

SHALOM *Y'all*

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



KEEP & REMEMBER

**PERSISTENT
PARTNERSHIP IN
PERPLEXING TIMES**

p.6

**IF YOU
LOVE IT, LET
IT GROW**

p.16

**ASK AND ANSWER:
SAFETY, RESPECT,
EQUITY**

p.24

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CONTENTS

Leadership Messages.....	4
Education.....	6
Fellow Alumni Network.....	10
Development.....	12
Meet the Board	14
Rabbinical.....	16
History.....	18
Heritage & Interpretation	20
Community Engagement.....	24
Programming	26
Gifts & Gratitude.....	28

2020: OUR COMMUNITIES KEPT GOING IN A YEAR TO REMEMBER

TWO FAMILIAR IMPERATIVES OFT-REPEATED IN JEWISH tradition are *shamor v'zachor* – *keep* and *remember*. Most frequently used in reference to the Sabbath, the words sometimes appear together, sometimes on their own. In some contexts, we are commanded to “keep” (or even more literally, “guard”) Shabbat; in other contexts, we are urged to “remember” our sacred time.

There is something active about *keeping* or *guarding* Shabbat. It conjures a protective image; without us keeping the Sabbath, lighting the candles, and designating this weekly time for rest, it will cease to exist. It makes us think of safety, of security, of the actions we take to protect what we hold dear.

But there is something equally moving about *remembering* the holiday. Memory is so central to our heritage. We tell the same stories over and over lest we ever forget them. There is something intimate and immediate about being specifically instructed not only to guard the sabbath, but also to remember it—to recall and hold fast to what it means, what it represents, and how we experience it.

How fitting these ideas seem for 2020. This unprecedented year has been one in which we have all been called on to keep and remember so many things, in so many ways.

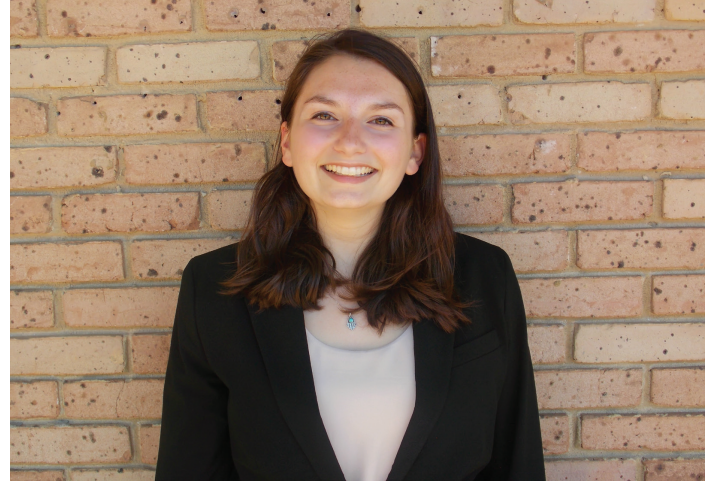
We have kept our commitments to Jewish life, to community, and to our loved ones. We have guarded what matters most to us by evolving our practices and adapting our protocols, from wearing masks to streaming services to delivering holiday treats while maintaining social distance. We hope to abandon some of these new tactics someday soon; others we may keep, because they have added new accessibility and meaning to our work.

This year, we were also reminded of what matters most. We remembered to check in on those we are not seeing in our classrooms or our congregations. We recalled, and reaffirmed, that memory is a bittersweet thing. We are grateful for the blessings of memory, but even as we push forward and emphasize the positive, we cannot forget the many difficulties of this year. The lives lost, the jobs lost, the connections cut off.

In this issue of *Shalom Y'all*, the board and staff of the Goldring/Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life (ISJL), along with our community partners, are paying tribute to the commitments we have proudly kept and the realities we must always remember. We thank you for continuing with us along all these unexpected curves in the road, and hope you will keep remembering the ISJL and the communities we serve.

L'shalom,

The Board & Staff of the ISJL



FROM THE CEO



Michele Schipper
CEO

I VIVIDLY REMEMBER THE FIRST issue of *Shalom Y'all* in 2020. It was published this past February, aligning with the ISJL's twentieth anniversary. The theme was *2020: A Year of Vision*. Who could have imagined that a few short weeks after it was published, the world would look so different?

In a year of so many uncertainties, some might say that it is difficult to focus on the future. Others might adamantly declare that maintaining any of the vision we might have had in early 2020 is impossible. But I would argue that, against all odds, the team at the ISJL has managed to carry out the full vision we set forward... it, too, just looks a little different.

We adapted our education curriculum to meet emerging remote-learning needs. We moved our cultural programs online and saw attendance numbers soar. We began offering more live-streaming content and brought southern Jewish life right into people's homes, no matter where they were sheltering in place. The reason we have been able to maintain focus, continue to create meaningful engagement opportunities, and focus on our strategic plan for the future is you.

You are our community, and this strong sense of community is what has helped us get through

some challenging and dark days. We have not wavered in our mission to support, connect, and celebrate Jewish life in the South. We continue to fulfill this mission because of each and every one of you.

As I look back on this year, it would be easy to say we have *survived* 2020. But I think we have done much more than that. This year challenged us to think even more creatively (and we have a very creative team!). Instead of a multi-state Passover Pilgrimage series, we brought communities together for our first streaming seder. We onboarded new Education Fellows who rolled up their sleeves and helped run a successful online education conference, then got to work all summer figuring out engaging ways to deliver virtual community visits. As fall approached, our team conducted a well-orchestrated fully online High Holiday worship schedule.

We kept going, and you kept showing up. More than 400 people experienced the streaming seder. More than 300 attended the Education Conference online. Thousands experienced our Facebook live streams (the Minced Southern Jewish Cooking Competition judged by culinary expert Marcie Cohen Ferris was one such highlight) and our online cultural program events, which featured presenters like Dan Nichols, The Bible Players, and Julie Silver.

It hasn't been easy. We have all experienced some form of loss this year, whether it is the loss of being in the same room for worship, giving hugs and physical greetings at an oneg Shabbat, attending a live concert, or sharing a holiday

meal with a crowd. But we have also gained incredible connections by working tirelessly to maintain a sense of community.

I am inspired every day by the work of the ISJL board and staff as we endeavor to meet the needs of our southern community members. As we navigate this new normal, I believe that we will preserve some of the new, tech-focused resources we've been developing even when we're able to hit the road again. As we adjust our programming and ensure that ongoing services and support continue to reach our communities, we appreciate your faith in our work, and your commitment to Jewish life. It's an honor to spend our days supporting Jewish life and connections across the South, knowing the work we do here reverberates far beyond our region. I hope that you, too, have found solace and inspiration this year in all these communal efforts.

