

Fall 2017

# CIRCA

Newsletter of the Goldring/Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life



*Continuing the Legacy*





GOLDRING  
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INSTITUTE OF  
SOUTHERN  
JEWISH LIFE

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*On the cover...*

Elliot Copen and Marc Perler of Tupelo, Mississippi. In the small picture (circa 1985), little Elliot looks up to Mr. Perler, a leader in his community. Almost three decades later, they recreated the photograph-- noting they both look up to each other now.

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**IN THIS ISSUE OF CIRCA**

*Continuing the legacy.*

That concept has been on the minds and in the hearts of the entire ISJL team lately. As you'll see in this issue of CIRCA (which may not be the name of this publication for long—more on that on page 6!), there are lots of exciting changes happening in our world. With all of the transitions and adventures ahead, we remain as committed as ever to preservation as well as innovation.

Everything we do is in order to continue the long, proud legacy of Judaism in the South. That legacy encompasses everything from sharing in Shabbat experiences, to celebrating community-specific traditions like Greenville Deli Day, to working alongside our neighbors to make our world a better place. When we think about the notion that we're "continuing the legacy," the word continuing is just as important as the word legacy. We're not just acknowledging the past; we're honoring it by perpetuating and enhancing the ongoing story of the Southern Jewish experience.

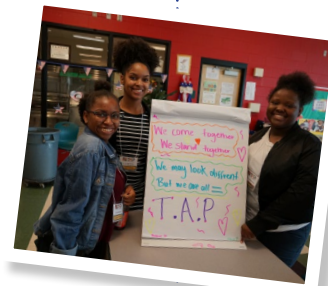
Here are just a few of the headline-news items you'll find in these pages, all of which speak to the power of legacy, transition, and continuity.

- An introduction to the incoming CEO of the Goldring/Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life.
- An update on the Museum of the Southern Jewish Experience, which will soon call a new Southern city home.
- A chance to get to know our newest staff member in a new, reimagined position – Director of Heritage and Interpretation.
- Updates from each ISJL department on how they are all working with our partner communities to continue the legacy of Southern Jewish life.

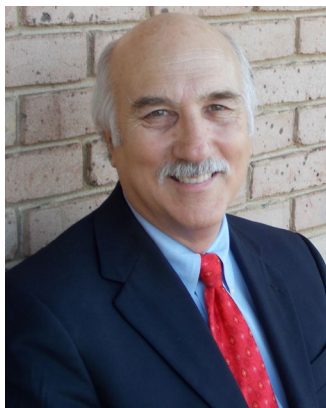
It's a real page-turner!

On top of all that, 2018 will be our eighteenth anniversary. Our "Chai Celebration" year will be filled with stories of lives touched by the ISJL over the past eighteen years, and what we hope the next phase of "life" will bring.

We hope that this array of updates will inspire you, and that you will remember the ISJL as you consider your year-end giving. We can't continue the legacy without your support. Thank you for joining us as we keep this journey moving forward, and here's to a wonderful 2018.



## President's Message



**ISJL President  
Macy B. Hart**

This “legacy” edition of CIRCA is so appropriate to the life, thus far, of the ISJL—and also to my own life.

Just before the holidays this year, I lost my Dad. He was 101 years old, and his loss reminded me that legacy is staring us in the face all the time. Sometimes we just don't know how to embrace it. So in honor of my father's legacy, which drives me in many ways, I want to share a few personal thoughts.

The ISJL was born out of the recognized need and desire of Southern Jewish congregations to keep burning bright, even as the proverbial flame flickers in small towns. These communities deserve our support, no matter how small or how large they are. My Dad taught me: if you see a problem that you can fix, then fix it. If you can't fix it, but tried, you learned something. Maybe next time.

I think the ISJL has done a pretty good job of doing our part to “fix things...” for almost two decades now. Our model of a trans-denominational regional service is a strong one. As we often say, we serve the South, but the Jewish communal issues we address aren't uniquely Southern. Our model could work in the Midwest, the Northwest, all over.

The ISJL is in a time of transition to the next era of leadership of our organization. I am preparing to step away from the helm of the organization; I'm not ready to retire, but am ready to pass the torch to my successor, Michele Schipper.

As we prepare for this

transition, there is an element still missing from the big picture of the ISJL. The Board and Staff, and our long-time supporters, want to see all of our departments, positions, and programs funded into the future.

We need more legacy gifts and to continue being introduced to, connecting with, collaborating with, inspiring, and partnering with donors. We need to solicit our long-time donors, attract more new supporters, connect with visionary philanthropists, and encourage families to honor or memorialize the mentors and heroes who preceded and influenced them in some way.

Even if you already give to the ISJL, have you considered the impact of planned giving and designating a legacy gift to the ISJL?

A legacy gift benefits all parties. A loved one's memory is honored, and vital Jewish service work continues. And now is the moment: The ISJL will celebrate our 18th anniversary in February 2018. As we mark this milestone of “life” (“chai”), we hope to sustain that life through legacy gifts secured throughout 2018.

What can a legacy gift do? One example is how it can secure positions and programs, such as fellowships. The ISJL currently employs twelve Fellows (ten Education Fellows, two Community Engagement Fellows) for two-year immersive fellowships. Of these twelve positions, four are currently fully funded by donors. Those existing grants expire soon, and only represent 25%-funding of the fellowships. My dream

is that through legacy gifts, all of our Fellowships, all of our departments, and all of our department chairs, could be positions funded in perpetuity and named in honor of loved ones.

