

WINTER 2010

# CIRCA

Newsletter of the Goldring/Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life



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## Celebrating and reflecting on ISJL's 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary



Message from  
ISJL Board Chair  
Rayman L. Solomon

The year 2010 marks the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Goldring/Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life. This milestone is cause not just to celebrate, but to reflect on all that has been accomplished since we transformed the Museum of the Southern Jewish Experience in Utica, Mississippi, into a virtual 13-state congregation offering rabbinic, educational, cultural, historical and social justice programming. The lives of

every Jew in the South have been touched in many ways by the work of the Institute during these 10 years. Many of us who no longer live in the South have experienced the work through our family or friends still living there.

Recently, a Jewish Telegraphic Agency reporter visited my hometown of Helena, Arkansas, to report on the remaining Jewish population there, which

includes my parents and uncle. The *Philadelphia Jewish Exponent* followed up by interviewing me about growing up Jewish in the South. The resulting article (see below) also explains my personal commitment to the crucial mission of the ISJL.

### He left his hometown, but hasn't forgotten his roots

By Aaron Passman

Growing up in the 1950s and '60s, Rayman Solomon, the son of David and Miriam Solomon of Helena, Ark., read the *Megillah* in English at Purim; attended Passover seders that concluded not with "Next Year in Jerusalem," but with a rendition of "America the Beautiful"; and was confirmed as a teenager alongside eight of his peers, in lieu of becoming a Bar Mitzvah.

These days, he makes his home in the suburbs of Philadelphia, but Solomon says that his religious and cultural identity came from his experience of being Jewish in a small Southern town, growing up in a classical German-Reform congregation.

His family lit candles and had Shabbat dinners on Fridays and attended services later that night -- there were no Saturday Shabbat services, he said -- at Temple Beth El. He attended Sunday School and received "a strong education in Bible stories," though

not much in the way of Hebrew instruction.

Said Solomon: "I think my sense of both identity, and that Judaism is about belonging to a community, is heavily influenced by my experiences growing up as a very small minority" in an overwhelmingly non-Jewish environment.

Yet Solomon noted that many of his generation -- including him and his two brothers -- left Arkansas after high school, most of them not returning. Still, there was an understanding that such would be the case, he said.

"If you go from a group of nine or 10 in my Sunday School class, and only one comes back, the congregation was getting smaller and smaller, and there was not an influx of Jews," said Solomon, 62, who today is dean of law at Rutgers-Camden University and a member of Congregation Beth Am Israel in Penn Valley, Penn.

"I think that most of the

parents recognized that there were dwindling opportunities for their children in these small towns," and so Jewish life would dwindle as well, he explained.

"I don't think any of us regret our decision not to be living there, but all of us regret that there's a dwindling congregation" in Helena, he said.

That sense of decline and loss led Solomon to become involved with the Goldring/Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life ([www.isjl.org](http://www.isjl.org)), where he is chairman of the board.

The Jackson, Miss.-based Institute, celebrating its 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary, serves "as a bridge to try to create a sense of community" among towns where only a few families live, "to try to create a larger congregation of the South," he said.

That's done though multiple avenues, such as the Institute's Museum of the Southern Jewish Experience,

a traveling rabbi and educational, religious and cultural programming.

The idea, said Solomon, is to connect communities in 13 Southern states, so that despite the distance between Greenville, Miss., and Paducah, Ky., these areas can still feel part of something larger.

He asserted that the major Movements have, in a sense, given up on such locales, at least institutionally speaking, focusing their efforts on the far greater percentage of Jews in larger cities and suburbs.

But he emphasized that the diminishment of Jewish life rurally isn't exclusively Southern. Pockets of the Midwest and non-urban Northeast face similar challenges. Affirmed Solomon, "It's a national problem."

*Reprinted with permission from the Jewish Exponent of Philadelphia*



## Needed: More elephant trainers



Message from  
ISJL President  
Macy B. Hart

As the Goldring/Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life begins its 10th year, we assure you that more than ever we'll address head-on the issues that brought this organization into being. I cannot begin to express the pride and sense of accomplishment I feel every day as I watch our amazing, ever-growing staff deliver the ISJL's programs and services.

Our approach isn't revolutionary, but it challenges the assumptions about Jewish life found on our "Jewish islands." I've written and spoken about the island system, in which Jews speak as a community and want to act as one, but do so only in times of crisis. We Jews are at our best when Israel is under attack or we're responding to a natural disaster such as Hurricane Katrina. Why in normal times can't we be cohesive and honor our differences?

The island approach has rendered us incoherent. It wastes, even squanders, resources. Before you read further, you must decide if you can continue with an open mind. I'll address several issues that are taboo on our islands. You're free to move to other sections of CIRCA now. You've been warned.

The Jewish community needs more elephant trainers. Why? The Jewish islands are inhibited from real discussion by the elephants in the room. The islands steer clear of the causes of our communal problems and try to fix the effects. For example, there seems to be a consensus that the state of Jewish education is deplorable. Congregational education is slammed as weak, teachers are maligned as poor, children are bored, etc.