As we prepare to bid farewell to the strange year that 2020 has been, we still need you. Please keep showing up. Keep tuning in. And if you are able, please consider a meaningful gift to the ISJL. There's even a little extra incentive right now: we're wrapping up a matching-dollar fundraising challenge. For every two dollars raised, an anonymous foundation will match donor contributions with an additional dollar.

Thank you for your support. May the next year be one of joy, learning, and good health.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Michele Schipper".

FROM THE BOARD CHAIR



Jay Hesdorffer
ISJL Board Chair

WHAT AN INTERESTING YEAR for the ISJL! What an interesting year for all of us. To be living in a world that encourages us to maintain distance is so strange, and doesn't feel very Jewish. Yet our capacity to create meaningful connections within our communities feels, in some ways, stronger than ever.

We are communicating more—in more ways, with more people, and with more intention. The ISJL is at the heart of this connectivity in the southern Jewish community. Now more than ever, the mission of the ISJL—to support, connect, and celebrate Jewish life in the South—has taken on new meaning and new significance, because staying connected has never been more important.

For the High Holidays, we opened our doors and invited everyone to attend ISJL High Holiday streaming services at no cost. We also provided communities with a multitude of resources, materials, and insights to navigate and prepare for the High Holidays in the midst of a pandemic so that whether they celebrated with us or coordinated their own local observance, they had support.

Our annual Education Conference typically hosts around 150 participants from across the South who come to Jackson to network, learn, and get familiar with the ISJL curriculum. This year when the pandemic made us move our

conference online, our numbers doubled. More than 300 people attended the conference virtually.

We are keeping our promises to the larger world as well. The pursuit of equality in education and civil rights goes hand-in-hand in southern communities. Today, as we embrace an important moment of social justice and reform, our commitment continues through initiatives in literacy, peer mediation, and learning modules focused on the intersection of social justice and Judaism in the South.

As we continued adapting to this new future, we remained committed to our history. The ISJL History Department is tasked with preserving the stories of Jewish life in the South. Whether you are a scholar or simply interested in family history, the Encyclopedia of Southern Jewish Communities is a valuable and impressive resource we've always made available online.

There is a lot to be found on the ISJL website. These days, in addition to longstanding resources like the Encyclopedia, you can find a list of congregations across the South offering streaming services. And if music is what you need to get you through this pandemic, enjoy the ISJL's Spotify selections where you'll find several "Southern & Jewish" soundtracks. "Broadway Goes South" is just one of several playlists you can enjoy!

For those who didn't get a summer vacation this year, we created the ISJL Virtual Vacation, providing digital road trips to historic sites and featuring scholars, chefs, authors, and those working to advance social justice in the South. Kicked off with livestreams on Facebook,

you can experience the Virtual Vacation anytime on our website!

The rhythm of the world may have changed this year, but the ISJL hasn't missed a beat. We pivoted quickly and strengthened communication, increased participation, and expanded the reach of our meaningful programming to the communities, families, and individuals who need us.

Of course, there have been no shortage of challenges. We have had to work hard and move fast to keep up with new needs brought by the pandemic. Our hearts ache for all those impacted by illness, and also by the natural and unnatural disasters that plagued so many this year. We miss face-to-face contact, and continuing to inspire new donations in a difficult year is no easy task. But we do have one excellent challenge: a matching challenge!

Thanks to an anonymous foundation, right now donations made toward our capacity-building initiative will be matched—a 1:2 match up to \$500,000. This is an amazing opportunity! If you can, as you consider your year-end giving, please send a contribution to the ISJL. It will do so much for connection and Jewish continuity—and your dollars will be stretched even farther when we meet the match challenge goal.

I invite you to visit our website and reach out to our staff, our board members, and me. Let us know how we can best serve you and your community. Thank you for staying connected to the ISJL so we can stay a step ahead in these historic times to keep all of us connected.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jay Hesdorffer". The signature is fluid and cursive, written over a white background.



Participants in the Tea and Torah minyan at the 2020 ISJL Education Conference.

EDUCATION

PERSISTENT PARTNERSHIP IN PERPLEXING TIMES

BY RABBI MATT DREFFIN
DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION

BETHANY BERGER
ASSISTANT DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION

SERVING OUR COMMUNITIES through partnership is at the heart of the work we do. We don't just drop off the curriculum and say, "Good luck!" That's what makes the ISJL education program different: it's personal, adaptable, and usually has lots of in-person connection points.

Our approach to education has always been designed to give partner congregations the resources and support that they need to make the curriculum work for them. We are accustomed to guiding communities through changes like sudden

increases and decreases in student numbers, combining grades, and onboarding new educators.

But this spring, the Education Department and our partners all faced the same unprecedented challenges.

Immediate changes accompanied the COVID crisis when it hit this past spring, and we started thinking about how to support our partners in new ways. What would they need in the coming weeks, if not months? We didn't just wonder—we researched as best we could, and asked our

communities what they needed most. Then we set about doing what the ISJL Education Department does best: brainstorming and writing engaging programming.

Within the first weeks of the pandemic, we put together online resources for students to continue their Jewish learning at home with their families. Then we created a series of interactive and engaging digital lessons, run by our own team, for all age groups. When it became apparent that social distancing and digital classrooms would become

the norm heading into the 2020–2021 school year, we immediately began to ponder, “How do we support our communities, giving them the best of what we have to offer when we cannot visit them in person?”

The first big, in-person event we had to adapt was our annual Education Conference. It required a complete rethinking of how we train teachers, since we would not all be gathering in Jackson, Mississippi. We made the decision to move our annual June conference from in-person to all-online. We thought, planned, and rehearsed so that, when the day came to welcome our 330 registrants, we executed impressive, efficient, and useful sessions.

The feedback we received after the conference was quite positive. Many people let us know that they had clear takeaways that would help them in the coming year. Whether it was “Seven Jewish Creative Sensibilities” they took from our keynote session with Dr. Miriam Heller-Stern or the need to cultivate safe, positive Jewish spaces as detailed in our Safety, Respect, and Equity session, our participants came away with concrete action items for moving forward in this new world.

Then it was really time to buckle down and prepare for a school year like no other.