Maybe your loved one.

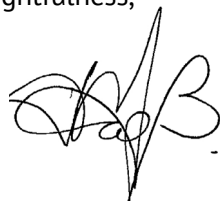
I invite you all to consider making this sort of gift.

Many of you have been a part of the ISJL's beginnings and continue to support the work. The ISJL has earned a wonderful national reputation with its programs and innovative and impactful delivery systems. I want to secure our legacy, long into the future. To do that, I want to urge you to spread the word about this opportunity to touch thousands of lives through a legacy gift to the ISJL. I welcome direct conversations to determine what programs or positions are appropriate for you to support based on your own philanthropic goals.

A funder once told me, “The ISJL does so much with so little.” What he meant was that the foundation he represented was very satisfied with where and how their dollars were being spent; what I thought was, imagine what we could do with more!

My time at the ISJL has given me a chance to really be a part of something truly wonderful and full of meaning. The ISJL will continue into the future. This message is all about legacy. Will you join yours with ours in 2018?

Thanks in advance for your thoughtfulness,



## Board Chair's Message



**ISJL Board Chair  
Rachel Reagler Schulman**

As you will see in this issue of CIRCA, there's a lot going on in our world. The Goldring/Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life (ISJL) is approaching our 18th year of service, and I'm excited about our future—and also inspired by our past.

I want to acknowledge the wisdom, generosity and passion of the founders and supporters of the Museum of the Southern Jewish Experience (MSJE). Before there was the ISJL, there was the MSJE, originally established in 1986. When we expanded to become the ISJL in February 2000, the broadening of our mission included promoting our Jewish heritage through new and innovative programs. It was a moment of change. The ISJL started first by offering multi-city cultural programs and hiring a historian to preserve the stories of the Southern Jewish past. We then began delivering rabbinical services to communities that no longer had a rabbi, and developing a comprehensive non-denominational Jewish education program.

We kept expanding our work, to include community engagement and oral history collection and Southern Jewish heritage trips and so much more.

Our program options keep growing. We now serve communities throughout a thirteen-state territory, connecting and collaborating with

them. And as always, the ISJL provides historic preservation advice throughout the South to congregations, communities and individuals in our many different stages of life. What a legacy to continue!

Now, as the MSJE becomes its own independent entity (see p. 7), we are excited to continue as committed partners in sharing the Southern Jewish legacy. The museum will forge and form even richer ways to exhibit and display our stories—and the ISJL will continue helping create new stories.

How will the ISJL continue the legacy in the years to come? How will the Board of Directors of the ISJL continue the legacy? As Chair of the Board, I consider this matter often as the ISJL looks to exciting times in the coming months. The Board is faced with balancing different ideas: continuing the proud traditions and successful programs that are in place, while adjusting to suggested changes and improvements. As a Board comprised of committed and extremely hard-working individuals, it is a challenge that I wholeheartedly believe this Board is ready to face. I am honored to be working with this group of people, who have put so much time and effort into securing the future of this organization.

So at this time, I also want to thank the Board of the

ISJL. Thank you all for the work you do for the ISJL, from your annual financial support to traveling to two Board Meetings a year to participating in many committee meetings via Zoom and to responding to countless emails. You make being on the board a pleasure!

Together, we will ensure that the ISJL will continue its legacy of promoting Judaism and its heritage in the South. How will the ISJL do this exactly? How will it continue its legacy? CIRCA is filled with many of the answers, through programs and outreach. However, the rest of the answer of “how it all keeps happening” is up to you and to me.

As Dr. Seuss said, “Unless someone like you cares a whole awful lot, nothing is going to get better. It's not.” The ISJL needs people like you and like me to continue to care and to support the ISJL. Please consider caring and giving now. Here's to a wonderful 2018.





**Incoming CEO**  
**Michele Schipper, COO**

I am honored to have been selected to serve as the next Chief Executive Officer of the ISJL. It's been more than a decade since I took on my first role here, as Chief Operating Officer, and it's remarkable to look back on these last ten years as I take on this new role.

When I interviewed back in 2007 for the COO position, one of the questions I had was how does so much get accomplished by so few? At the time, the ISJL staff was half the size it is today, the Community Engagement Department was not yet up and running but somehow "tikkun olam" work was getting done, the organization was serving dozens of Jewish communities with only about a dozen full-time staff—you get the idea.

Having now spent 10 years as part of this organization, I understand.

It is through a dynamic staff, no matter how big or small we get (just like we say in reference to our partner communities!). It is with the support of a thoughtful and focused board. It is due to the partnerships with organizations, foundations, and individuals—those with whom we partner in programming, and those who support our work. Together, we are able to stay true to the ISJL's holistic approach to Jewish life, as we seek to address all of the needs of our Southern communities.

The ISJL is truly a special organization. I have worked as a Jewish professional throughout my career, working at Jewish overnight camps and JCCs, and for ten years now at the ISJL. Nothing quite compares to the work we do here.

As our leadership transitions and we head into the ISJL's "Chai Year" and beyond, I remain passionate and focused on the work we do. Together, we will continue the legacy of honoring the past while strengthening the services and creating new opportunities throughout the ISJL's region.

I look forward to continuing this conversation with you in future issues of CIRCA!

