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Calgary Jewish Film Festival celebrates 25 yrs

By Maxine Fischbein, LJL Reporter

The Beth Tzedec Congregation Jewish Film Festival marks an incredible milestone in Calgary next month as film lovers celebrate 25 seasons of the best Israeli and Jewish cinema from every corner of the world.

It is hard to believe that a quarter century has passed since festival founder Harvey Cyngiser – who served as adult education chair at Beth Tzedec – introduced a program using film as a jumping-off point for study about Jewish experience in Israel and the Diaspora.

“I didn’t even realize what was out there in terms of film,” Cyngiser told *AJNews* as he walked down memory lane last month in the leadup to the 2025 film fest which runs November 1-16 at Beth Tzedec.

Cyngiser began tapping into a motherlode of cinematic treasure that he knew he had to share with a much broader audience.

Along the way, the audience has grown to include film lovers beyond the Jewish community, and there have been sublime moments when the content of films proved ideal for collaborations with other ethnic and cultural groups.

“It’s been an outreach program in many ways,” said Cyngiser, adding that over the years, he has invited members of the Vietnamese, Italian, German, Chinese and Jamaican communities to attend screenings and adjunct events.

Other special guests have included filmmakers and film subjects, some of whom are celebrities. Memorable



The *Blond Boy from the Casbah* opens the 25th Annual Beth Tzedec Congregation Jewish Film Festival in Calgary with a feel-good story on Saturday November 1. The festival, which has a stellar line-up of Jewish themed films, runs from November 1-16 at Beth Tzedec.

guests who have spoken or performed over the years at the Film Festival include; Nancy Spielberg, sister to good old what’s his name and a successful film producer in her own right; David Rubinger, who was a celebrated *Time Life* photojournalist; Yonit Levi, one of Israel’s most famous television news anchors, and Avi Nesher, Israel’s answer to Nancy Spielberg’s brother, Steven.

Musical guests over the years have included Shuli Natan, who popularized the Israeli song *Yerushalayim Shel Zahav* (Jerusalem of Gold); Ethiopian-Israeli singer Hagit Yaso and former CPO Concertmaster John Lowry who played one of the Violins of Hope (violins owned and played by Jewish musicians prior to and sometimes during the Holocaust); local Jamaican reggae band Strugglah; and the Jewish Cowboy, Scott Gerber.

From a tango performance to Israeli basketball legend Tal Brody and Team Israel baseball player Cobi Deker, Cyngiser has invited guests that either appeared in the films or whose talents complemented the themes and subject matter.

“The biggest moments were not always the celebrities,” mused Cyngiser, who says he feels most inspired by the everyday people whose extraordinary stories have been told at the Jewish Film Festival, people like Shlomi Biche, an IDF officer wounded in the Second Lebanon War. Following a screening of *Encounter*, the documentary in which he was a subject, he casually strolled into the Beth Tzedec Sanctuary and up to a microphone as the lights came up to the amazement and delight of his Calgary audience.

Another favourite moment for Cyngiser came when

Continued on page 2

Edmonton launches UJA campaign with laughter and inspiration



Comedian Ariel Elias had the crowd laughing out loud at the Edmonton UJA Campaign launch, which honoured Karen Farkas and Clyde Hurtig with the Dianne and Irving Kipnes Kavod Award. They are pictured above with family members. Photos by Tammy Vineberg.

On September 11, the Edmonton Jewish community gathered to celebrate the 2025 United Jewish Appeal campaign launch. Members, friends and allies celebrated the UJA donors, partners, and volunteers, with entertainment by the hilarious comedian Ariel Elias.

It was a wonderful evening – a time to relax with

friends, family and neighbours – to truly laugh and reconnect.

It was inspiring to hear about the important work that the Jewish Federation of Edmonton is doing for our community. CEO Stacey Leavitt-Wright described Jewish Federation’s role as the central organization of the Jewish community.

She said, “We have a unique perspective that allows us to see the entire picture and connect the partners, donors, and leaders to make a lasting impact on the future of Jewish Edmonton.

“The United Jewish Appeal (UJA) annual

Continued on page 4

Film Festival *Cont. from page 1*

producer Nancy Spielberg attended the Film Festival screening of the documentary *Above and Beyond*, which focused on the experiences of American Jewish volunteers who fought in Israel’s 1948 War of Independence.

The film was great, but, says Cyngiser, “The big moment was when Calgarian Frank Kettner...got up and was recognized together with the other Alberta Mahalniks (volunteers from overseas) who served in Israel during the 1948 War of Independence.

“Since the beginning of the film festival, we’ve championed Israeli cinema,” recalled Cyngiser. “For many years Israeli film was well received on the international stage too, but in the last couple of years, there has actually been a boycott of Israeli cinema.”

The vilification has grown since the start of the ongoing war in Gaza sparked by the Hamas Terrorist attacks in Israel on October 7, 2023.

“Film festivals have become venues for this proxy war that is going on in every field including sports, music, and the academic world,” Cyngiser told *AJNews*.

There was angst in the Canadian Jewish community when the Toronto International Film Festival (TIFF) opted to pull director Barry Avrich’s documentary film *The Road Between Us: The Ultimate Rescue* (Canada 2025) from its prestigious film festival this past September.

The film tells the story of retired Israeli general Noam Tibon and his wife Gali who rushed to their son’s kibbutz near the Gaza border in order to rescue their son, daughter-in-law and two grandchildren after receiving a text from their son when terrorists entered their home at Kibbutz Nir Oz on October 7, 2023.

TIFF organizers were eventually forced to reinstate the film, which went on to win the TIFF People’s Choice Award for best documentary,” Cyngiser said.

While it seemed unlikely that the Calgary Jewish Film Festival could acquire a film still making the rounds at major film festivals and slated for theatrical release, Cyngiser secured the right to screen *The Road Between Us* at this year’s Calgary Jewish Film Festival. This affords members of the community the opportunity to see and discuss the film in a safe space.

“Set against the backdrop of one of Israel’s darkest days, and blending intimate firsthand testimony with the raw urgency of a survival thriller, this film is both a gripping cinematic retelling of an extraordinary rescue, and a profoundly human story about courage,

family, resilience, and the human capacity for bravery and love in the darkest moments.”

Another Israeli film to watch for during the 2025 season is *The Sea* (Israel 2025), which garnered a stunning 13 nominations for Ophir Awards, often referred to as the Israeli Academy Awards. The poignant and unforgettable feature film swept top honours including Best Film, Best Director, Best Screenplay, Best Actor, and Best Supporting Actor and will be Israel’s official submission for the 2026 Oscars in Hollywood.