Our first big task was adapting the curriculum. It’s specifically designed to be interactive in a classroom setting, where students can hold hands, sing together, and co-create as they absorb Jewish content. We reached out to some former Fellows to get us started on adapting the lessons to make more sense for a digital platform—shortening the lessons, making them as interactive as possible, creating slides that will work for screen-sharing, and trying to make online teaching as effortless for the teachers as possible. By the end of this year, we will have created a whole second version of the curriculum that can be run completely digitally.

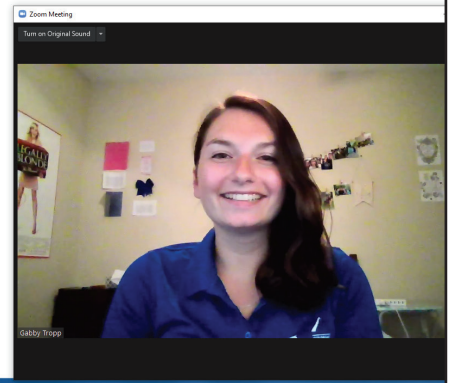
The second adjustment was learning how to provide useful virtual “visits” to communities. In many ways, our team members

have become experts in digital classrooms. We worked with video conference platforms like Zoom and Google Classroom, in order to more easily train teachers in our region to feel confident and lead exciting lessons. We have become familiar with a variety of other technological resources to show how students can remain actively engaged in the classroom, even as they learn in their own homes.

There have been challenges, and it has been hard. But our team is committed to the mission and we can see inspiring resilience in our communities. We will continue to move forward in the new and unique ways required of us to address the needs of our partners. To paraphrase the Mishnah, our time is limited and the work seems overwhelming; although we may not finish the task, we will never desist from trying to tackle it as best as we can.

Teacher Training Agenda

1. Introductions
2. ISJL Virtual Lessons & the Program Bank
3. Technology Workshop
 - a. Zoom functionality
 - b. PollEverywhere
 - c. Mural
4. Questions
5. Personal Goal-Setting
6. PollEverywhere Exit Ticket



VAK Learning

Visual

Visual learners need to see things (pictures, words, diagrams, etc.) to do their best learning.

Auditory

Auditory learners need to hear things to do their best learning.

Kinesthetic

Kinesthetic learners do their best learning in hands-on, do-it-yourself activities.

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

MEET THE 2020–2022 ISJL EDUCATION FELLOWS

JULIAN COHEN

Julian grew up in Arlington, Virginia, right outside of Washington, D.C. After finishing his studies at Lawrence University, Julian was excited to head further south for his ISJL fellowship. “I am excited to join the Institute of Southern Jewish Life as an Education Fellow because I love Jewish communal life and want to become a Jewish professional,” says Julian. “Having spent a lot of time in small Jewish communities, I know how vital the work we are doing is for so many people.” In his spare time Julian likes to play music, read, and bake. He makes a pretty good loaf of challah, so ask him about that sometime!



LANDON CRAWFORD

Landon recently graduated from Ohio University where he studied media and animation. He moved around a lot growing up—he spent elementary school in Richmond, Virginia; middle school in Plano, Texas; and high school in Columbus, Ohio—but wherever he lived, his family was very active in the Jewish community. This job is a great fit for him, Landon explains: “I learned the importance of Jewish education early. When I had the chance to bring Jewish education to others, I instantly took the opportunity. I taught Sunday school in college, which is what inspired me to look for future jobs in Jewish education once I graduated. Former ISJL Education Fellow Leah Apothaker told me all about the incredible work the ISJL does. Since starting here at the ISJL, I’ve already fallen in love with the great people that this position has allowed me to come in contact with, even from a distance.”



THE MORE THINGS CHANGE, THE MORE THEY STAY THE SAME— WHICH means that even though we had to make our new staff orientation mostly virtual this year, we still welcomed new team members this summer! We're thrilled to introduce you to our already-hard-working new Education Fellows. Especially if you haven't had the opportunity to meet them in person yet—with no in-person conference or community visits on the calendar since they have been here—we encourage you to drop them an email and say hello anytime.



DYLAN RICE

Dylan brings a special background to his work as an ISJL Education Fellow: he was once an ISJL education student! Dylan grew up in Columbus, Georgia, where he attended Temple Israel. Temple Israel is a longtime ISJL partner community, and Dylan received a religious school education rooted in the ISJL's very own education program. As Dylan describes it: "I was fortunate enough to receive a Jewish education with the ISJL curriculum. This education granted me a solid foundation upon which I could proudly express my Jewish identity. It is this foundation-building that led me to work at the ISJL, where I get to assist in the process of securing the future of Judaism in the South." A recent graduate of Columbus State University, Dylan's interests include history, politics, cooking, DJing, and exploring the great outdoors.



GABBY TROPP

Gabby is a recent graduate of Lafayette College in Pennsylvania, where she studied history, Spanish, and Jewish studies. Growing up in Connecticut, she was excited to explore new parts of the country, which made this fellowship appealing. Says Gabby: "I am so excited to be working at the ISJL because I love seeing new places, meeting new people, and being a part of Jewish communal life in all its forms. I am looking forward to the next two years of learning and living Jewishly in the South!" When she isn't adapting curriculum or digging into her new life in Jackson, Gabby enjoys watching TV and movies, reading, cooking, teaching herself to play the guitar, and learning to speak Hebrew.



FELLOW FLASHBACK: RABBI GREG WEISMAN

THE ISJL FELLOW ALUMNI NETWORK (FAN) IS A GROUP OF INSPIRING YOUNG PROFESSIONALS WHOSE careers and studies span a variety of fields, but who all have one thing in common: they spent two immersive years as ISJL Education or Community Engagement Fellows!

Two FAN members, Claire Solomon Nisen and Gabi Cohn, are spearheading FAN membership and engagement efforts. One of the fun tasks they've taken on is collecting profiles of former fellows. In this issue we're excited to feature Rabbi Greg Weisman, who served as an ISJL Education Fellow from 2005 to 2007.

So Greg, what inspired you to become an ISJL Fellow?

I remember it vividly. It was May 5, 2005, and I was parking my car on a side street of the campus at Boston University, going to my final class as an undergrad. I had applied to the rabbinical program at the Hebrew Union College, and was advised by HUC to spend a few years working before going to rabbinical school. At the time, former ISJL Director of Education Rachel Stern was still in Cincinnati, but had been working with the ISJL as a consultant, and so my name went from HUC to the ISJL. My phone rang with a number and area code I didn't recognize (601!). I answered the phone and found myself speaking to a man with a strong southern accent: Macy B. Hart. He introduced himself, the organization, and the fellowship. He said that he was on his way to Boston to visit his daughter and wondered if I would meet him. We had breakfast a few days later, and within a few weeks I had graduated

from BU, gone back to Chicago, packed up my life, and moved down to Jackson.