## A Note From The Search Committee

**By Rayman Solomon**

When our Board Chair, Rachel Reagler Schulman, asked me to head the committee to select a person to replace Macy Hart, I had two immediate reactions. I was honored to be asked to lead such an effort, and terrified to be given an impossible task. No one person could "replace" Macy; our founder, visionary, fundraiser, and leader. But we had an excellent committee, and were assisted by the ISJL

staff, the Executive Committee, and the entire Board. And, most importantly, we had a fabulous candidate in Michele Schipper! After numerous interviews and conversations with the committee, the Board, and others who recently experienced the same leadership transitions in their organizations, we understood that Michele had the vision and skills to move from her role as Chief Operating Of-

ficer to become CEO. Her knowledge of the ISJL and its mission is unparalleled. She will continue to make the ISJL the go-to-Jewish organization for all of the communities we serve. We are all excited to see what the future will bring. It turned out our task was not impossible—it was easy and unanimous, and assures us that the leader of our beloved organization will continue the legacy.

**Help us name this Publication!**

"CIRCA" was a name selected many years ago to evoke the museum image of the MSJE.

As the museum becomes an independent entity, this publication of the ISJL needs a new name!



**What do YOU think we should call this publication?**



Email your suggestions to [kander@isjl.org](mailto:kander@isjl.org)

## Museum of the Southern Jewish Experience to Open in New Orleans



The ISJL is deeply connected to the Museum of the Southern Jewish Experience (MSJE). In fact, the MSJE pre-dated the ISJL, and then with the emergence of the larger institute in 2000 became a subsidiary entity, incorporated into the ISJL's overall work and mission. Since 2012, the museum has had no physical building, but has continued offering programs and sharing artifacts and information as a department of the ISJL. Now, excitement is building as the MSJE makes plans to re-open in 2019 as an independent entity, located in New Orleans.

This new iteration of the museum will be a tremendous addition to the Southern Jewish landscape. A location in New Orleans' cultural and arts district will increase visibility and foot traffic, giving the collection and programs the potential to reach a large and diverse audience. Plans for the museum are already well underway; the primary exhibit designer will be Gallagher & Associates, an award-winning firm that has worked on many of the nation's most innovative museums. The museum is poised to become a tourist destination—a

state-of-the-art facility and historic, heartfelt testament to the legacy of Judaism in the South.

The ISJL and MSJE will be two separate organizations, although they will remain supportive of one another and promote synergies through cross-board representation. The Museum has also already hired its executive director, Kenneth Hoffman, a veteran of both the museum world and the world of Southern Jewish history. Hoffman, a Baton Rouge native, has a long resume in museums including time as the MSJE's very first intern. He has worked at the much-lauded National WWII Museum in New Orleans since its opening in 2000, serving most recently as education director. While a graduate student at Tulane, he wrote a master's thesis on the Jewish community of Port Gibson, MS, and organized many of the activities for the 1994 Natchez Jewish Homecoming event. Board leadership has also been established, emerging from the search and planning committee for the MSJE. Jay Tanenbaum, of

Atlanta, Georgia, is the MSJE chair, with other former ISJL board members Morris Mintz of Monroe, Louisiana, and Rusty Palmer of San Antonio, Texas, serving as vice-chairs.

"We're very excited for the museum's future," says Macy B. Hart, ISJL president and original founder of the MSJE. "There's such a rich history of Southern Jewish life in this region, and under, Jay, Morris, Rusty, and Kenneth's leadership, along with the whole team they'll assemble, we know that history will be shared in a dynamic and engaging way. Meanwhile, the Southern Jewish story is still unfolding—and at the ISJL we're proud to play a role in supporting and enhancing Jewish life throughout the region."

Jay Tanenbaum adds: "It's both a challenge and an honor to have this opportunity to re-establish the MSJE as a vibrant new project. I am humbled by the reception we have received in reaching out to new partners and supporters. With 10 million visitors a year, New Orleans gives us the ability to engage a much larger audience with the lessons of hope, tolerance, and leadership demonstrated through the stories of Southern Jewry."

With a shared history and an interconnected vision, these two organizations are committed to working in partnership to preserve and share stories of the Southern Jewish past, and to work together as integral entities in the landscape of the Southern Jewish present and future. This is truly an inspiring instance of continuing the legacy.

Visit the MSJE's website to sign up for updates and take a survey about what you would like to see at the museum when it opens its doors: [www.msje.org](http://www.msje.org).

## Rabbis on the Road: Still a “Bold Old Idea”

From the very beginning, the ISJL has touted the notion of itinerant rabbis – clergy who literally hit the road to visit communities with no full-time local rabbi. It’s not a concept we created; circuit riding rabbis were popular decades ago, too. In the 1950’s, Rabbi Harold Freedman tooled around the back roads of the Blue Ridge Mountains in a bus outfitted with blackboards, a record player, a library, a battery-powered eternal light and even a portable ark. Back then, more than 150 families were regulars to the bus, and in his first five years Rabbi Freedman prepared more than 20 children to become b’nai mitzvah. His successors made similar travels into the 1980’s.

And then, starting in 2003, the ISJL began reviving this “bold old idea.” One of the ways we get traveling clergy into communities is through our Rabbis on the Road program. By partnering with congregations and clergy, including those outside of our region, we are able to provide visits to congregations without Rabbis throughout the South.

This approach to rabbinical service is truly continuing the legacy – and we invited a member from one of our communities (Andrea Levy of Jonesboro, Arkansas) and a rabbi who recently traveled for us (Rabbi Josh Davidson of Congregation Emanu-El in New York City) to share their insider insights on the impact of these visits on congregants and clergy alike.