It will be interesting to see how Hollywood reacts to an Israeli film that emphasizes the humanity of the Palestinian boy who is the beating heart of the film. Khaled, who is 12 years old is looking forward to seeing the sea for the first time as he sets out with his friends on a school trip. Prevented from crossing into Israel during a security check, he opts to make his own way to Tel Aviv. The resulting odyssey delivers a moving cinematic experience that underscores the potential when everyday people sadly siloed in two solitudes transcend politics and acknowledge each other’s humanity.

“Especially at a time like this when Israel is at war and reality is so difficult, the fact that through this film we can see *the other* is a hopeful message,” Cyngiser said.

Always Together (Israel 2025) is a documentary that focuses on a group of grade 12 students at Nofei Habsor, a regional high school along Israel’s southern border with Gaza, all of whom were affected by the October 7 terrorist attacks. When they are evacuated from their homes, the young adults plead with the Ministry of Education not to disperse them at the very time they need each other most.

“Some have lost family and friends, but there is still positive energy, this youthful spirit of moving forward and being the next generation that is going to come back to the homes they’ve been displaced from and rebuild,” Cyngiser said.

Always Together is sponsored by Calgary Jewish Federation and will be free of charge thanks to the generous support of Joe and Sondra Spier and the Krell and Cyngiser families.

Film director Paz Schwartz and Shahar Reuven, one of the film’s subjects, will be on hand for the screening and a Q and A.

This year’s Kristallnacht screening, *The Last Twins* (USA 2025) – sponsored by Calgary Jewish Federation – is also open to the entire community free of charge and will be preceded by a brief memorial ceremony.

The Last Twins tells the uplifting story of Erno “Zvi” Spiegel “...who risked everything to save dozens of young twins from almost certain death at Auschwitz.”



The Sea, Israel’s submission for the 2026 Oscars, will be screened on Saturday, November 8 at Beth Tzedec.

At the heart of this remarkable film is the testimony of some of the aging twins who owe their long lives to Spiegel.

When tasked by the angel of death Dr. Josef Mengele to manage the boys, Spiegel used his position to provide them with comfort and hope, thus becoming their guardian angel. The film is aptly billed as “...a testament to resilience, sacrifice, and the power of one person to make a difference, even in humanity’s darkest hour.”

Labors of Love: The Life and Legacy of Henrietta Szold – sponsored by CHW – tells the inspiring story of the founder of Hadassah, Henrietta Szold, whose inspired leadership during the early 20th century helped to shape Israel’s health care system. Szold was also the visionary behind the Youth Aliyah program which rescued and resettled some 11,000 European Jewish children and resettled them in Palestine.

Director Abby Ginzberg – who has a surprising intergenerational connection to Szold – will be speaking following the screening.

In the documentary *Charles Grodin: Rebel with A Cause* – fittingly selected as this year’s Dr. Ralph Gurevitch Tikkun Olam screening – director James L. Freedman tells the little-known story of actor, comedian and TV broadcaster Charles Grodin’s social activism, “...in particular, his remarkable, decades-long fight to get wrongfully convicted people – most of whom were mothers of colour with young children – out of prison.”

This year’s Dr. Martha Cohen Memorial Screening, *Midas Man* (United Kingdom 2024), is an entertaining feature film about Brian Epstein, the Jewish Liverpudlian and showbiz genius who propelled the Beatles to international fame while fighting his own demons.

The 2025 Jay Joffe Memorial Screening, sponsored by the Jewish Historical Society of Southern Alberta, will feature two films, one of which was made right here in Calgary.

Continued on page 13



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(Left) -The Edmonton community received a cheque from the Alberta gov't for \$1 mil to be used toward development of the future JCC. Photo by Tammy Vineberg. (Right) - Hillel leaders recited the names of the hostages still held captive in Gaza during a moving program marking 2 years since the Hamas massacre. Photo by Jim Moses.

Edmonton UJA *Cont. from page 1*

campaign is the engine that powers everything Federation does – in emergencies, in advocacy, in Israel, and right here in this city. We ensure that whether locally, nationally, or internationally, we have a voice representing our community.”

She discussed two important events that recently took place in the community. The first was a roundtable discussion that was held in Edmonton with Minister of Justice, Sean Fraser, and MP Anthony Housefather as well as additional ministers, parliamentary secretaries and MPs. “We had a literal seat at the table,” said Leavitt-Wright. “This was an opportunity for a frank conversation about how antisemitism is affecting our community and the measures that our government can take.”

Later in the month, Jewish Federation of Edmonton hosted Tanya Fir, Minister of Arts, Culture and Status

of Women for a cheque presentation outside of the new Edmonton Jewish Community Centre construction site. “Our provincial government’s support of this project has been a shining example, securing that our community has a hub of connection and continuity,” said Leavitt-Wright.

She urges community members to give generously to the UJA campaign. “Let’s build a flourishing community together,” she said. “We need your support, dedication, and belief in the power of unity. The impact of collective giving strengthens our community, As One.”

Leavitt-Wright took a moment to thank all the local UJA canvassers – “community volunteers who are ‘making the call’ – inspired by the vision of a flourishing community. Most funds that we raise for the community are through canvassing,” she said. “When they reach out, they are helping you fulfill the mitzvah of tzedakah. Just as we answer the call of the Shofar at the High Holidays, there is another call we

hope you will answer—the call of your canvasser.

“A special thank you to my staff team for all the details and efforts that go into making our UJA launch such a success, and to Jewish Federation of Edmonton Co-presidents Benaron Gleiberman and Rebecca Asbell, who provide the exceptional sauce of stalwart leadership as co-presidents. Yasher Koach to our Dianne and Irving Kipnes Kavod Award honorees, Karen Farkas and Clyde Hurtig.

“And a final sincere gratitude to our Jewish Federation of Canada – United Israel Appeal CEO, Steve Shulman, who came especially to be with us, bringing inspiring words, continuously strengthening our community and guaranteeing that Edmonton is a valued member of the national system.

“Thank you for supporting the Jewish Federation of Edmonton and make your gift today to ensure a flourishing future for our community.”

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A MESSAGE FROM BECKY SAEGERT

Tzedakah is personal. When we give together it is transformational.