Ninety-four percent of non-Orthodox children who are getting a Jewish education today, from early childhood through middle teens, attend congregational schools. Six percent of non-Orthodox children are in Jewish day schools. Now comes the elephant in the room. Communal dollars raised by Federations and Jewish community foundations are with rare exception funding only the day schools in a very large per capita allocation. Congregations can access little or no communal funding.

Why doesn't the dollar follow the child? A major reason is the way most Jewish communities view their congregational schools. It doesn't have to be that way! The ISJL has proven that. Our work embodies a common curricular system, trains congregational teachers wherever they are, and delivers the curriculum through travelling Educators.

ISJL must be meeting a need, for the Education Program has grown in its nearly seven years to serve 70 congregations in 13 states across Movement and ideological boundaries. We will grow again in 2010/2011 and will begin an initiative with the congregations we serve to seek allocations of communal dollars. The money will come from funds raised on behalf of the entire community – just as taxes in the secular world support public schools regardless of where parents enroll their children.

Congregations should push hard for some per capita dollars to offer their own educational programs. Their efforts may stimulate a true communal conversation and move toward solution. Wait! Is that an elephant starting to move?

Why has the state of Jewish education reached such a low? Those who only condemn the current condition are embracing the symptoms rather than the cause, which is the lack of a common approach with a curriculum that spirals up from the earliest to the oldest child, as in the public schools. Think about when you learned to count in the first grade or before, then to add, subtract, multiply – all the way to higher math as one grade led to the next. Think about the college experience where you sat next to a stranger in math class and assumed a similar background because the secular world had agreed generations ago on what students needed to learn to be successful.

Think about changing schools due to a family relocating to a new state, and how the academic transition is fairly easy. Then think about the transition that *did not take* place in the synagogue school because there was no similarity in what the prior congregation and the new one teach in each grade. Why haven't we wanted to learn from the success of the secular world? One reason is that we can't get past the elephant.

This elephant deals with our not wanting to discuss why our Jewish islands created and then sanctified an educational system that requires and *demand*s that *each congregation develop its very own curriculum, staff and teachers*. Would we tolerate such a non-system in the secular schools? Absolutely not! That elephant keeps us from addressing the fact that we never gave our congregations a similar opportunity for success. Why can't the Jewish community discuss a nationwide Jewish curriculum? Egos, competition among congregations, the desires for independence and

*(continued on page 10)*

## ISJL again among North America's most innovative Jewish nonprofits

### *Receives capacity-building grant from Slingshot Fund*

For the fourth consecutive year, the Goldring/Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life (ISJL) has been named one of the nation's 50 most innovative Jewish nonprofits by the *Slingshot* resource guide.

*Slingshot* highlights organizations, leaders and programs that have taken an innovative approach to addressing age-old challenges to Jewish identity and community. The ISJL made this year's cut after an extensive evaluation process overseen by several dozen foundation professionals.

Additionally, the ISJL is one

of only 10 organizations to receive a capacity-building grant from the Slingshot Fund, a giving mechanism launched by young donors. "The ISJL implements innovative solutions to deliver Jewish programming and resources to communities across the South," explains ISJL President Macy B. Hart. "Our inclusion in *Slingshot 09-10* reaffirms the impact of our work and allows us to continue building our capacity. The demand for our services keeps growing, and with the help of *Slingshot*, we will, too."

ISJL programs serve more than 7,000 families and

partner with more than 100 Jewish congregations and community groups across 13 Southern states.

The ISJL and the other grantees "represent everything the Slingshot Fund investors look for: having a real impact on Jewish life in North America, and making it applicable for the next generation," explains Will Schneider, Director of Slingshot.

Slingshot also recognized Footsteps, an organization that provides a range of services to people who are leaving the Orthodox Jewish

community. Footsteps was founded by Malkie Schwartz, now the ISJL's Director of Community Engagement.

*Slingshot* was created by a team of young funders as a guidebook to help funders of all ages diversify their giving portfolios with the most innovative and effective organizations and programs in North America. Now in its fifth edition, *Slingshot* is a catalyst for next-generation funding and offers a telling snapshot of shifting trends in North America's Jewish community.

## Museum

### 'Journey Stories' exhibit a popular destination

The Smithsonian Institution exhibit "Journey Stories" ended a great six-week run in October at the Historic Natchez Foundation in Natchez, Mississippi. The Goldring/Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life and the local foundation co-sponsored the exhibit's Natchez stop.

"Journey Stories" attracted 1,500 people from 26 states and four countries to the Historic Natchez

Foundation. The exhibit depicted immigrant journeys to and across the United States. The ISJL mounted a complementary exhibit about Jewish history in Natchez and Mississippi.

The ISJL sponsored several successful programs in connection with the exhibit that brought attention to Natchez, the Southern Jewish Experience and the ISJL mission. Every fourth grade public school class in Natchez



*Students visit the Jewish display that complemented the "Journey Stories" exhibit in Natchez, Mississippi*

visited along with students from Natchez parochial schools and schools in the surrounding area.

ISJL Museum Projects Director Kate Lubarsky and Associate Education Director Jordan Magidson led tours through the exhibit and gave an introductory talk about Judaism and the history of Jews in the Natchez community. Kate and Jordan spent a day with fourth and fifth graders from Natchez's Trinity Episcopal day school during their field trip to local historic sites.