Rabbi Matt Dreffin leading services at B'nai Israel in Natchez, Mississippi.

## From The Visiting Rabbi’s Point of View...

By Rabbi Josh Davidson

*(Excerpted from a sermon given to his New York congregation following visits down south)*

A couple of weeks ago, I was rummaging through some cartons in my parents’ basement when I came upon a box of TripTiks. You remember those spiral bound booklets AAA used to produce long before such tools as Google Maps and MapQuest? Following my college graduation, I had determined to drive cross country. So I called AAA and ordered the TripTiks directing me from Great Neck to Cooperstown to Cleveland to Chicago to Minneapolis on to Los Angeles and back home again. That was twenty-seven years ago. And in all the years since, I don’t think I’ve done as much driving as I did last month in Arkansas and Mississippi where I covered about a thousand miles in a four-day stretch. I made the journey under the auspices of the ISJL.

I landed in Memphis and drove northwest across the Mississippi River to Jonesboro, Arkansas. Jonesboro is a town of about 70,000 with a small congregation of twenty households, though they have their own beautiful synagogue building—Temple Israel. Being there brought me back to my days as a student rabbi when I would travel to similarly sized communities to teach and preach. Temple Israel is blessed to have Andrea Levy, a lay leader who carries much of the temple’s program on her own shoulders. She offers an Introduction to Judaism class for those interested in conversion. She also represents the synagogue in various interfaith settings educating the Christian community about Jewish ritual and custom. She commented that sometimes when you leave a big Jewish community – she grew up in Highland Park, Illinois – Judaism

becomes an even bigger part of your life. It certainly has for her. It was inspiring to be part of this congregation if only for one night, which truly must make Shabbos for itself. The sense of personal investment of each individual runs so deep. They all know that if one of them doesn’t show up, there will be no minyan.

Saturday I was up at dawn driving two and a half hours southeast to my next stop in Oxford, Mississippi – the home of Ole Miss whose Jewish community is shepherded by the volunteer leader of the University Hillel, Wendy Goldberg a faculty member in the liberal arts school. According to Federation estimates, there are fifty families in Oxford who identify with Judaism. However, that number does not include the university’s Jewish students. About ten of us gathered at the local Unitarian Universalist Church. And here too I was moved by the sense of personal responsibility each member felt for this community’s success. That evening we gathered at a local park for a Havdalah service, this time

with children in attendance too.

On Sunday morning, I drove another two hours southeast to Columbus, Mississippi. The roots of Temple B’nai Israel in Columbus reached back to the 1840s. Today, there are forty member households who call the congregation home. Following an hour of Torah study, the dozen congregants in attendance reflected candidly on the challenges of Jewish life in the South. They spoke of their desire to be able to do more as a community, but how difficult it was with limited resources and limited numbers. Yet they have a lay leader, a professor at Mississippi State, who functions as their rabbi. And they do hold services twice a month. That afternoon the president of the synagogue, Paul Lasky, brought me to the Jewish cemetery for what would be the most poignant hour of my trip. For in that cemetery were buried the pioneers who had built the community, and there were more Jews buried there than there are alive in the community today. Standing among the graves, some dating back one-hundred-seventy years, we offered the El

Malei Rachamim memorial prayer.

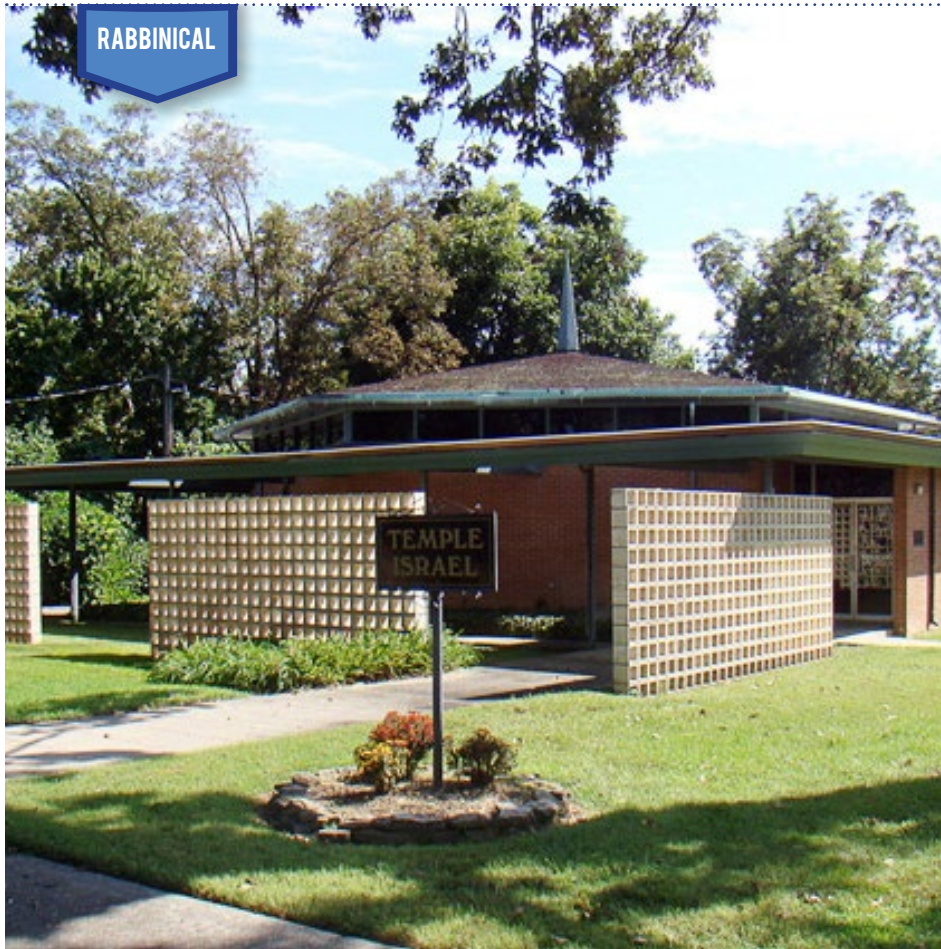
Monday I made my way due west to Greenville, a Delta town which once had the largest Jewish population in the state. Now it’s an aging congregation; the children have left and no younger Jews are moving in. Still, the congregation holds services twice monthly and Benji Nelkin, one of the congregation leaders, has created a beautiful museum in the temple to the congregation’s once thriving past. That night I drove to Jackson, and in the morning flew home.