When my son was in kindergarten, I spoke with his class about tzedakah. Since they were so young, we began by talking about how good it feels to help someone else. I hope that in time those children will understand that some gifts don't only help other people, they strengthen our entire community and everyone in it. Those gifts help all of us, even if we are donors ourselves. This is the essence of the United Jewish Appeal (UJA).

As someone who now helps steward donor dollars for our community, one thing is clear to me: when we give together, we create an impact greater than what any of us could accomplish on our own.

Jewish Federation's unique vantage point enables us to see the full spectrum of needs and opportunities across the community, and to take on new and urgent needs as they evolve. Together, we can tackle complex issues and create opportunities for connection and belonging that foster a sense of belonging. At a time when so many would divide us, this has never been more important.

You can also make an impact in perpetuity by endowing your gift.

In addition to the UJA, we work with donors year-round to help them realize their long-term philanthropic goals. If supporting the community is important to you during your lifetime, the Edmonton Jewish Community Charitable Foundation can help you

establish a permanent legacy of community support. Endowing your annual UJA gift is easier to do than you might expect and ensures that you will continue making an impact in perpetuity.

As we start 5786, we have an opportunity not just to think about what the year to come holds for us, our families, and our community, but what actions we will take to shape what matters most.

What part can I play in repairing the world? What values will I prioritize? How will I lead with my heart? The answers lie in the individual actions and collective impact we make through our UJA gift—because when we support our community together, it's personal and it's transformational.

Becky Saegert is the senior strategic director of development at the Jewish Federation of Edmonton.

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Gordy Hoffman receives Arch Award from U of C Alumni Association

By Maxine Fischbein

A respected member of the Calgary Jewish community and society at large, Calgary lawyer and philanthropist Gordon Hoffman – who last year was honoured by the University of Calgary with an Honorary Doctor of Laws degree – is once again being recognized by the U of C with a 2025 Distinguished Alumni Award for Lifetime Achievement at a ceremony to take place October 16.

In their announcement of Hoffman’s 2025 Arch Award, the Alumni Association referred to Hoffman as “a leader, a builder and a legacy-maker.”

“His name is synonymous with service, and his list of achievements is as inspiring as it is extensive,” said the Alumni Association, citing Hoffman’s work with close to 100 charitable organizations over the past five decades, quite a few of which he established, including the Project Warmth Society of Alberta and its spin-off organizations, Kids’ Koats, Pupils’ Parkas and Students’ Scarfs; the Project Warmth Society of Canada; and Operation Kickstart Society of Alberta.

Hoffman is also the founder, chair, and president of the Alberta Champions Society in Recognition of Community Enrichment. Deeply dedicated to helping children with learning disabilities and ADHD, Hoffman’s eponymous Charity Golf Tournament has raised close to \$2 million in support of Foothills Academy, a school that speaks to his very soul.

Within the community at large, Hoffman has served a diverse range of organizations including faith, interfaith, cultural, arts, and sports organizations. He has served as solicitor and/or advisor, director, honorary director, board member or officer for Jewish organizations including the Shaarey Tzedec Synagogue, Calgary Jewish Community Council (now Calgary Jewish Federation), B’nai Brith Calgary Lodge #816, the Calgary Jewish Senior Citizens Residence Society, Beth Tzedec Sisterhood, Chabad

Lubavitch of Alberta, and the Calgary Jewish Family Loan Association.

Together with his wife Eva, Hoffman has chaired many high-profile and successful fundraising galas. He is particularly proud of concerts that featured former Beth Tzedec Congregation Cantor Alex Stein, the late musician and composer Marvin Hamlisch, the Calgary Philharmonic Orchestra, Frankie Valli and the Four Seasons, Neal Sedaka, and Joel Gray.

Some of these concerts were held at Beth Tzedec, a point of pride for the Hoffmans, who are longtime congregants there. Funds they have raised over the years have benefited the Shul as well as other organizations within and beyond the Jewish community.

A highlight, according to Gordy Hoffman was bringing Holocaust survivor, author, and Nobel Laureate Elie Wiesel to Calgary in 2006, when he addressed a full house at the Jack Singer Concert Hall.

In addition to his Queen’s Council designation in 2000, his appointment to the Order of Canada in 2019, and his honorary Doctor of Laws Degree from the U of C last year, Hoffman has received other prestigious awards and recognitions, among them the City of Calgary Citizen of the Year Award (2010), the Queen Elizabeth II Diamond Jubilee Medal (2012), and the Queen Elizabeth II Platinum Jubilee Pin (2022). Gordy and Eva Hoffman were co-honourees at Theatre Calgary’s Night with the Stars in 2011.

Hoffman has frequently been recognized by Jewish organizations as well. In 2008, he and Eva were honoured at a JNF Gala celebrating the modern state of Israel’s 60th anniversary. Gordy is the 2011 recipient of the Ben Docktor Award of Excellence (B’nai Brith).

At his 50th Anniversary University of Alberta law school reunion, Hoffman was approached for his help with raising funds for a long-established bursary that had begun to stagnate. Hoffman, of course, once again rose to the occasion.

“When I went to law school, [tuition] was \$325,” recalled Hoffman. “I was able to work during the summer...and was able to pay the tuition, which was hardly anything, and live for the rest of the year from the money I made over the summer.”

Hoffman added that it is impossible for today’s law students to earn enough over the summer to do as he once did, so he rolled up his sleeves and did something about it.

At first, Hoffman committed to writing a few letters and figured he would contact 10 former classmates about supporting the bursaries. But anyone who

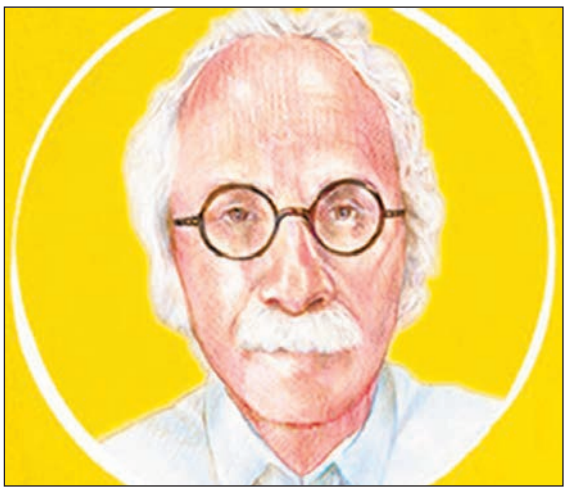


Illustration of Gordon Hoffman by Erin Finley, for the U of C Alumni Association.

knows Gordy Hoffman also knows that he thrives on the human interactions such efforts require.