Most of the students had learned about world religions earlier in the semester and asked great questions. They were so excited to learn about all the different holidays and hear spoken Hebrew!

**HOLOCAUST TORAH GETS NEW HOME** – From 1967 until closing in 2009, Temple B'nai Shalom in Brookhaven, Miss., housed a Czech Torah that had survived the Holocaust. With help from Macy B. Hart, President of the Goldring/Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life, the Torah has a new home in Raleigh, N.C. Macy connected Rabbi Raachel Jurovics, who was seeking a Torah for her Heartspace interfaith organization, with B'nai Shalom's Steve Liverman. Steve drove the Torah to Raleigh in November 2009. The rabbi already has visited the Czech Republic with the Torah, which she uses as a teaching tool. Pictured at the Torah transfer are (from left) Steve Jurovics, Stacy Grove, Rabbi Raachel Jurovics, Sandra Liverman, Steve Liverman and Rabbi Lucy Dinner. Courtesy of Steve Liverman



## Programming

### Many instruments in many communities

#### Visiting Israeli musician Amir Gwartzman to perform and teach across South

Amir Gwartzman, one of Israel's finest musicians, will visit dozens of Southern communities from February through May 2010 as a Schusterman Visiting Artist. He'll perform concerts, give workshops on some of the 24 instruments he plays, teach music students and speak to civic and religious groups. His visit is underwritten by the Charles and Lynn Schusterman Family Foundation of Tulsa, Oklahoma, and coordinated by the Goldring/Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life.

From his temporary base in Jackson, Mississippi, Amir will travel to Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Louisiana, Oklahoma, Tennessee and

Texas. The ISJL hopes that a successful visit by Amir will lead to additional residencies by other artists to serve communities throughout the ISJL's 13-state service region.

Amir presents a solo concert that he calls "Inhale-Exhale." Surrounded on stage by 20 woodwinds, horns, pipes, flutes and percussion instruments, Amir plays earthy r & b, soaring modern jazz and rhythmic Cuban jazz. For most of his songs, he constructs an ensemble sound, instantly recording one instrumental part atop another until the music swells into a blend of rhythm, melody and harmony. One jazz piece alone features Amir on clarinet, classical and

wooden flutes, tenor sax, baritone sax and three percussion instruments.

Amir has performed worldwide as a solo jazz musician and a member of the acclaimed Israeli world music band Esta. He is a master of saxophone, clarinet, flute, bagpipes and a woodwind section full of African, Asian, European and Middle Eastern instruments, including Armenian duduk and Irish penny whistles

For the past 10 years, he has given workshops regularly for students at U.S. universities and high schools. In 2007, he presented workshops in Thailand as well as two solo concerts in Hanoi, where he collaborated with



*Amir Gwartzman brings knowledge, passion and more than 20 instruments.*

Vietnam's top jazz musicians. In 2009, he collaborated with European and African musicians at the EuroMed Music Festival in Hungary, Serbia and Poland.

For more information, contact Andy Muchin, the ISJL's Director of Programming, at [amuchin@isjl.org](mailto:amuchin@isjl.org) or (601) 362-6357.



## Dan Nichols concert creates *Kehillah Kedoshah*

*Kehillah Kedoshah* – holy community. That’s what the fifth and sixth graders at Temple B’Nai Israel in Panama City, Florida, want for their congregation. And that’s just what they got on Dec. 20 when more than 50 members of three synagogues gathered for a concert by recording artist Dan Nichols.

B’Nai Israel won the concert, donated by Dan, through an essay contest sponsored by the Goldring/Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life. In the fall, ISJL’s Education Department asked fifth and sixth graders in its partner education communities to write a 200- to 300-word essay on the topic: “*Kehillah Kedoshah* means holy community. How would a Jewish concert contribute to your holy community?”

The topic was inspired by Dan’s song “*Kehillah Kedosha*.” All of the entries



*Dan Nichols with young fans at his Panama City concert.*

impressed the contest judges, a panel of ISJL professionals. The winning essay was a group effort by 10 students at B’Nai Israel. (See box to the right for an excerpt.)

The Panama City congregation invited members of B’Nai Israel Synagogue in Pensacola, Florida, and Temple Emanu-El, Dothan, Alabama, to share the concert. The students were excited to

meet Dan, pose for photos with him and create shakers to accompany Dan’s own lively Jewish songs as well as popular Jewish camp songs.

Thanks to Dan for contributing his time and talents. Thanks also to Karen Swanay of Panama City for helping to organize the event. The ISJL is happy to have made the concert available.

## ‘We want more kids to join us’

*Following is an excerpt from the winning essay in ISJL’s recent contest for fifth and sixth graders (see above). The essay was written as a group by 10 students at Temple B’Nai Israel in Panama City, Florida: Jacob Haiken, Ezra Holbrook, Josh Holbrook, Hannah Joseph, Stephen Momberger, Max Nagler, Hannah Peterson, John Swanay IV, Liam Swanay and Ben Zipes.*

“We know there are more Jews in the area, and we’d like to get to know them. We’d like to have more members for our temple so we could get a Rabbi full-time... We want what other kids have – a feeling of belonging to a community that supports and cares about us. We have that at temple, but we’d like to have more kids and more things to do together. We think this concert would help get the word out that we are here and we want more kids to join us.”