What did you learn during your time as a Fellow?

The thing that I carry with me and utilize on an almost-daily basis is the knowledge that every person that I meet is bringing their own story and their own experience to that moment. Coming from Chicago's North Shore and an upper-middle-class upbringing, most of the people I knew growing up were similar to me. The treasure of my time at the ISJL was meeting so many people at the 15 or so congregations I worked with directly, some of whom had similar backgrounds to me, and some of whom had very different experiences. Throughout my time after the ISJL, in all of the congregational and communal settings in which I have served, I have tried to carry that with me, to enter into every conversation with the goal of understanding the people I meet in a deeper way.

What are you up to these days?

I'm in my seventh year here in Boca Raton, Florida, as the rabbi at Temple Beth El, and it continues to be an incredible experience. The congregation has a wonderful foundation of great lay leadership, a solid professional staff, and engaged congregants. Lifecycle events are a big part of life in Boca, and it's not unusual (in non-COVID times) for me to have a bris or a baby naming, a funeral, and a bar/bat mitzvah or a wedding all in the same week—sometimes even on the same day!

I do a lot of teaching—adults and high school students mostly, but I spend some time in the religious school and preschool as well. My educational background that I began at the ISJL and continued by pursuing a master's in Jewish education at HUC (alongside my good friend Rabbi Matt Dreffin, from day one in Jerusalem to our ordination together!) has been an essential tool in that aspect of my job. These days I am spending a lot of time working on our social justice initiatives, which focus primarily on racial justice and voter engagement. But beyond the "work," I very much enjoy being a part of this community. For my family—me, my wife Tami, and our three girls—the temple is in many ways our whole life. Most of our friends are at temple, our younger two go to preschool there, and our oldest goes to religious school there!

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"THE TREASURE OF MY TIME AT THE ISJL WAS MEETING SO MANY PEOPLE AT THE 15 OR SO CONGREGATIONS I WORKED WITH DIRECTLY, SOME OF WHOM HAD SIMILAR BACKGROUNDS TO ME, AND SOME OF WHOM HAD VERY DIFFERENT EXPERIENCES."

SHAMOR V'ZACHOR:

How Can We Truly Guard and Remember?

BY RISA KLEIN HERZOG

DIRECTOR OF DEVELOPMENT

HOW DO WE KEEP MOVING forward while still guarding and remembering the past? How do we synthesize what is still needed while discarding what is no longer useful or available? How can we ensure that our work will be ongoing? These are the challenges we've been navigating this year.

At the ISJL, we expected 2020 to be a year of celebration. We began the year by celebrating our twentieth anniversary and all of the amazing work we've done with our community partners over the past two decades. Our official anniversary was in February. In March, the pandemic changed everything. This year has been marked by tragedy, restlessness, and fear.

How do we carry these memories and guard the legacies we care about so deeply? One way is through planned giving—designating something for the ISJL in wills and estate plans. These vital gifts protect the ISJL's important work and help ensure our long-term financial security. Close to half of the ISJL's board members have created a planned gift in their estate which will provide for the future of the ISJL. This illustrates the vision, generosity, and dedication of our board to support, connect, and celebrate Jewish life in the South in perpetuity. We need others to join them in this meaningful action.

The ISJL's past Fellows, who now number more than 60 in total, remember what they taught and learned during their time at the ISJL. They carry these experiences with

them throughout their careers and lives. This impact is far-reaching, as our Fellows are from all over the United States and continue their careers throughout the country. They are the future of the Jewish people—not just in the South, but nationwide.

Across the entire organization, we are guarding and remembering what matters most about our work and why we do it. It is an honor and an enormous task to contribute to Jewish identity and continuity.

On a personal note, I, too, am reflecting on how I will guard and remember this strange year. All of this came at a very significant time in my life. My husband and I are “empty nesters” again, having just returned from settling our daughters into their sophomore and senior years of college (as “settled” as things can be right now). For months, they have watched us work from home and navigate this pandemic. Through my work at the ISJL, they have virtually witnessed the power of the southern Jewish community coming together for Passover, Shabbat, Havdalah, conferences, comedy events, and more.

Perhaps in all of this, my most cherished moments have been lighting our Sabbath candles together each Friday night. Before her recent passing, a dear elderly friend entrusted me with her Shabbat candlesticks. A new depth and layer of meaning has been added to our Shabbat blessings as I reflect on my friend, and on the honor and responsibility I have to

guard and remember the traditions of our people. Lighting the candles was not a new tradition for our family, but we were all back together again to partake in the ritual during the pandemic, able to use my friend's candlesticks—and my hope is that our daughters will remember this unexpected time together and be reminded of the grounding of Shabbat and its beauty.

With so many things feeling uncertain at this time, here is what I know for sure: I am proud of the important work of the ISJL, which is relevant and needed now more than ever. During this unprecedented time, my family has turned to the Jewish community for support, resources, and connection. I am grateful and proud to be part of the Jewish community.

The timing may seem odd, but it has worked out well that throughout this year the ISJL has been engaged in a strategic planning process that will catapult us confidently and purposefully into the future. Also, thanks to an anonymous foundation, we are in the midst of a matching challenge that will leverage new and increased gifts to support our ongoing capacity-building. My hope is that you also take pride in the value provided by the ISJL and that you will be an inspired donor in the years and decades ahead. The actions we take now will guide the generations that follow as they decide what to protect, guard, and remember.

Thank you for your ongoing support and dedication to the ISJL.

To discuss your legacy hopes or giving goals, email development@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 rherzog@isjl.org.

MEET THE BOARD: PEPE FINN & SCOTT MILLER



Pepe Finn. Image courtesy of the St. Louis Business Journal.

PEPE FINN GREW UP IN New Orleans and still feels a strong connection to the Jewish communities of the Deep South. She has been on the ISJL's Board of Directors for a decade, most recently serving on the Executive Board as Treasurer.