“I started calling some of my classmates and I was having fun, quite frankly,” Hoffman told *AJNews*. “I hadn’t seen some of them in 50 years.”

In the end, Hoffman personally reached out to the 156 living members of his U of A law class and boosted the bursary by \$100 thousand.

That is quite an accomplishment, yet Hoffman quickly turns the spotlight on others who step up, none more than his wife of 57 years.

“Eva is a lot smarter and more capable than I am,” Hoffman self-deprecatingly states, adding that Eva is very much a part of all the charitable initiatives the Hoffmans have either supported or put in motion over the years.

Hoffman urges his coreligionists to keep in mind that it is important to be philanthropic both within and beyond the Jewish community. For more than five decades he has walked the talk, generously supporting worthwhile civic causes with a particular emphasis on helping those struggling on the margins.

“Many Jewish people are so very supportive of the general community,” says Hoffman, referring to their work on committees, directorships, and a plethora of causes and services that strengthen the social fabric in Alberta and beyond.

“I am proud of what the Jewish community has done. We have contributed a lot here, and we will continue to do so. People should not forget that.”

“This,” Hoffman simply states, “is what we do.”

Maxine Fischbein is a Local Journalism Initiative Reporter.

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Calgary Holocaust Memorial Site enhances reflection and education

By Maxine Fischbein, LJI Reporter

The Calgary Holocaust Memorial site at the Paperny Family JCC has been upgraded and rededicated with beautiful enhancements that have boosted the comfort, safety, and educational potential of the site.

At its centre remains the iconic *Ashes to Life* sculpture by renowned artist Roy Leadbeater. The original memorial and statue – which attest to the inextinguishable spirit of the Jewish people – were donated to the Calgary Jewish community in 1986 by William (Bill) Schwartz and Alyse Schwartz, each of blessed memory, in memory of their parents Louis and Regina Schwartz and Isaac and Celia Schwartzpelz.

Close to four decades later, the site – which had fallen into disrepair – has become more accessible and welcoming than ever due to a remarkable facelift that includes beautiful landscaping, formal pathways, improved lighting and well-thought-out spaces that will help to enhance reflection and education, including planned visits by Calgary and area junior high and high school students and their teachers.

All this was made possible due to a forward-thinking vision that Ron and Barb Krell shared with then newly appointed Calgary Jewish Federation Holocaust and Human Rights Remembrance and Education Co-Chairs Marnie Bondar and Dahlia Libin some five years ago.

Work at the site began in earnest immediately following the annual Yom Hashoah commemoration this past spring.

Professionals who helped bring the Calgary Holocaust Memorial Upgrade Project to fruition include award-winning designer and Certified Landscape Designer Katherine Kinch, founder of Your Space by Design; project manager Tony Sunderland; Contractor Ryan Menzies, of Alpine Construction and Design Ltd; and Lorne Tucker, of Somerville Memorials.

Fittingly, the rededication was held on the day when community members visited local Jewish cemetery sites to pay respect to loved ones during Kever Avot ceremonies between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur.

“This is an important and momentous occasion for our community, said Calgary Jewish Federation CEO Rob Nagus prior to the unveiling of a new dedication at the entrance to the memorial site.

“At a time when Holocaust remembrance and education are more vital than ever, we face both the challenge and the opportunity of ensuring that the lessons and the legacy of the Holocaust remain alive and relevant,” Nagus said.

“This rededication is more than a renovation. It’s a communal achievement that is made possible through the vision and generosity and leadership of so many,” Nagus added, lauding the leadership of Stuart and Elaine Myron and family, Dr. Frances Cyngiser and David Weisfeld and family, Harvey Cyngiser and family, Barb and Ron Krell and family, and the Legacy Fund.

“During the Yamim Noraim, the Days of Awe, we stand together in solidarity within this renewed site honouring the memory of our people who perished in the Shoah and linking them together with those who survived,” said Barb Krell.

“Today we rededicate this space, not only as a monument to the Shoah but as a call to conscience. Rededication means...renewing our vow that Never Again is not a phrase of the past, but a command for the future. It means refusing to allow the silence of indifference to take root,” Ron Krell said.

That commitment is strongly reflected in the establishment of a Holocaust Memorial Endowment Fund that will provide for perpetual care of the revitalized site “...to ensure the legacy of the park endures as a welcoming space for remembrance and the sharing of the lessons of the Holocaust for years to come,” said Ron Krell.

The endowment fund will help to ensure landscape maintenance, lighting, cleaning, repairs, and additions to the site. Community members are encouraged to support the endowment fund, which is managed by the Jewish Community Foundation of Calgary.

“With the completion of this phase, we build on the legacy of survivors who created this meaningful memorial in tribute to their loved ones who were murdered in the Shoah, now honouring their memory, their strength in survival, and courage in sharing their testimony,” Barb Krell said.

Marnie Bondar and Dahlia Libin were tasked with ensuring that the new and improved site will serve not only as an inviting gathering space but an optimal location for onsite education about the Holocaust.

“Aharon Appelfeld once said, ‘After the death of the last witnesses, the memory of the Holocaust must not



Harvey Cyngiser (L), Ron Krell, and Stuart Myron unveil a rededication monument at the entrance to the newly upgraded Holocaust Memorial Park. Photos by Anita Jong Courtesy of Calgary Jewish Federation.

be left to historians alone. Now is the time for works of art,” recounted Bondar. “This powerful sentiment reminds us that memory must be active, creative and living, especially for future generations who will never meet a survivor in person.”

