to the field."

"It is a tremendous privilege to welcome a new cohort of Poms each year, each of whom offers an innovative and impressive slate of accomplishments," said Harlene Appelman, Executive Director of The Covenant Foundation. "And it is so encouraging that the field continues to produce Jewish educators year after year who are as motivated, as creative, as engaged, and as talented as our first cohort was in 2011."

We are so proud of Matt for this tremendous honor, and hope you will join us in wishing a hearty mazel tov to him and his fellow Pomegranate honorees!

GIFTS & GRATITUDE

THANK YOU TO OUR SUPPORTERS

IN THESE PAGES, YOU CAN SEE the impact our education, history, heritage and interpretation, cultural, community engagement, and rabbinical 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 – December 31, 2019, to enable our important work.

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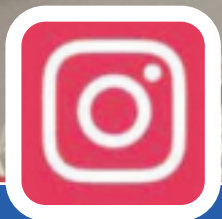
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