Pepe brought a lot of expertise to the table as ISJL Treasurer. She has served as the CEO of the investment firm Stern Brothers since 2009 and is particularly proud of increasing the firm's commitment to diversity. Pepe's drive to make a difference personally and professionally has driven her to contribute to a number of organizations. In addition to the ISJL, she is also currently on the board of the Nine Network of Public Media (PBS Channel 9) and is a trustee of the Citizens Budget Commission, and has served as trustee and Chairman of the Board

of the Metropolitan St. Louis Sewer District—all of which led her to be recognized by the St. Louis Business Journal as one of the city's 25 most influential businesswomen. Pepe holds a Bachelor of Arts in Political Philosophy from Louisiana State University and a law degree from St. Louis University School of Law. She and her husband Terry raised their family in St. Louis and always keep up with a whirlwind of activities.

Why I initially got involved in the ISJL: I got involved with ISJL because my Jewish identity was powerfully informed by having grown up in the South. This identity was nurtured by friends and families from small towns across the South throughout my life. Whether it was the friend from Natchez who came to my confirmation, the family in Meridian

with whom I spent Passover, or the wonderful rabbi from Hattiesburg, my Jewish identity was shaped by these meaningful relationships with Jews across the South. The opportunity to give back and be engaged with the ISJL in the mission of supporting, connecting, and celebrating Jewish life in the South was compelling, and speaks to my heart.

My favorite aspect of southern Jewish identity: My favorite aspect of southern Jewish identity is the connectivity. My Midwestern-raised children are not far off when they say southern Jews either all know each other or are all related. I believe this sense of connectedness is something special, binding anyone with southern Jewish ties together and rooting us in a vital southern Jewish legacy.



SCOTT MILLER JOINED THE ISJL's Board of Directors in 2015. A native of Indianola, Mississippi, he has a close, personal connection to the smallest communities served by

the ISJL. As a Dallas resident, he and his family are also committed to the larger Jewish community, which led them to establish the Scott and Julie Miller Philanthropic Fund of the Dallas Jewish Community Foundation.

Professionally, Scott is a Chartered Financial Analyst (CFA) charterholder and is the founder of Miller Global Investments, an investment management and financial planning firm in Dallas. He graduated cum laude with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Economics from Vanderbilt University, and earned his Master of Business Administration degree in Finance from The Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania before returning to the South. He and his wife, Julie, make their home in Dallas with their three children, and are very active in their local community.

Why I initially got involved in the ISJL: My family epitomized the Jewish immigrant experience. My grandparents and parents were supportive of the ISJL. Macy Hart, whose farsighted vision I admire tremendously, had recruited me to join the board for years. In 2015, the timing felt right. I have always marveled at how sensational it is for the ISJL to offer Jews across the South access to the Jewish activities that many of us, who live in large cities, take for granted.

My favorite aspect of southern Jewish identity: The uniqueness of growing up in a small town and living a Jewish life while also assimilating into the broader community has been a remarkable experience for me. This organization has served as motivation to me to be even more involved.

DID YOU KNOW? ADDITIONAL TAX & GIVING INFORMATION FOR 2020

THIS YEAR, THE CARES ACT makes a new charitable deduction available to individual taxpayers who do not itemize their deductions. This new benefit allows for a charitable deduction of up to \$300 per individual. This is an above-the-line cash contribution that is deducted from the individual taxpayer's income prior to the calculation of their adjusted gross income. This is the one charitable giving benefit that will extend beyond the 2020 tax year.

In addition for 2020, the CARES Act provides incentives for both individuals and corporations by increasing the available deductions on qualified charitable cash contributions to most public charities by increasing deduction limits as follows:

- **100% of their adjusted gross income for individual taxpayers who itemize their deductions.** Beyond the scope of the CARES Act, the

deduction for qualified charitable cash contributions made by itemizing individual donors is limited to 60% of their adjusted gross income. Contributions of any kind of other property including marketable securities or real estate do not qualify.

- **25% of taxable income for corporations, up from the 10% limit which is generally applicable for corporations outside of the CARES Act.**

Speak with your tax professional about maximizing your deductions and ensuring that you can more effectively support all of the charitable organizations you value. The ISJL is a 501(c)3 nonprofit, and contributions are deductible to the fullest extent allowed by law.



RABBINICAL SERVICES

IF YOU LOVE IT, LET IT GROW

BY RABBI CAROLINE SIM
DIRECTOR OF RABBINICAL
SERVICES

ONE THING WE CAN SAY about 5780 is that it has been a year full of change. At this time last year, no one could have predicted the ways in which our lives would change just a few short months later.

Let's face it: there has been a lot of change, for all of us. We have had to re-think how we work, how we play, how we live, and how we move around society. Many of us have even had to re-learn how to effectively do our jobs because of the new requirements of the pandemic.

There has been a lot of change at the ISJL, too. At the beginning of the pandemic, Rabbi Aaron Stucker-Rozovsky finished his term at the ISJL, and I began my work here. The ISJL is going through a strategic planning process in an effort to analyze how best to serve southern Jewish congregations, which will bring a change in our vision and the way we carry out our mission.

With all of this change, now more than ever it is important to keep our Jewish communities together. Now more than ever, we need to *shamor* (guard or keep) and *zachor* (remember) Judaism in our hearts,

in our minds, and most importantly in our lives.

However, while we are remembering our traditions and guarding our Jewish identities, we also need to be flexible enough to innovate. Meeting on Zoom is different from meeting in a café. Going to services online is different from going to the synagogue to pray. We cannot expect to feel exactly the same at home as we do at synagogue or in the public sphere. Although we might prefer one way of doing things over the other, neither is inherently better than the other; they are just different. Each situation calls for a different set of expectations.

Sometimes, new adjustments yield new programs we'll definitely want to keep. This past summer, the ISJL had its first digital "Meet the Rabbi" session, where I had the opportunity to meet some of the members of the southern congregations I now serve. The ISJL could have offered such a function in the past. However, the idea only came when the ISJL had to solve the puzzle of how the new rabbi could meet ISJL communities while still conforming to quarantine restrictions. Now, even when travel resumes, offering an all-community virtual "Meet the Rabbi" session is a new tradition we can keep!

Let's consider the Israelites. In order to get to the Promised Land, the Israelites had to leave behind everything that was familiar—both the good and the bad. For 40 years, they wandered in the desert. Every day they had to pack up their homes, move, and then unpack and set up new temporary households at the end of every single day (except Shabbat). Although the Israelites always knew what direction they were going in, they never knew who would be their neighbor that night, much less a week in the future.



Then, in the middle of this chaotic time, they received the law at Sinai, outlining new expectations and rules for their new reality as a free people.