“The Ashes to Life sculpture itself will remain the heart of site, its rough edges representing the scars of the Holocaust, its bronze figures a testament to the

Continued on page 11



B'NAI BRITH

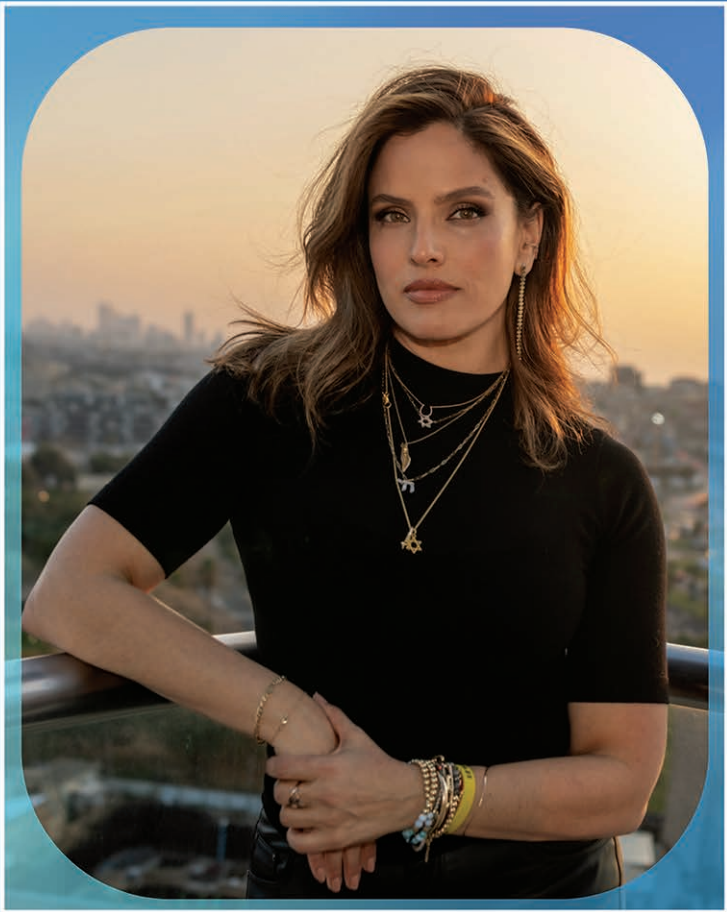
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A MESSAGE FROM THE IBP COMMITTEE

As we enter the year 5786, we pause to reflect, renew, and reaffirm the values that define and unite our Jewish community. At the heart of our response to the ongoing needs of our community is the United Jewish Appeal (UJA) Campaign. More than a fundraising effort, UJA is a lifeline, enabling us to care for one another and ensuring Calgary's Jewish community remains welcoming and supportive—especially for those who are newly arrived or facing challenges. Through UJA, we demonstrate that no one is ever left behind. One of the most powerful ways UJA strengthens our community is through the Integrated Bursary Program (IBP). Established in 2009, IBP removes financial barriers, ensuring that families can access Jewish day schools, summer camps, and other formative programs. Guided by the values of dignity, anonymity, and equity, IBP provides a single, confidential application process, allowing every child

to participate fully in Jewish life. For many families, the financial burden of education and camp can be overwhelming—IBP ensures these transformative experiences remain accessible. This program is not just about meeting basic needs; it builds Jewish identity, fosters belonging, and strengthens the bonds that tie our community together. Since its inception, IBP has grown significantly. Last year alone, we supported 77 families—including 93 children in Jewish education and 35 children in summer camp—including Israeli children who arrived after October 7, allowing them to find stability and connection within our community. As we embark on this New Year, we recognize that the future of our community relies on the generosity of donors to UJA. Your contribution is more than a gift—it is an investment in families, in people, and in the enduring vitality of Jewish life in Calgary. By giving, you help us live out the Judaic principle of

Tikkun Olam—repairing our world—and ensure that Jewish life continues to thrive with dignity, purpose, and pride. **Together We Can** create a strong, inclusive, and resilient Jewish future—one where every member is cherished, every voice is heard, and no one is ever left behind. *Chag Sameach,* Beth Price, Debbie Ryder, and Ellen Magidson
Integrated Bursary Program Committee
Calgary Jewish Federation

Building an inclusive community is a priority. Contact us and we will make every effort to meet your needs.

Thank you to everyone who joined us on September 28 for the **HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL PARK REDEDICATION**. The 2025 revitalization of the Holocaust Memorial Park has been generously donated by Stuart & Elaine Myron and family, Dr. Frances Cyngiser & David Weisfeld and family, Harvey Cyngiser and family, Rob & Barb Krell and family, and the Legacy Fund. The Holocaust Memorial Park and Sculpture, Ashes to Life, was originally donated to the Jewish Community of Calgary in 1986 by William (Bill) Schwartz and Alyse Schwartz, each of blessed memory, in memory of their parents Louis & Regina Schwartz and Isaac & Celia Schwartzpelz. Special recognition goes to Holocaust and Human Rights: Remembrance and Education Co-Chairs Marnie Bondar and Dahlia Libin, who have helped guide this special initiative, and have been so instrumental in delivering exceptional programming for Calgary Jewish Federation. Scan QR code to view more event photos.



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THURSDAY WELLNESS:
Unwind & Restore

OCTOBER 23 • 7-9PM
PAPERNY FAMILY JCC

Take a midweek pause — unwind, connect, and restore your energy. You deserve this!

An evening for parents, relatives, and caregivers of children and adults with disabilities. Connect with others and enjoy chair massage therapy, music, kosher wine, cheese, hors d'oeuvres, and more.

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TOGETHER WE CAN

All events on this page are made possible by your gifts to Calgary Jewish Federation's annual UJA Campaign.

INCLUSION
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SPEAKER
SHAWNA KERR-SMITH

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TUESDAY
NOVEMBER 4
6:30 - 8:30PM
PAPERNY FAMILY JCC

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TOGETHER WE CAN



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JAC
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UJA
2025

\$18

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A COMMUNITY ISRAELI DANCE PARTY

SATURDAY
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8:00PM

FESTIVAL HALL
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The power of community.

UJA
2025

A conversation about Contemporary Humanistic Judaism

By Jeremy Appel, LJI Reporter

Earlier this year, the Jewish Publication Society released *Contemporary Humanistic Judaism: Beliefs, Values, Practices*, a collection of writings about the titular non-theistic branch of Judaism that is rooted in devotion to Jewish history and culture, rather than a supernatural being.

Alberta Jewish News sat down with its editors, Rabbi Jodi Kornfeld (JK) and Rabbi Adam Chalon (AC), who preside over separate humanistic congregations in the Chicago suburb of Deerfield, to discuss the beliefs and practices, and tensions between the particular and universal, at the heart of Humanistic Judaism.

This interview has been shortened for length and edited for clarity.

To start with an obvious question, what is Humanistic Judaism?

JK: We consider ourselves to be the fifth denominational branch of Judaism. It is human centered, and it combines the philosophy of humanism, which is a belief in the power and authority of human beings over their own lives, with a very broad definition of Judaism being the collective experience of the Jewish people. That experience is not limited to religion. It's cultural – so Jewish music, Jewish food, all those things that go into our Jewish identity. It really is the merger of those two things.