I hope you’ll forgive me if this report sounded too much like a travel log or a TripTik. For me, each one of these visits was deeply moving. At every stop, I met individuals who’ve taken it upon themselves to keep Jewish life or the memory of Jewish life alive for the generations to come. The preservation of memory of the stories of those who came before us has always been a truly sacred Jewish task.

*To learn more about the ISJL Rabbinical Department and how they can help you enrich Jewish life right where YOU live, email information@isjl.org*



Visiting Rabbi Andy Bachman has spent time in several southern congregations this year.



## When Rabbis Visit Jonesboro

By Andrea Levy

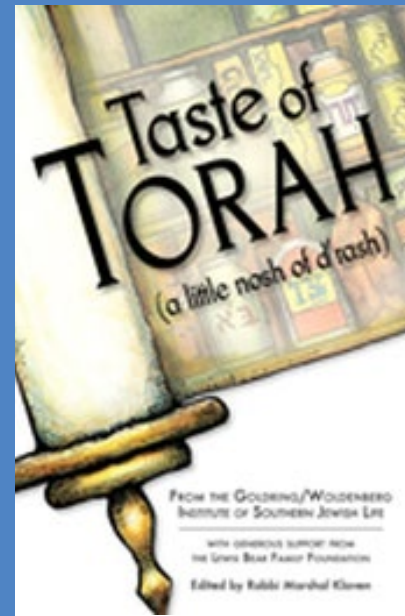
I'll start by telling you a little bit about my Jewish community here in Jonesboro, Arkansas: Temple Israel dedicated Jonesboro's first synagogue in January of 1898. At that time, the congregation had over 80 Jews. Our current building was constructed in the 1960s to meet the needs of a growing congregation—at the time.

The Jewish population of Jonesboro has fluctuated since then. Currently, we have about 15 local Jews attending services, joined by 10 other wonderful community members at most services. We have no rabbi here, and until recently, we hadn't even had a rabbi visit since 2014. All of our services have been lay-led.

But then this June, we were so fortunate to have Rabbi Josh Davidson, from Congregation Emanu-

el in New York, lead a Friday night Shabbat service for us. It was a truly special experience. Rabbi Davidson is kind and humble. His sermon was inspirational. The best part of having him here was having Rabbi Davidson at our Shabbat pot-luck after services. The opportunity for our attendees to speak with him one-on-one is something our group is still talking about.

We are trying to keep our Jewish legacy alive in Jonesboro and visits like these re-energize our sense of kehilla (community). As I write this, we are looking forward to another rabbinical visit – Rabbi Andy Bachman will join us for Yom Kippur. We are so grateful to the ISJL for arranging these amazing and meaningful opportunities for us here in Jonesboro!



## This Chanukah treat helps you learn - and eat!

If you have a copy of the ISJL's *Taste of Torah* book, right now is a great time to perfect your Hush Puppy Latkes and the other delicious recipes you'll find inside! If you don't have a copy, or know someone who needs one, grab this great gift for Chanukah! In addition to weekly Torah insights, there are also Southern and Jewish flavors filling these delicious pages.

If you don't have a copy of *Taste of Torah*, you can snag one from The Peddler's Cart section of our website.

Let's go to Israel, y'all.



Join Macy B. Hart and Susan Hart for a trip to Israel with a Southern accent!

**February 23 - March 6, 2018**

Join the ISJL's first-ever group trip to Israel! Aply guided by friend and veteran tour guide Ron Perry, this all-adult trip features a packed itinerary, incredibly enriching activities, and a unique Southern Jewish twist on the traditional trip to the holy land. Overnight accomodations included at Herods in Tel Aviv, Hagoshrim Kibbutz Hotel in Kibbutz Hagoshrim, and Dan Boutique in Jerusalem (pictured below).



Learn more at [www.isjl.org/isjl-israel-trip](http://www.isjl.org/isjl-israel-trip)

# A Legacy of Learning

By Rachel Stern & Rabbi Matt Dreffin

When we think of legacy, we ponder what we are leaving behind, what impact we are making while we are here that will hopefully echo after we're gone. The contemplation of legacy is the essence of Jewish education. We pass along a concept often attached to an experience, and we hope that it affects the learner, that it shapes them in some way.



The ISJL Education Program is rooted in legacy. We are passing along content and experiences about Judaism in the hopes that it influences the Jewish lives of the teachers, students, and the families with whom we work. We know that we are making a difference because we are on-the-ground in the communities we serve three times a year, and in contact with our education partners throughout the rest of the year. We hear the feedback firsthand, and we witness growth in teachers, students, and families.