Here's the key: the Israelites existed long before the law was given at Sinai. The Israelites didn't stop being Israelites once they left slavery, nor did they become different people once they received the law. The group that left Egypt was essentially the same group that entered the Promised Land. Leaving behind a life of slavery, adopting and adapting to a new way of life, and figuring out how their existing Israelite traditions and identity fit into their newly-received law only served to strengthen the Israelites and unify them as a people.

That doesn't mean these changes are easy. But I know we are up to the challenge. After all, every generation of Jews has had to do it. In every generation, we've faced a changing world and figured out how Judaism would fit into that new

environment. In the past, most of us have had the comfort of making these changes more gradually, as opposed to having them spring up suddenly. But we're still built to withstand these big changes.

In the same way, we need to think of the current situation as a challenge rather than a barrier, as an opportunity rather than an obstacle. How do we innovate? How do we grow? How do we live in the world as it is now while keeping and remembering our connection to tradition?

May we find our answers to these questions by following the examples of our ancestors, and always adapting while still preserving our heritage. May we have the wisdom to adjust to new circumstances and innovate for changing circumstances. Above all, may we have the patience to endure and trust that there is sweetness ahead. I look forward to meeting you in person, and I am thankful to be a part of this tremendous community.

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



HISTORY

PROTECTING OUR MEMORIES: Why We Share Southern Jewish History

BY DR. JOSH PARSHALL
DIRECTOR OF HISTORY

REMEMBERING IS AT THE CORE of my work. Through the ISJL's online Encyclopedia of Southern Jewish Communities, we sustain public memory of Jewish communities across the South. In doing so, we protect the legacies of Jewish life in hundreds of communities—large and small, regardless of whether or not any organized Jewish institutions still exist there. Although the events of 2020 disrupted my plans for collecting and sharing memories of Jewish life in the South, the help of community members in Mississippi towns and cities has allowed me to continue to preserve Jewish

memories in the state and affirmed the significance of this aspect of the ISJL's work.

My current efforts to revise and update the Mississippi section of the encyclopedia are a good example of our preservation efforts. I have already edited our entries for Brookhaven and Clarksdale. In both towns, Jewish residents established congregations that lasted from the 1890s until the early 21st century. Brookhaven's synagogue now houses a local history museum, which includes permanent displays about Jewish history and customs. Clarksdale's

Congregation Beth Israel is no longer standing. Both towns still have Jewish cemeteries. Whatever material evidence of Jewish life remains—Hebrew headstones, a former synagogue, conspicuously Jewish names on a downtown storefront—the encyclopedia serves as a vital repository of publicly-available information in the absence or near-absence of a local Jewish population. Both for current non-Jewish residents of the town and for local Jews who once lived there or whose forebears settled there, our encyclopedia entries provide context for and



*Above: The Torah procession to the new Congregation Beth Israel in Gulfport, 2009. Provided by Lori Beth Susman.
Below: Adolph Kerstine, one of the first Jewish settlers in Clarksdale and Coahoma County. Provided by Margery Kerstine, who has also compiled extensive historical data on Jewish life in and around Clarksdale.*

confirmation of personal memories and family stories. At the same time, these histories offer clues and leads for local historians and Jewish genealogists in search of further details.

Whereas the Clarksdale and Brookhaven entries recall Jewish communities that are no longer active, other entries tell the ongoing stories of Jewish life in the South. As I edited the Biloxi-Gulfport essay in April, I had phone calls with local Jewish residents about how Jewish families of Congregation Beth Israel and Chabad of South Mississippi had adjusted their Passover plans in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. For communities like these, I hope that the encyclopedia serves as a source of strength, an affirmation of their significance within the local community and belonging to a broader Jewish community.

Of course, many of the recent

phone conversations and emails that have connected me to Mississippi Jewish communities and their memories took the place of in-person meetings that I had hoped to schedule this summer. Whereas I had planned to travel throughout Mississippi collecting stories, photographing synagogues, and creating digital scans of historical images, I found myself working from our guest bedroom (and in August from my parents' basement in Missouri!). Despite the change in plans, I've received enthusiastic support from individuals associated with several Mississippi Jewish communities. As I keep working on revisions, it's encouraging to know how much people value the encyclopedia as a source for collective memory and how willing they are to add their own stories and share their own objects of memory in support of our historical work.



To learn more about southern Jewish history, email history@isjl.org.

COMPLICATED BUT TRUTHFUL: Keeping and Remembering our Whole Heritage

BY NORA KATZ

DIRECTOR OF HERITAGE & INTERPRETATION

MY FAVORITE MOMENTS IN my role as Director of Heritage and Interpretation happen when I get to expand someone's understanding of the history of Jews in the United States and give them a more complicated view of our country's history in the process. Sometimes those moments happen in conversations about our work restoring and preserving historic Temple B'nai Israel in Natchez, Mississippi. Sometimes they happen during workshops about teaching Jewish immigration with our traveling trunk. Other times, they happen at sites of memory like the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, Alabama.

When the country shut down in mid-March, I was determined to keep having these moments of clarity and transformation. When we began a long-overdue national reckoning about the need for racial justice in this country, I was doubly convinced that these conversations couldn't stop—southern Jewish history is inextricably linked to the history and contemporary experiences of African Americans.

With all of this in mind, we launched the ISJL Virtual Vacation. The project started out as a question: how do we bring stories of the Jewish South into peoples' homes in a way that is engaging, conversational, and enriching? How do we show people the ways in which the story of the Jewish South fits into larger conversations about equity, racial

and economic justice, and activism?

The ISJL Virtual Vacation is a weekly series of online programs celebrating the history and culture of the Jewish South. Our first session gave participants a taste of the big themes and major events in the history of Jewish life in this region. We moved on to sessions about Natchez, home to the oldest Jewish congregation in Mississippi, and the

history of Jewish summer camp (a presentation I delivered from a tent that I pitched in my living room). In preparation for the High Holidays, I developed a series of programs about Jews and the Civil Rights Movement. We visited Selma together (virtually, of course), and talked about themes of empathy and complicity in southern Jews' responses to the Movement. There



Above: Nora poses with an award for Excellence in Stewardship of Historic Sites from the Mississippi Heritage Trust—the only truly socially-distant photo option is a selfie, of course.

Left: Temple Israel (Boston) participants visit Selma (photo by Fallon Rubin).



A protest for racial justice in Jackson, Mississippi this summer was the largest demonstration in the city since the Civil Rights Movement.

is so much more to come, and I am so excited to share it with you.

This program has been an excellent reminder of what's possible for the ISJL and the Heritage and Interpretation Department, even in the face of national tragedy and crisis. Connecting people to nuanced, complicated, thoughtful, and truthful interpretations of our shared past is an important facet of how we will move through this moment together.