## May is Jewish American Heritage Month.

ISJL encourages communities to join the celebration!

Check our website, [www.isjl.org](http://www.isjl.org), for updates or email [information@isjl.org](mailto:information@isjl.org) for more information or resources.

## Education Conference to feature expert on congregational schools

Growing up in the small Mississippi town of Winona, Macy B. Hart noticed the sacrifice and struggle of his religious school teachers. Two of them were his parents, who owned a department store. Macy learned early on about the challenges that part-time, volunteer teachers face: no professional staff to direct them, no curriculum to guide them and no colleagues for exchanging ideas or simply commiserating. His parents and their friends persevered as teachers because they had no alternative.

While working for 30 years, the future ISJL President learned that his parents' situation was far from unique in Southern Jewish communities. Rabbis, educators and volunteers were making do without the resources available to religious schools in larger cities.

Therefore, ISJL's Education Department has three very important components: a comprehensive curriculum;

a staff of Education Fellows trained to do almost anything a religious school may need; and an annual Education Conference that allows teachers from across the region to meet in a central location to network, collaborate and learn from master educators and each other.

Rabbis, educators and volunteer teachers from an expected 85 communities in 13 states will attend ISJL's "Go and Teach" Education Conference from June 27-29, 2010, in Jackson, Mississippi. The attendees often are among the only Jewish people in their towns. At the Education Conference, they'll pray, learn and, very importantly, talk with nearly 200 other Jews.

Each year, the Education Conference invites master educators to aid our teachers as they continue to grow. We're pleased to announce that Rabbi Samuel Joseph, Ph.D., Professor of Jewish Education and Leadership Development at Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion in Cincinnati, will be the keynote speaker. Rabbi

Joseph specializes in the ways in which Jewish institutions and organizations strive for excellence as they seek to fulfill their mission and vision. He also mentored ISJL Education Director Rachel Stern.

Rabbi Joseph has extensive experience working with congregational schools through his work as a consultant to professional and volunteer leaders and

in supporting them in their endeavors. He is the author of four books, including *Portraits of Schooling: A Survey and an Analysis of Supplementary Schooling in Congregations* and *How to be a Jewish Teacher: An Invitation to Make a Difference*.

For more information about the 2010 Education Conference, see the ISJL website, [www.isjl.org](http://www.isjl.org), and watch your mail.

*The Education Conference also includes hands-on community service, such as sandwich-making for a food pantry at the 2009 gathering.*





## Whirlwind working weekends: ISJL Education Fellows hit the road

By Alli Goldman

Without a doubt, the community visits are the highlight of my job as an Education Fellow at the Goldring/Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life. I love the travel and experiencing the unique character and feel of each congregation I serve.

But a community visit begins long before one of our 10 Education Fellows arrives at a host family's home on a Friday afternoon. We start preparing for a visit at least a month in advance. Along with a rabbi or educator in the community, we develop programs and activities for the Religious School and the entire congregation. By the Thursday before a visit, our boxes are packed with supplies, lesson plans and thank you gifts, and the office is abuzz with excitement for the weekend.

Typically, our weekend begins early Friday morning as we pick up a rental car or get dropped off at the Jackson, Mississippi, airport. After a day of travel, we arrive at our destinations to visit with our host family and freshen up for the evening's activities. We attend Friday night services

and often give a *d'var Torah* (Torah lesson). If there's no rabbi in the community, we may lead services. Afterward at the Oneg Shabbat, we schmooze with congregants, learning about their lives and discussing the ISJL's many departments.

Saturday morning can go a number of ways. If the community holds services, we Fellows often participate by reading from the Torah, giving a *d'var Torah* or receiving the honor of *aliyah*, or being called to the Torah. We may read a story at a Tot Shabbat or lead the Junior Congregation in an art project. In other communities, Saturday morning is a great time to lead Torah or text study or other adult education activities.

Afterward, we usually attend a Kiddush luncheon and mingle with congregants. Saturday afternoons allow us to spend time with our host family, tour the city, visit a museum, eat a candy apple at a festival or take a much needed Shabbat nap.

Saturday evening usually means a program at the synagogue. Sometimes we



Education Fellow Jessica Kent working with Religious School students at Temple Emanu-El in Atlanta.

participate in a community *Havdallah* service. We sing songs, recite the prayers and, of course, eat a little something. Or we may lead a Youth Group program that starts with *Havdallah*, followed by a film, art project or games. If we're feeling ambitious, we may lead a lock-in event on Saturday night for the Religious School students. The all-night lock-ins allow us to get to know the students and present some fantastic programming. The hardest part, other than getting the kids to go to bed, is waking them up for Religious School on Sunday morning.