But we're very close to the endeavor, of course. Even though we know through observation and anecdotes shared by teachers and feedback forms and conference conversations that our Jewish Education program makes a difference, we're not the ones who can really assess the work. We wanted

to know more, to gather real data, to evaluate not only the positive impact but also areas for growing and improving our work. We wanted to be sure that we were meeting our goals—and that we could continue doing so.

We hired an evaluator, Dr. Tobin Belzer, who worked with our communities and our team to take a closer look at our program. She gathered evaluative information in a variety of ways, from focus groups to staff and former Education Fellow interviews to accompanying a current Fellow on a visit and sending out an online survey to education partners.

We were thrilled with her work and with the results of her evaluation. Some of the quotes from education partners are featured on this

“

*I feel that before we used ISJL Program, we were missing some **important ways to reach students...***

*the ISJL [education program] has allowed even an inexperienced person to teach a class, with the **scripted lessons** and the **many ideas** that come with each lesson.*

”

“ *I love how the curriculum approaches **all angles of learning**. It really takes Sunday School off book and brings Judaism to life for our kids, **especially our interfaith kids**.* ”

page. We identified some areas of improvement (the biggest takeaway was that our Program Bank, a repository of hundreds of amazing past programs, is under-utilized; marketing around it hasn't been strong—so here's a plug, ask us about the Program Bank and stay tuned to learn more about it!) and also some successes—the biggest of which is the impact of the Education Fellows.

The Fellows exemplify legacy in so many ways. They create relationships with countless students, showing how Judaism can be fun, meaningful, and a part of everyday life. The communities we serve remember their Fellows,

and stay in touch long after the fellowship has been completed. The ISJL Education Fellowship is usually a Fellow's first job after school, and the experiences they gain working with our communities provide skills and deepen commitment in the Fellows. They take their formative experiences here with them as they continue on to future positions—whether their careers be in Jewish education, the rabbinate, or other fields of work.

Yes, legacy is showing what remains with us, but it is also looking towards the future, ensuring the legacy we're continuing is far reaching and long lasting for the next batch of students, teachers, and ISJL Education Fellows.

*To learn more about the ISJL Education Department and how they can help make your Fellow visits, and school year adventures successful, email Rachel Stern ([rstern@isjl.org](mailto:rstern@isjl.org)) or Rabbi Matt Dreffin ([mdreffin@isjl.org](mailto:mdreffin@isjl.org)).*

“

*The ISJL [Education] Fellows bring a tremendous amount of **thoughtfulness, creativity, and fun** to our classes.*

”



*The current first-year Fellows (Education and Community Engagement!) are all helping continue traditions.*

## The ISJL History Department: All About Legacy

By Dr. Josh Parshall

“Legacies” are at the heart of the History Department’s work, whether that means celebrating the achievements of Jewish leaders in the South, preserving the memories of Jewish communities that are no longer active, or wrestling with the fascinating and sometimes uneasy complexities of southern and Jewish histories. Our mission is not only to document and interpret the past, but also to ask how it reverberates in the present, and how we can make it meaningful for new audiences. Here are some of the ways we’re doing just that.

### Encyclopedia

The most visible way that the History Department preserves and celebrates the legacies of the southern Jewish past is through the Encyclopedia of Southern Jewish Communities. You can explore this free, online resource through the ISJL website. The Encyclopedia currently includes over 250 entries on local Jewish history in every town in twelve states that has ever had an organized Jewish community. In addition to expanding and enhancing the contents of the Encyclopedia in the next few years, we are also beginning to update and revise the existing entries. First up will be two of the earliest states added to the Encyclopedia: Mississippi and Alabama. For the Alabama section, I’m looking forward to a new collaboration with graduate students in the Department of History at Auburn University. As always, and especially if you live in or hail from Mississippi or Alabama, feel free to look up your own community in the Encyclopedia and let us know how we can update or improve the information there!



Images from Dr. Parshall’s recent lecture in Brookhaven, MS.

### Public Events

We also explore the legacies of southern Jewish communities through public events. In August, I went to Brookhaven, Mississippi, to give my first historical talk as the Director of the ISJL History Department. I addressed the Lincoln County Historical Society on the development of the local Jewish community in the late-nineteenth century. The turnout was great, and the audience asked smart questions in the post-lecture Q&A. In a small town where few Jewish residents remain, it was especially gratifying to see that non-Jewish locals are interested in maintaining public memories of a now inactive Jewish community.

### Internships

It might feel far off, but really, spring and summer are just around the corner—and that means it’s time to start looking for summer interns. If you know a great, responsible college student with interests in American Jewish history, southern history, oral history, or related fields, they may be able to work with us as we document the southern Jewish past and explore its rich, multi-layered legacies. Check our website for details in December!

*To learn more about the ISJL History Department or find out how to bring a history lecture to your community, email Dr. Josh Parshall ([jparshall@isjl.org](mailto:jparshall@isjl.org)).*



## Meet Nora Katz, ISJL’s First Director of Heritage and Interpretation

With the separation of the ISJL and the Museum of the Southern Jewish Experience, there is no longer a Museum Department within the ISJL. Instead, the board and staff of the ISJL is excited to announce a new department – Heritage and Interpretation. This department will oversee, among other things, groups visiting the south (for Southern Jewish Heritage trips, alternative spring break volunteer trips, and more), heritage programming aimed at both Jewish and secular audiences, and interpretive innovations to bring history and heritage to life.