AC: Our humanism is coming from understanding how the world works, but also as our understanding of the Jewish experience. If you look back at Jewish history, it wasn't the kindness of the divine protector that made us survive, it was the Jewish people who fought for survival, or moved and were able to adapt to new circumstances, who changed what they did Jewishly over time, to be more appropriate to the settings where they were living. That's one more demonstration that we're on our own, but we're not on our own practically, because we have each other, we have community and we can draw on those strengths.

We learned from the outside world and it became practice, but we experienced it because it was a culture that connected with people around us. And most importantly, culture is made by people, and if people made it once upon a time, then people can change it today. We're not the only ones. The reform movement started with editing the prayer book because it didn't reflect what they believe, and Jewish feminists today add prayers and blessings to reflect a more imminent theology, or one that's open to female divine language that the classical texts don't include. So we're part of this experience of Jews taking what they've inherited and adapting it into something new.

Humanistic Judaism recognizes these very basic human needs of community, of a spiritual dimension to understand that we are part of something larger. It just is confined to the natural world, and so when we want to do liturgy or we want to do life cycle events and ceremonies and services, we use non-theistic language, because we are not seeking intervention.

In the introduction to the book, you outline how Humanistic Judaism grew out of the Reform movement, with Rabbi Sherwin Wine establishing the first Humanistic shul in Detroit in the 1960s after leaving a Reform congregation. What are the similarities and differences between Reform and Humanistic Judaism, as well as the Reconstructionist movement which also came out of Reform?

AC: All three of those movements that you mentioned have some basic agreement on the idea that Judaism changes over time, and that people today have the right and responsibility to adapt their Jewish practice to fit their values.

If you're balancing consistency with your values and consistency with tradition, when you take the Torah scroll out, do you say, "This is the Torah, which Moses placed before the Children of Israel, from the mouth of God, and by the hand of Moses," if you don't believe Moses wrote it? Do you say the old words because they're traditional, or do you write new words that praises the people of Israel who created the Torah over many centuries?

That's where the Reform movement and Reconstructionist and humanistic Judaism diverge on the Torah, where the Reform movement will say those old words, even though their rabbis, their Sunday school program, and their adult learning programs don't believe that Moses wrote this book. They say the old words for the continuity part.

Where the Reconstructionist is more continuity than integrity from our perspective is when it comes to God. Because the Reconstructionist movement, going back to Mordecai Kaplan in the 1930s, didn't really believe in a personal God who intervenes in the world, who writes the Torah, who cares what you eat or what you

wear or who you marry, although they preserve that *atta*, that *you*, that *Melech*, that *King* language in their scripture for the sake of continuity, even if they didn't mean it literally.

Our approach is we want to be as clear as possible with what we believe. We can use poetic language. But let's say what we believe and be able to clearly believe what we say, and that means making more changes. We may lose on the continuity side, but we gain on living out our values clearly.

But when it comes to the equality and inclusion of LGBT Jews, those kinds of values questions, we're in the same place as the Reform and Reconstructionist movements. The liturgy is really where you'll see the lines drawn most.

JC: I would say that in what can be a clash between constituency and continuity, we would jettison the continuity part in favour of consistency, so that we're being very clear. We don't try to salvage language. We don't use Hebrew that says one thing because it's Hebrew and that's the way it's always been done.

If it doesn't make sense with the belief system and the philosophy that we espouse, we let it go or we find a substitute.

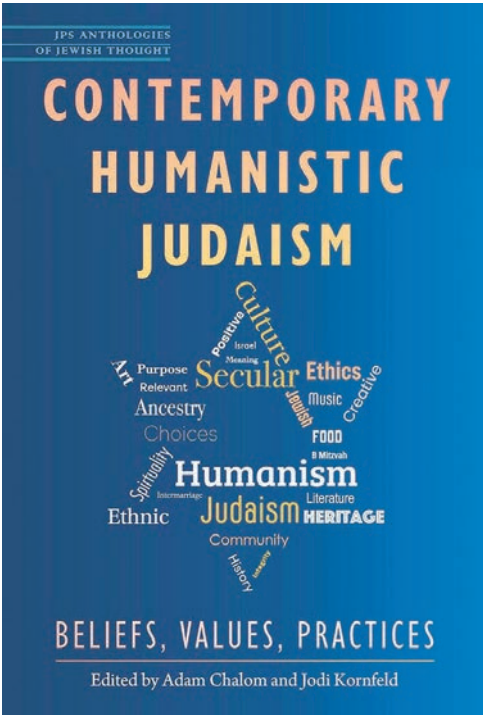
Rabbi Wine argued that there are no uniquely Jewish values, just humanistic values that people who are Jewish hold. In one of Rabbi Chalom's contributions to the book, "Are There Jewish Values," you appear to diverge from that perspective.

AC: Well, I agree and disagree. That's classic rabbinic style. I agree with him that values are not necessarily uniquely Jewish. We didn't invent loving your neighbor, we didn't invent the importance of education. There's lots of other cultures all over the globe that emphasize those kinds of things without having the Torah or the Talmud. Even the 10 Commandments – to not commit murder, to not commit adultery – you find those in lots of other cultures, because they're a reflection of the human experience.

Where I disagree with Rabbi Wine is that I do think that there are certain values that are conventionally reflected in Jewish life, like education and community support. They don't have to be uniquely Jewish to still count as being Jewish. I used the example in the article that my house has an attached garage and a front door with a patio. Is that unique to my house? No, but does it describe my house? Yes.

Saying that Jewish culture has valued learning is accurate. It doesn't mean that no other culture did or that we did it better than everybody else. However, we also have to be subtle about this, because Jewish culture did not value learning for everyone. Historically, it valued it for men and not for women. Modern Jewish culture values it for everyone. In fact, the majority of non-Orthodox rabbis that are coming out of rabbinic seminaries are women. So that's where we can have a subtle understanding of the set of Jewish values, some of which I may disagree with, and the set of my values, and then the overlap, like a Venn diagram, is going to be my Jewish values.

If we're going to celebrate some things and reject other things, we should be aware of all of it and be learned, but also be honest.



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Cartmell
FOR MAYOR

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Holocaust Monument

Cont. from page 7

enduring strength and creativity of the Jewish people, and the tallest figure’s protective arm symbolizing both family and solidarity,” Libin said.

An affecting feature of the revitalized memorial site are 18 stone pillars of memory that will eventually be etched with the names of cities, towns, villages, and shtetls where Calgary-connected survivors lived prior to the Holocaust.