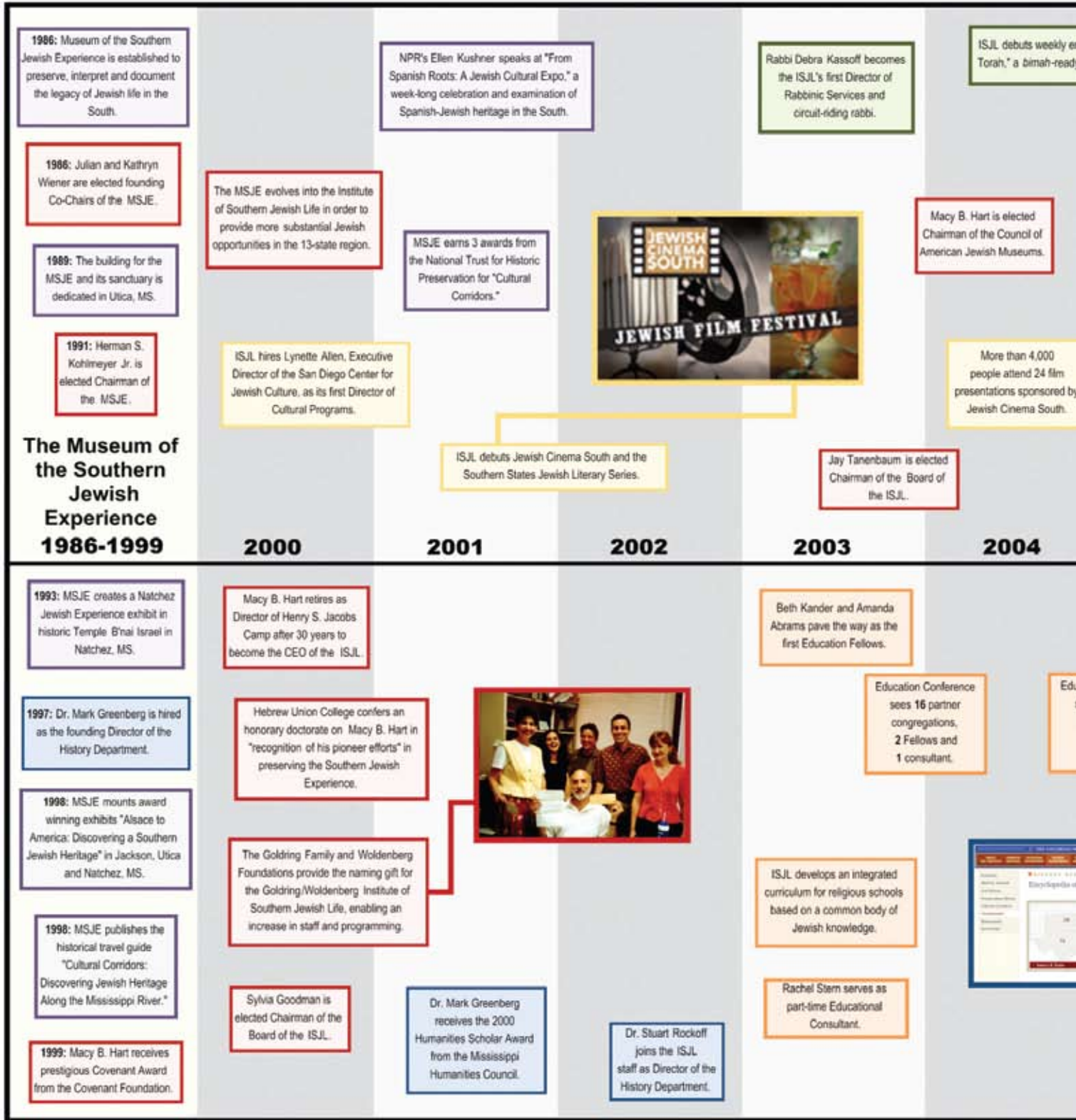
Religious School is our time to showcase the ISJL Curriculum and other programs we've worked

so hard to create. We may lead an all-school or family program. We may visit various classrooms and observe and participate in their lessons. It's thrilling to see the words on the pages of the curriculum come to life for the students.

Following classes, we usually lead a meeting for teachers. We may talk about behavior management and the curriculum or lead a text study about education. Then we say our goodbyes and head back to Jackson to rest, because on Monday we return to the office and begin preparing for our next community visits.

*Alli Goldman is a first-year Education Fellow.*

# A Decade of Growth for the Goldring/Woldenberg



## Legend:

Museum of the Southern Jewish Experience (MSJE)