The ISJL is thrilled to welcome Nora Katz as the first Director of Heritage and Interpretation.

Nora, who assumed her position in September, came to Jackson straight from Dublin, Ireland, where she earned her Master’s degree in Public History and Cultural Heritage at Trinity College. Her thesis, titled “No More Fourth Wall: Performing Reality, Witnessing History,

and the Rise of ANU Productions,” examined the work of Dublin-based site-specific theatre company ANU Productions and their engagement with traumatic history and collective memory. The project involved oral history interviews with theatre practitioners and audience members, considering the ways in which theatre works as a medium for processing and presenting the past. Nora presented her research at an Oral History Network of Ireland conference in Galway. She also had the opportunity to organize a community-based oral history “harvest” at the Clandeboye Estate in Northern Ireland. Nora has experience working at a variety of heritage institutions, including the National Museum of American Jewish History, which piqued her interest in this field of work; the Mercer Museum & Library in Bucks County, Pennsylvania; the Blackfriary Community Heritage & Archaeology Project in Trim, Ireland; and the New Bedford Whaling Museum in Massachusetts. She earned a Bachelor’s degree in History with minors in Archaeology and Medieval

and Renaissance Studies at Carleton College in Northfield, Minnesota. Her senior thesis explored the aesthetics of barren and bountiful landscapes in 17th-century French explorer Samuel de Champlain’s maps of New France. Nora is also the co-author of *Literary Starbucks*, a humor book with illustrations by acclaimed New Yorker cartoonist Harry Bliss.

She is excited to bring her experience developing exhibitions, education programs, and theatrical productions to the ISJL. As Director of Heritage and Interpretation, Nora is looking forward to engaging with the ISJL’s partner institutions to develop new traveling trunks and traveling exhibitions. She’s also eager to support diverse groups on their journeys through the South, as well as to developing programs and exhibits. She’s especially excited to begin collaborating with fellow ISJL staff members on heritage projects.

*To learn more about this new department and welcome Nora to the role, email [nkatz@isjl.org](mailto:nkatz@isjl.org).*



# Bringing Music and So Much More

By Batsheva

We asked Batsheva, one of our beloved ISJL Programming presenters, to share her thoughts on legacy and how visiting our communities impacts her, as well as them. Many thanks to Batsheva for so often bringing us her beautiful music—and now, her beautiful words here as well!

**“Oyfn veg shteyt a boim...”**

**“On the road, there is a tree...”**

This is the first line of a Yiddish song by one of the great Jewish literary figures, Itzik Manger.

The song goes on to describe the birds on the tree, leaving the nest and flying off in all directions.

**“Drey keyn mayrev, drey keyn mizrekh, un der resht keyn durem”**

**“Three to the west, three to the east and the rest to the south.”**

The song is actually an allegory about the return of the Jewish people to Zion. (You can find it on the



internet or YouTube.

I am particularly enamored with the rendition by Chava Alberstein.) It resonates for me because I—I am the bird, flying to the south. But in my case – it is the southern United States.

As many of you may know, under the auspices of the ISJL, I have been touring the southern states of the United States for the past several years, with a guitar in one hand, and the heritage of the songs of the Jewish people in the other. I sing in Ladino and Yiddish, in Ivrit (Hebrew) and English. Songs of the past, songs of the present and my own work. I sing ballads, laments, joyful songs, and even some satire!

These concert tours are not like those of other singers. When you carry the kind of precious cargo with which I travel, it goes much deeper than standing in front of a group of people singing some songs. I am not an

artist who just sings... and then leaves.

These songs are the threads that have bound us through the centuries, across oceans, and ultimately, so deeply to each other. The act of singing, and the act of listening to songs, connects us and binds us in an emotional way; through our history, through our memory, through our families, our losses and our joys. We are connected by these songs in a way that goes so much deeper than a concert.

I have returned to some of the communities multiple times. I have come to know many people. I have picked up conversations where I left off with people I may not have seen in over a year. I remember their lives, their jobs, their friends, their families. We return to conversations about life, Israel, memory, the community.

And they remember the music – how it made them feel, what it made them remember, how it stirred something in the soul. It's remarkable, isn't it? We don't know each other – and then we know each other, through an hour or so of sharing songs.

These words bring us together:

**“Oyfn veg shteyt a boym.”**

**“Eitz chayyim hi la-machazikim bah.”**

**“On the road there is a tree.”**

**“It is a Tree of Life to those who cling to it.”**

See you again, oyfn veg, on the road, as we continue the legacy.

To learn more about the ISJL Programming Department, email Alachua Nazarenko at [anazarenko@isjl.org](mailto:anazarenko@isjl.org).



Abraham Zvi Idelsohn, an ethnomusicologist.



Rachel, the founding mother of modern Hebrew poetry.



David Bergelson, a Yiddish writer imprisoned and killed by Stalin in the mid-1900s.

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**Your purchase supports the ISJL's work!**



Happy readers at this spring's LAB program in Jackson, MS.

## Continuing a Legacy of Giving Back

By Dave Miller

The ISJL believes that working to help make the world a better place is a vital piece of the Southern Jewish legacy. Here are two new and expanded ways we're bringing even more people together to make a difference.

### Literacy Programming

When Read, Lead, Succeed (RLS) first began we focused on improving literacy outcomes for primary school students by using secondary school students to act as tutors and mentors. We loved the relationships that were built between the students, but we realized that to reach more students we would need to utilize more community members. This led to the decision to bring in education majors at local universities, enhancing and expanding our mentorships and connections.