“These will serve as individual stations for student exploration and remembrance,” Libin said, adding that this will make the history of the Holocaust “both personal and tangible.”

In addition to being a place of solemn remembrance and contemplation, the memorial site, said Libin, will now be “a living classroom.”

To help accommodate student groups for on-site study, the Holocaust Memorial Park now includes flat-topped boulders that can seat up to 75 students.

A second phase of the memorial park project will provide local individuals and families the opportunity to honour loved ones murdered in the Shoah, and plans are also in the works to honour the survivors who

settled in Calgary, Bondar said.

“These additions will ensure that the memorial continues to evolve, representing not only the history of the Jewish people in Europe, but also the stories of those survivors who rebuilt their lives here in Calgary,” Bondar said.

“We believe that this site, revitalized and reimagined, will not only educate, it will inspire. It will remind us that history is not something that we only read about in textbooks. It is something we feel, we question, we remember, and, most importantly, something we carry forward,” said Libin.

Prior to the traditional laying of stones, the moving ceremony concluded with the soulful chanting of *El Maleh Rachamim* and the *Mourners Kaddish* by Beth Tzedec Congregation Rabbi and Cantor Russell G. Jayne, who then led the crowd in the singing of *Hatikvah*.

Those wishing to support perpetual care of the Calgary Holocaust Memorial Park may direct donations to the Calgary Holocaust Memorial Maintenance Endowment Fund and are asked to contact Jewish Community Foundation of Calgary Manager Brenda Sapoznikow at 403-640-2273 or mail@jcfc.ca.

For more information about additional philanthropic



Dahlia Libin (L) and Marnie Bondar at the revitalized Holocaust Memorial Park at the Paperny Family JCC in Calgary.

opportunities in support of Holocaust remembrance and education, contact Ron Krell at krells@shaw.ca.

Marking October 7th in Calgary

By Holly Shifrah, LJI Reporter

The Calgary Jewish community gathered the evening of Sunday, October 5th to mark 2 years since the October 7th terrorist attack in Israel. The “Community Commemoration for Reflection & Resilience” was organized and supported by The Calgary Jewish Federation, the Paperny Family JCC, and Beth Tzedec Congregation, where the event took place.

As the large crowd, estimated at five hundred and fifty people, filtered past private security outside and into Beth Tzedec’s sanctuary, a slide show displayed images of extensive kibbutz damage, rockets being fired, IDF soldiers in battle, and civilians in the

aftermath of the attack and during the on-going war. The slides and the visible security were a sad reminder of the pain not only of October 7, 2023, but the recent Yom Kippur attack on a synagogue in Manchester, England which has prompted renewed discussions amongst Jews all over the world about safety and security issues.

The event began with the singing of “Oh, Canada” and “Hatikvah” before remarks from Rob Nagus, the CEO of The Calgary Jewish Federation, who also took a moment to thank the allies, friends, and politicians present in support of the Jewish community. Nagus concluded his remarks with a charge for the community to fulfill the sacred responsibility of remembering the lives lost on October 7th while also embodying hope and determination.

Lisa Libin, President of the Calgary Jewish Federation, followed with heartfelt observations on how the world, and Jews’ understanding of our place in our wider communities, has changed. But

she also remarked that “being Jewish isn’t about tragedy; it’s about community,” an idea that was well represented by the large gathering of Jews from many different subsets of the larger Calgary Jewish community. It also happened to be one of the themes explored in the film that was screened as the final component of the night, “The New Jew: Days of War” featuring Israeli comedian Guri Alfi (directed by Asaf Nawi and Moshe Samuels).

The film, a follow up to the 2021 TV miniseries “The New Jew” engaged with American Jews of different ages, back-grounds, and political leanings to discuss their experiences and perspectives of what it means to be Jewish in a post-October 7th world. “The New Jew: Days of War” highlights how the terror and tragedy of October 7th, and the ongoing hostility and violence since then, has united and fostered new friendships amongst Jews; both within municipal and state communities but also across the world: such

Continued on page 14

FALL 2025

JEWISH STUDIES WEEK

3-7 NOV 2025



Full details:



NOV 3 @ 10:30-11:30 AM - SENATE CHAMBER

TEACHING THE HOLOCAUST IN TURBULENT TIMES

Melanie Carina Schmoll, Author and Historian

Research Fellow at the Finkler Institute of Holocaust Research and Associate Fellow at the Center for Military, Security and Strategic Studies (CMSS), University of Calgary. Her latest book is *Hatred of Jews - a Failure of Holocaust Education?*.

NOV 3 @ 11:45 AM - 2:30 PM - SENATE CHAMBER

11:45 AM - LUNCH

NOON - FILM SCREENING & DISCUSSION

THOSE WHO REMAINED (2019)

Q&A with film director Barnabás Tóth



A Hungarian drama about the tender bond between two Holocaust survivors—a grieving doctor and a traumatized teenage girl—as they navigate healing and connection in post-WWII Hungary. The film earned international acclaim for its poignant portrayal of emotional resilience and was Hungary’s shortlisted entry for the 92nd Academy Awards.

NOV 6 @ 6-7:30 PM - TELUS CENTRE 150

JEWES, ROMA, AND THE HOLOCAUST

Ari Joskowicz, Eugene Greener, Jr. Chair in Jewish Studies

Professor of Jewish Studies and History, Vanderbilt University

Jews and Roma suffered side by side under Nazi persecution, yet their postwar recognition diverged sharply—Jewish suffering became widely memorialized, while the Roma genocide was largely ignored. This raises pressing questions about how to tell a more inclusive Holocaust history and understand the intertwined experiences of Nazi racial persecution.

NOV 7 @ 2-3:30 PM - ARTS LOUNGE

CENTRAL EUROPEAN CAFE

Featuring special guest, author and journalist, Bonny Reichert.

Reichert is a Canadian writer, chef, food stylist, and journalist whose work often explores the intersection of food, family, memory, and identity.



Melanie Carina Schmoll



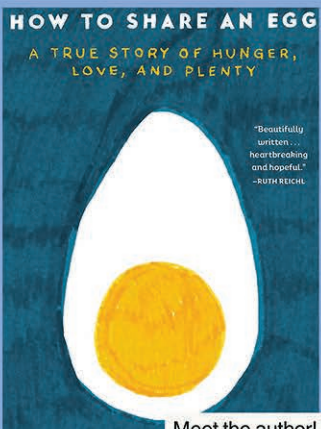
Those Who Remained (2019)



2025 Reichert Holocaust Lecturer

HOW TO SHARE AN EGG

A TRUE STORY OF HUNGER, LOVE, AND PLENTY



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BONNY REICHERT

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September was a busy month at Talmud Torah in Edmonton filled with chaggim and settling into their new classes. The students participated in a meaningful Tashlich program and later ran in the Terry Fox Run to support cancer research. Hopefully the strike will be short-lived so they can get back to their school routines soon.