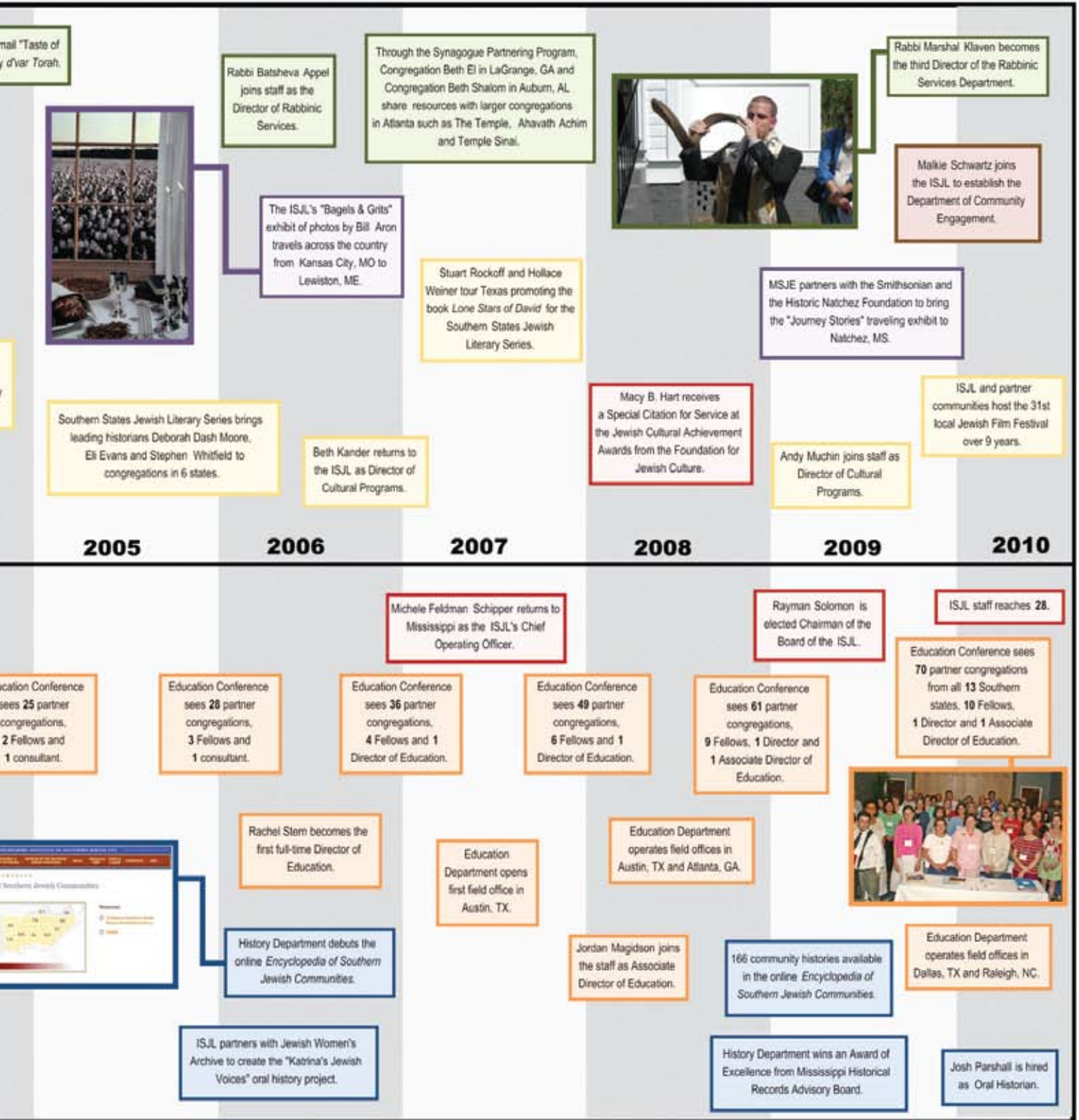
ISJL Board and Operations

Education Department

Cultural Programs



# Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life: 2000-2010





## Field Offices operate in Dallas, Raleigh

As the Education Department has expanded to serve Religious Schools in all 13 states of our region, it is increasingly working with communities located 600 to 1,000 miles from the ISJL office in Jackson, Mississippi. To ensure that ISJL Education Department staff is in close proximity to all of the communities, ISJL has opened field offices staffed by second-year Education Fellows.

The first office opened in 2007 in Austin, Texas, to reach the growing number of religious schools ISJL serves in Texas and Oklahoma. In 2008, ISJL established an office in Atlanta to serve Religious Schools in the Southeast.

This year, ISJL moved each office to increase its proximity to the partner communities. The Texas office is now located in Dallas, staffed by Rachel Jarman. The Southeastern office is situated in Raleigh, N.C., staffed by Shelby Deeney.

These field offices function like our Jackson office in providing an Education Fellow for three visits per year to each participating religious school. The Fellows teach, network, recruit, attend programs and events and bring the same excitement and enthusiasm that all of the Education Fellows are known for. Just as all of our Jackson-based Fellows become part of each community they visit as well as of Jackson, our field office Fellows become part of the communities in which they work and live.

*(PRESIDENT: from page 2)*

creativity are among the conversation stoppers. Yet the best way to improve a product collectively is to engage people's creativity. No one prevented my first grade teacher from getting me to a third grade reading level if she could. She knew, however, to make sure I and my classmates could read on at least the second grade level when we got there.

It's easy to blame the teachers for the congregational schools' problems. The reality, though, is that those teachers aren't trained and certified. The schools don't always hire an expert to write a curriculum

for all ages, and normally the congregational schools have just 2.5 hours to teach each week. If we know that, then why don't we fix the problem? Why haven't our leaders, either from the top down or the grassroots up, demanded that we transform the non-system by putting the tools we already have into the hands of our teachers, whether they are volunteer or professional? It's because the solution seems just too big to address and it's easier to put another band-aid on the wound instead of addressing the cause. There's another elephant.