Another major moment for us came last year, when many partners lost funding and had to close their doors due to issues beyond their control. Students still had a need and we were committed to find a way to support them. We determined that the best time to reach students was during their spring break. In order to accomplish this, we had to expand our curriculum. It is nearly impossible to provide meaningful literacy interventions to more than 100 students over the course of

a week. Therefore, we decided to make the program about finding and growing a love for reading.

Students spent their days at the Literacy Achievement Bonanza (LAB) enjoying activities that met state literacy standards, allowed them to participate at whatever level they were at, and brought joy to the experience of books and reading. It also brought wide swaths of the community together. The LAB was an enormous success and a variety of new opportunities presented themselves. We found that the best version of RLS combines literacy interventions and fun activities, all of which build skills, confidence, and joy.

Currently, we are planning for two LAB locations during the 2018 spring break. We're launching the newly formatted RLS programming as the cornerstone of an afterschool program and a pilot program with a library system that uses our program to work with whole families in need of literacy support. We are working diligently to ensure that our legacy in literacy is profound.

### Community Engagement Modules

There are a myriad of other critical challenges facing our communities. The best way to tackle these challenges is together, and our Judaic

principles, texts, and history provide us a road map and lessons for doing so. Over the last nine years, we have worked with congregations to develop social justice programming for their members and communities. We have also explored how social justice takes shape in Jewish spaces and conversations about what Jewish social justice is. People are eager to play a role in improving outcomes for others and making the world a better place. This process can require large amounts of work and dedication, which is a lot to ask of people who already have a lot on their plate.

We listened to your concerns, ideas, and interests, and this summer we launched our Community Engagement Modules. These ninety-minute sessions cover a wide array of topics and are organized into five categories: keep, remember, act, share, and create. We want every person in the congregation to have the ability to engage in learning more about our faith's legacy of repairing the world and seeking justice, as well as the opportunity to find their own inspiration and define what their Jewish social justice legacy will be.

*To learn more about our brand-new Community Engagement Modules, literacy programming, and all of our social justice opportunities, email Dave Miller ([dmiller@isjl.org](mailto:dmiller@isjl.org)).*

## T.A.P. Looks Ahead To Its Tenth Year

By Dave Miller

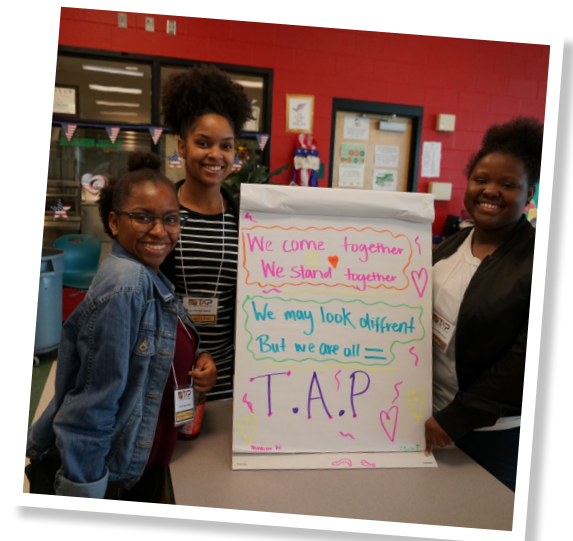
Over the last nine years, the ISJL's peer mediation initiative, Talk About the Problems (T.A.P.), has gone on quite a journey. As we approach our tenth year we have a lot to be excited about.

In September, we kicked off the 2017-2018 school year with our annual T.A.P. Summit. This incredible day brought together a diverse group of students from throughout the state covering grades 6-12. They had the opportunity to learn about the school-to-prison pipeline, mediating as a profession, LGBTQ+ advocacy, how the police department is working to building bridges to the community, and what it means to be an advocate on all levels for themselves and those around them.

Moreover, adults who support and lead these students had the chance to learn from each other, share best practices, explore ways to effectively implement T.A.P. at their site, and learn how to implement T.A.P. as a club in addition to the work they are already doing on a day-to-day basis using T.A.P. as part of regular school operations.

What does all this mean? It means that T.A.P. is becoming part of the school cultures. The stories that students and adults shared were about empowerment. There were dozens of stories about students who are using the program to help their peers, counselors who are working to have students play a larger role in positively guiding school culture, and administrators looking for ways to increase student empowerment and give them the opportunity to define what their legacy at the school will be.

The ISJL wants the legacy of T.A.P. to be about empowering others to create transformative positive change in school culture and to take those same skills and practices and apply them to the greater community. We have high school students who have been with the program so long that they received special cords to wear at their graduation. These same students come to us year after year asking how they can be involved once they have moved on to college. This year we have a cadre of volunteers



who will be assisting us with training and celebrating the successes of the peer mediators.

There is a lot of work to be done and new schools that are seeking the opportunity to be new partners. This year we are looking to add 10 more partner sites, which would empower approximately 125 students. Additionally, we are looking to increase our footprint outside of Mississippi because we know that student leadership is valuable everywhere. Talk About the Problems is just getting started and we look forward to many more powerful years.

*To learn more about our peer mediation program, visit [www.isjl.org/tap](http://www.isjl.org/tap)*



Community Engagement Fellow Rachel Glazer and LAB participants.

## Thank You to Our Supporters!

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