On a personal level, it has been incredibly energizing to take the time to talk with public historian colleagues from across the South in preparation for each Virtual Vacation session. Doing public history work virtually can be exhausting—

colleagues are working together on this front, and in many ways it has been comforting to have near-constant meetings, strategy sessions, and check-in messages about how to keep moving when the world feels like it's crumbling around us. But some days the task feels Sisyphean—like we're just pushing a boulder up a hill on a Zoom call with no end in sight.

In developing Virtual Vacation sessions, I get to take a pause. I get to learn from my colleagues and hear them talk passionately about their work—whether that's doing a comprehensive study of outbuildings used by enslaved people in Natchez; planning for summer camp in 2021; helping

young people register to vote; or even just bragging about their amazing coworkers. The fact that I get to share these conversations with all of you is the cherry on top.

I hope that you have enjoyed the Virtual Vacation, and I hope that stories of the Jewish South remain meaningful to you in the year ahead. I also hope that engaging with the history of Jews in the South encourages you to get involved in telling the story of your local community, and challenges you to think about the ways in which we are all complicit in injustice and racism in America. We have a lot of work to do and a lot of stories to tell as we keep and remember the multilayered truths of our past.

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



CHAI CLUB: HOW MONTHLY GIVING HELPS NONPROFITS

THERE ARE SO MANY WAYS THAT MONTHLY GIVERS HAVE A HUGE IMPACT ON NONPROFITS—something we’re reminded of at this time in particular. Why is a monthly gift such an important contribution?

- Monthly gifts provide stability. Predictable support allows the ISJL to plan better and to be more efficient. While there are always more dollars to be raised, knowing there is a consistent base of support coming in each month is tremendously beneficial.
- Monthly gifts increase connection. Ongoing gifts are meaningful and convey your confidence and trust in the ISJL’s work—something for which the ISJL is grateful, and also something that inspires other donors to give!
- Monthly giving can be more accessible for new donors. In particular, monthly giving gives opportunities to our younger donors, who may not have the capital yet to make larger gifts. All gifts at all levels are meaningful to us!
- Consistent contributions make a large impact over time. As an example, \$18/month is an easy amount to contribute—and also ensures \$216 in our annual budget, which helps shore up essential programs and support!
- Monthly giving is convenient. Once in place, monthly giving doesn’t need much maintenance, and the records are always easy to track for donors and for institutions.
- Chai Club contributors truly shine. Monthly donors to the ISJL are highlighted and recognized as Chai Club donors in *Shalom Y’all* magazine, and we’re interested in expanding the ways we celebrate our donors in the years ahead... feel free to share your ideas!

We would be delighted if you joined the ISJL’s monthly giving society. It’s easy—just visit www.isjl.org/donate and select “Join the Chai Club.” Plus, new Chai Club members or those who grow their gift amounts in 2020 can count toward our ongoing 2020 Matching Challenge, making your gift go even farther!

Thank you!



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

ASK AND ANSWER: SAFETY, RESPECT, EQUITY

BY RACHEL GLAZER

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PROGRAM MANAGER

THE ASK (ACT, SHARE, KEEP) program incorporates three avenues through which communities can engage with Jewish social justice. We can take direct **action** in the form of mutual aid, community service, and creative exploration of how we approach justice on the ground. We can **share** with one another by breaking bread and opening up lines of dialogue that challenge our assumptions about others' experiences. And we can **keep** Jewish teachings at the heart of our work by engaging with ritual and text to guide our actions.

As I consider the commandment from which we drew this pillar of the program, *shamor v'zachor*, I connect even more strongly to the alternate translation of *shamor*: to guard. By keeping our traditions

at the forefront of our minds, we can call upon our spiritual strength to support our growth from the turmoil of 2020. We cannot be content with a flash in the pan, but rather, but rather, to paraphrase civil rights organizer Ella Baker, we must commit ourselves to the slow and patient work of collective freedom.

As an organization with such a broad regional reach, the ISJL hopes to be a resource for congregations looking to catalyze change in their communities from within. In the past year, our staff underwent a series of trainings through a larger network of Jewish organizations known as SRE (Safety, Respect, Equity) that seeks to create safe, respectful, and equitable workplaces and communal spaces in North America.

After Beth Kander-Dauphin's

informational session about SRE at this summer's Education Conference, the Zoom meeting's chat box was brimming with thoughtful questions and enthusiastic suggestions. Thanks to a grant from the SRE Coalition, we are able to provide the (virtual) space for these conversations to all of our partner communities for free through the Department of Community Engagement's newest ASK module: Safety, Respect, and Equity.

The SRE module is a 90-minute virtual session designed to help participants understand the broad concepts of safety, respect, and equity and how they connect to the SRE movement in the Jewish world. Participants will discuss how to communicate and advocate

Left: ISJL staff learn about SRE at an in-service by Ta'amod last year. Right: Lance Wheeler presenting to TAP Mediators.

for these principles in their communities through Jewish text study and collaborative activities. Ultimately, we aim to connect our partners with the resources to help them more deeply engage with ongoing SRE initiatives.

These initiatives call upon communities to lead from our Jewish values by seeking accountability and addressing inequalities in our synagogues, nonprofits, educational spaces, and community centers. Initiated as a response to the inequities and harassment that were brought to light by the #MeToo movement, SRE provides the tools for us to rise to the ethical standards of our tradition and openly move toward long-lasting, systemic change as a Jewish community.

With the face of the modern workplace and worship center shifting almost daily, it can be tempting to say that these conversations should wait until things settle down. But 2020 has been a year of unseating previous notions of what constitutes "normal." We have a unique opportunity in this moment to reshape our expectations of how we treat one another, both in the digital or physical world.

In order to keep and to guard our driving values, it is time for us to let go of systems and habits that leave out many of our neighbors and congregants. In supporting, connecting, and celebrating the southern Jewish community, this year we are also challenging our partners to keep pushing for a safer, more respectful, and more equitable future for us all.



ZADECK TAP MENTORS 2020–2021

THE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT team is excited to kick off our first year of the Talk About the Problems (TAP) Zadeck Mentorship, made possible by an endowment from the Zadeck family. Community members from local universities, nonprofit organizations, law firms, and related fields will volunteer their time to mentor TAP high school mediators about how their conflict resolution skills apply to various professions.