I'll close by suggesting that the reader question the Jewish edu-

cational non-system. Consider whether the standards we demand of our secular world should bring focus to the Jewish educational dialogue that must take place. If we really want different, measurable outcomes, then we are going to have to do things differently. Otherwise we should just let the non-system continue to occupy our conversations, penalize our children and waste more crucial years – in other words, feed the elephants.

## What the Education Department has up its sleeve

When the ISJL Education Fellows plan their community visits, they learn what their communities need to enhance the lessons in the ISJL Education Curriculum. It's then the Education Department's job to meet those needs.

We create programs for students, teachers, adults and families. In the past year alone, we've devised a family education program about the gates of the Old City of Jerusalem, a classroom management session for teachers using the story of the four sons from the Passover Haggadah, an all-school program on Jewish heroes, a children's program on loving oneself and others, and many more.

Not only do we bring these new and unique resources to the communities that request them, but we share everything we create with all of our communities – with the Education Fellows as ambassadors. These programs enliven Jewish education in new and meaningful ways and help students of all ages celebrate being Jewish.

## 'Check Tire Pressure'

By Rabbi Marshal Klaven



"Check Tire Pressure." The message lit up on the dashboard of the rental car I drove through southeast Arkansas this past November. For many, thoughts of a punctured tire might enter the mind along with a concern for an impending blowout that would leave the traveler stranded on some remote country road. But my mind carried no such worry. My dad was an auto mechanic. I had learned from him long ago that in the winter, as the air gets cold, it is natural for the tire to lose some pressure because the air molecules within it slow and condense. So, I continued to drive.

Passing cotton field after cotton field, I began to think how this natural process applies to many things in life beyond tires. That is to say, when the winter season of existence rolls around, most things seem to naturally slow and condense, saving what little energy they have left for when it really matters. But, what about our congregants who are experiencing the winter season of their congregations? Do they, too, slow and condense, saving what little energies they have left for when it really matters?

Or, are they able to weather this course differently?

Many of the 130-plus congregations that the ISJL Rabbinic Department serves feel the chill of winter more acutely with the passing of each year. Or, more accurately, these congregations feel the change in season more acutely with the passing of each member. The greatest resource any congregation has is its membership. When that membership decreases, especially within these small Jewish communities, an external pressure mounts which frankly threatens to flatten the congregation.

Yet many of the congregations I encounter on my travels defy the natural process. In the face of a dwindling membership and a growing scarcity of resources, their congregants exude an internal pressure (i.e., vitality) that keeps the mounting external one at bay. "The weight of maintaining the congregation is mounting on our shoulders. Now," one of these congregants told me in a very reflective tone, "we can shrug off our responsibility. But, then, our congregation will fall. Or," he continued more assuredly, "we can bulk up, embracing our responsibility to hold up our congregation as high as we can for as long as we can."

Throughout the ISJL coverage area, congregants have indeed bulked up their congregations through greater participation in social service projects with their neighbors, greater efforts to explore and learn the eternal values of their Jewish faith and greater attendance at Jewish communal worship. One remarkable example is Anshe Chesed Congregation in the historic town of Vicksburg, Mississippi. Although the congregation is experiencing an ever-decreasing membership with an average age approaching 80, Anshe Chesed holds a Shabbat *minyan* every Friday night with nearly 90 percent attendance!

With so many other examples like this, it's time for our large congregations to take a lesson from our smaller ones. It's time for all of us to "check the tire pressure" of our congregations. For no matter where we are on the road in our Jewish journeys, we shouldn't wait for the warning signifying a change in the season of our congregations. Rather, we can – as these congregations have done – exude an internal pressure through our involvement in congregational life which keeps the external pressures at bay. Surely then we can drive on, assured that our Jewish community will not run flat or experience a blow-out!

## Jewish role vital in development of North Carolina

By Dr. Stuart Rockoff

North Carolina was among the last Southern states to develop permanent Jewish communities and congregations. Though individual Jews settled in North Carolina as early as 1585, not until 1872 did Tarheel State Jews establish a lasting congregation, Temple of Israel in Wilmington. Over the next several decades, Jews settled in virtually every corner of the state, with most opening retail stores.

In Statesville, brothers Isaac and David Wallace built a large herb and root business in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century that supplied medicinal herbs to customers around the country and Europe. In Greensboro, two pairs of brothers, Moses and Ceasar Cone and Moses and Emanuel Sternberger, established large cotton mills that helped to transform their sleepy town into an industrial center.

William Heilig and Max Meyers opened a furniture store together in Goldsboro in 1913. The Heilig-Meyers Co. eventually grew into the largest publicly traded furniture retailer in the United States. In

Whiteville, Lithuanian-born Joseph Mann opened a department store in 1922 and incorporated a Star of David into the logo. Today, the store is run by Joseph's grandson, Terry Mann, who was elected mayor of Whiteville in 2009.