The virtual learning format that has been adopted by our school partners provides a unique opportunity for mentors and mentees to engage more frequently

via Zoom. Monthly small group sessions will cover topics such as setting realistic goals, connecting personal interests with conflict resolution skills, career exploration, mock interviews, job shadowing, and more. At the conclusion of the school year, Zadeck TAP Mentors will be invited to the district-wide Induction Ceremony to be acknowledged alongside their mentees.

We remain deeply grateful to the Zadeck family for sponsoring this mentorship program. If you would like to sponsor an ISJL program, email development@isjl.org.

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

PROGRAMMING

FROM IN-THE-ROOM TO ALL-ON-ZOOM: Keeping Cultural Programming Going Strong All Year Long

BY ANN ZIVITZ KIENTZ
DIRECTOR OF PROGRAMMING

THIS SPRING, WE REALIZED that cultural programming was going to be pretty different for the foreseeable future. But that didn't mean there was no future—only that we had to think outside the box and remember what our big goals were as we kept cultural programming going.

Maintaining the relationships between clergy, lay leaders, congregants, Federations, JCCs, and the ISJL was of the utmost importance. Everyone wanted to continue providing high-quality

Jewish programming for their communities, and it needed to be easy and affordable. That's when the ISJL's beloved shared-programming structure made the move to Zoom.

The big idea of reduced costs through partnerships has been a mainstay of the ISJL Cultural Programming Department for years. We moved to Zoom, and our program became even more accessible as partners signed up to share events on the same night!

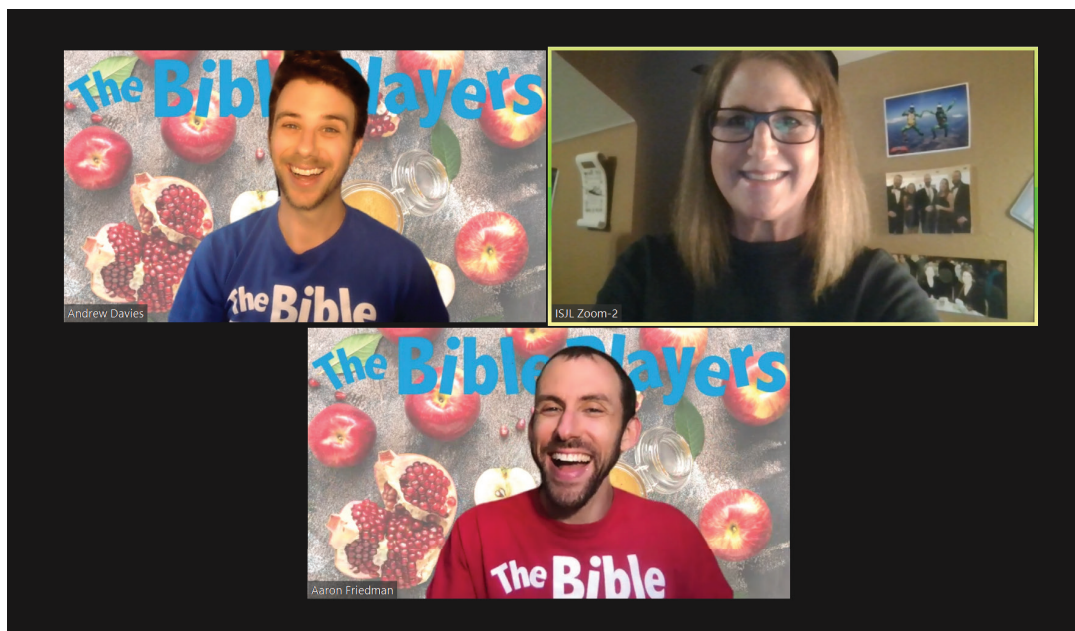
In May we coordinated with four Federation partners to share

a Saul Kaye concert and a three-part class by Dr. Joel Hoffman. In June, the ISJL hosted comedian Benji Lovitt, musician Batsheva, and another round of learning with Dr. Joel Hoffman, working in partnership with four Federations, one JCC, and eight synagogues. July's offerings included the California-based theatre company JWT, comedian Joel Chasoff, and one of our newest presenters, a band called The Ruach. That month, we were delighted to be working in partnership with two Federations and nine congregations.

To close out our summer programming offerings in August, renowned Jewish musician Dan Nichols presented a fantastic concert. Drawing a crowd of people wanting to remember their much-missed summer camp experiences, Dan broke all of the previous records of attendance with eleven partner congregations spread across eight states participating in that program!

The lineup for our late autumn and winter programming for this year includes musician Joe Buchanan, more performances from JWT, an adult "rated (R)esh" comedy show from The Bible Players, and a special first night of Chanukah concert by another rock star from the Jewish music world: Julie Silver!

Rabbi Erin Boxt of Temple Beth El in Knoxville, Tennessee, shared these words with us: "As our world continues to be rocked by the COVID-19 pandemic, it is absolutely necessary and vital to remain connected as best we can not only to those in our own community, but also to Jews everywhere. The ISJL Summer Programming series provided great



opportunities for us to connect with other communities while being entertained, learning, and just enjoying everything offered. Thank you so much to the ISJL! We look forward to our continual relationship with the ISJL!"

Virginia Brissette Hirshik, President and CEO of the Jewish Council of North Central Florida, wrote to tell us: "We love working with the ISJL! We sponsored our first program in 2015 and have worked with the ISJL on several other events since. Certainly during the last few months, providing interesting and affordable program options has been a great service to the Jewish community. The ISJL offers a wonderful array of Jewish programming and Ann Zivitz Kientz makes the process of planning events so easy! For the JCNCF, partnering with the ISJL means we are supporting an important Jewish institution and the Jewish scholars and artists that they work with. Additionally, we are able to offer timely and compelling Jewish content to our community members and donors—it's a win for everybody!"

We look forward to returning to in-person programming at some point in 2021, but this experience has taught us all that Zoom events as an add-on or stand-alone are likely here to stay. Zoom has broadened everyone's opportunities to experience more Jewish programming and to connect to the Jewish community all over the region and beyond. We'll keep the best of what we're learning now—and remember all the wonderful in-the-room events in years past that will once again bring people together in the future!

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



GIFTS & GRATITUDE

THANK YOU TO OUR SUPPORTERS

IN THESE PAGES, YOU CAN SEE THE IMPACT THE ISJL HAS ON THOUSANDS OF people just like you. With deep appreciation, the Goldring/Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life extends thanks to everyone who made a contribution or pledge from January 1 – September 15, 2020, to enable our important work.

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