For a long time, North Carolina enforced Christian oaths on all public office-holders that effectively prevented Jews from serving. One exception was Jacob Henry, who was elected to the North Carolina House of Commons in 1808. When his seating was challenged by another legislator, Henry delivered an impassioned speech defending religious liberty in America, which convinced his colleagues to allow him to take his rightful seat. Still, the Christian oath requirement remained until 1868. In recent decades, a handful of North Carolina Jews have served in state government, including Marshall Rauch, who spent 24 years representing Gastonia in the State Senate, and the colorful Jerry Popkin of Jacksonville, who arrived for his first day in the State Senate in 1977 in a chauffeur-driven limousine.



Courtesy of The North Carolina State Archives.

*Gertrude Weil of Goldsboro was North Carolina's leading advocate for women's suffrage.*

Jewish North Carolinians did not have to run for office to play a role in 20<sup>th</sup> century political change in the state. Gertrude Weil of Goldsboro became the state leader for women's suffrage, fought for child and women's labor reforms and denounced lynching. In Charlotte, native New Yorker Harry Golden published the *Carolina Israelite* newspaper, which used humor to call for racial integration during the time of Civil Rights upheaval.

In recent decades, North Carolina's Jewish community has increased to an estimated 26,500 people, many of them

newcomers attracted to the state's booming sunbelt cities and the economic activity surrounding the Research Triangle. In Raleigh, the Jewish population surged from 490 people in 1960 to 6,000 by 1997. Temple Beth Or has struggled to keep up with the extraordinary growth, adding a new education wing and later a new education building and social hall.

In Charlotte, where the Jewish community grew from 3,300 Jews in 1980 to 8,500 by 1997, leaders created Shalom Park, currently the location of two of the city's synagogues, the Jewish



Community Center, the Charlotte Jewish Day School and the Charlotte Jewish Federation.

Much of this growth is due to Northern Jews moving into the state, drawn by economic opportunity and a high quality of life. The beautiful mountains of western North Carolina have long been a draw for Jews. In the 1930s and '40s, Hendersonville had several Jewish boarding houses that served kosher food to Jews who visited the summer resort town. Philip S. Henry, a well-known globe-trotting Australian Jew who made a fortune in the coffee and copper businesses, purchased an estate on Beaucatcher Mountain in Asheville in 1903. Although he spent much of his time in Europe, Henry continued to call Asheville home until his death in 1933. He was a renowned art and rare-book collector, and was even honored by Emperor Franz Joseph of Austria.

In recent years, Jewish retirees increasingly have moved to the area. In Boone, they have established Temple of the High Country, and are set to begin construction of their first synagogue. As retirees, many of the congregants in Boone spend only part of the year in North Carolina. When



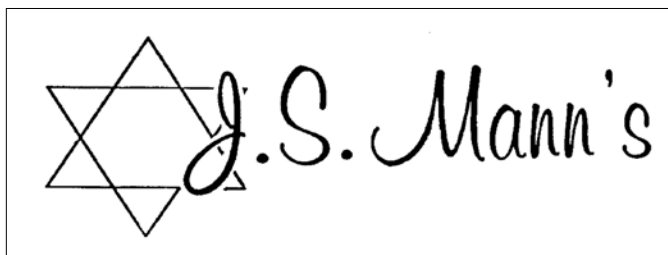
*Brothers Moses (seated) and Cesar Cone were key industrialists and philanthropists in Greensboro.*

the congregation voted to move forward with the construction of a synagogue, members met in two locations simultaneously, Boone and Boca Raton, Fla.

While North Carolina has seen the decline of several of its small Jewish communities in recent years, including

Weldon, Rocky Mount and Wilson, Jewish life has flourished elsewhere in the state, from the booming sunbelt cities of Charlotte and Raleigh to the newly established communities in Lake Norman, Pinehurst, Brevard and Boone.

*In Whiteville, Joseph Mann's department store logo was unabashedly Jewish.*



## North Carolina communities added to online encyclopedia

The ISJL History Department is excited to announce the unveiling of the eighth completed state in its online "Encyclopedia of Southern Jewish Communities."

With 28 community histories, the North Carolina section is the encyclopedia's largest yet, and was the product of several months of work by the entire ISJL history staff, including Director Stuart Rockoff, Oral Historian Josh Parshall and summer interns Aaron Welt and Caryn Miller.

The North Carolina histories would have been impossible to complete without the assistance of the Jewish Heritage Foundation of North Carolina and its historian, Leonard Rogoff.

To learn more about Southern Jewish communities, visit the Encyclopedia of Southern Jewish Communities at the ISJL website: [www.isjl.org](http://www.isjl.org).

## Thank You to Our Contributors!

In these CIRCA pages, you can see the impact our education, history, museum, cultural and rabbinic programs have on thousands of people just like you. With deep appreciation, the Goldring/Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life extends thanks to everyone who made a contribution during 2009, to enable our important work.

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Jonah Hoffman becoming a Bar  
Mitzvah  
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Jay Wiener

Shirley Orlansky's recovery  
Reva & Ellis Hart

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Henry Paris' birthday  
Maurine Lipnick  
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Happy Chanukah to Dotti &  
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Jacob Schipper becoming a Bar  
Mitzvah  
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Irv Feldman

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Pam & Lee Rubin

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