September at Edmonton Talmud Torah: A month of connection, celebration, and reflection

By Natalie Soroka

September was filled with joy and meaningful moments across the Edmonton Talmud Torah Society (TTS) community. The Early Learning Centre began the month with a lively and heartwarming welcome-back event that brought together children, families, and staff. The event featured music, activities and, of course, ice cream – a perfect treat to mark the start of another exciting chapter together. Laughter and smiles filled the space as families reconnected after the summer and new faces were warmly welcomed into the Talmud Torah Early Learning and Out of School Care community. Ari, the beloved TT lion mascot, added to the fun with plenty of hugs, high fives, and photo-worthy moments that captured the spirit of togetherness and joy that defines our school community.

TTS also proudly unveiled a state-of-the-art gym projection system, featuring a 208” ceiling-mounted screen and a 7,000-lumen projector. This upgrade replaces the old “cart-and-sheet” setup, making assemblies safer, smoother, and more engaging. Funded by the TTS, and a generous grant from the Edmonton Jewish Community Charitable Foundation, the new system enhances how we gather, share, and celebrate together.

Students participated in two meaningful experiences that brought reflection and purpose to the month: the ritual of *Tashlich* and the Terry Fox Run at Gold Bar Park. By the North Saskatchewan River, they symbolically cast away their misdeeds to welcome the new year. Later, they ran with spirit and determination, honouring loved ones and supporting cancer research—beautifully embodying the values of compassion and community.

Randy Soifer z”l was a lifelong member of the Edmonton Talmud Torah community and a proud graduate of the Class of ’65. Together with his wife Jane, Randy sent all four of their children through Talmud Torah K–9, continuing a deep family tradition of connection to our school. His leadership and dedication left a lasting mark—he served in many roles, including President, Treasurer, and Building Chair—where his wisdom and vision helped bring our current school building to life. His love for Edmonton Talmud Torah was evident in everything he did, and his presence will be profoundly missed.

We also mourn the loss of Gail Buck z”l, who dedicated many years as a volunteer on the Talmud Torah Society’s Parents’ Auxiliary, organizing pizza lunches and supporting school life with warmth and care. We extend our heartfelt condolences to her husband Brian and children Ethan, Ezra, and Sophie—all proud graduates of Edmonton Talmud Torah.

May the memories of Randy and Gail be a blessing to their families and to our entire community.

Amid these moments of joy and connection, we also paused to remember and mourn the loss of two beloved members of our community.

Edmonton Talmud Torah Society

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Your 2025-26 Board of Directors

Shana Tova

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For change of address, please send both old and new addresses. We welcome your stories, pictures, artwork and opinions. Please send submissions to our office at the address above.

Next Deadline: November 3, 2025

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CJA honours National Day for Truth and Reconciliation

Students at the Calgary Jewish Academy came together to acknowledge the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation. In classrooms, students learned about the importance of this day, listening, reflecting, making connections, and considering meaningful ways to take action.

As a school-wide activity, each student traced their hand, cut it out, and wrote a word or phrase representing their personal commitment and hope for reconciliation. These hands were then assembled into a set of large, vibrant wings a powerful symbol of how the CJA community unites in remembrance, hope, and unity.

Phrases written by students included words like respect, love, kindness, and truth, each one a reflection of their understanding and desire to build a better future.

Every hand matters. Every voice matters. Together, we remember, reflect, and commit to reconciliation.



Film Festival *Cont. from page 2*

Bazaar!...The Story that Needs to be Told – a short documentary directed by Jennifer Eisenberg and Sheryl Livergant and Executive Produced by Jonathan Joffe (Jay Joffe’s son) – is a nostalgic journey back to the heyday of the Calgary Hadassah Bazaar. Interviews with Hadassah volunteers combined with photos and other archival treasures recall an annual event that led to many friendships, strengthened Jewish bonds, and put the local Jewish community on the Calgary civic map.

Swedishkayt: Yidlife Crisis in Stockholm (Canada/Sweden 2025), directed by and starring Yidlife Crisis originators Eli Batalion and Jamie Elman, is a delightful romp through Jewish history in Stockholm, including the fact that Yiddish has, perhaps counterintuitively, become “a protected government-recognized language in Sweden. Described as “a feel-good portrait of a small but robust community that, against the odds, is thriving” the documentary is “a universal story about diaspora, language, community, and resilience.”

While the Calgary Jewish community is relatively small, its film festival is anything but. Cyngiser chalks the success of the festival up to his diverse and enthusiastic film festival committee; generous sponsors, many of whom have supported the annual event since its inception; and a loyal audience that keeps coming back for more. All this adds up to a film festival that consistently punches above its weight.

This labour of love brings our community together regardless of affiliations and political views, a fact that seems more important than ever before with Jewish communities experiencing enormous stress over the last two years.

A good omen for the future, the Beth Tzedec Congregation Jewish Film Festival has, in recent years, begun to attract younger film lovers with Cyngiser and his committee working hard to encourage what it hopes will be a continuing trend.

This year, a special effort was made to invite Hillel and BBYO students to attend the screening of *Always Together*; and JAC, a program of Calgary Jewish Federation that convenes Jewish adults under the age of 40, is sponsoring the evening screenings of the previously mentioned documentary *The Road Between Us* and the feature film *Dead Language* (Israel/Czech Republic, Poland 2025).

“Nominated for 12 Israeli Academy Awards, *Dead Language* is a tender, quietly powerful drama about relationships and about longing – longing for connection, for meaning, for something beyond the confines of everyday life.”

Some seasons yield great films for school age kids, a precious commodity for which Cyngiser is always on the lookout. No luck this year, though past years have brought Jewish kids and their parents together for unforgettable films, special guests and programs.

In 2010, *Articles of Hope* – a documentary about Israel’s first astronaut, Ilan Ramon – was screened. Ramon was tragically killed together with six other crew members in the 2003 Columbia Space Shuttle

explosion. In his memory, a generous endowment was established by the Beth Tzedec Congregation Jewish Film Festival and the Cyngiser family.

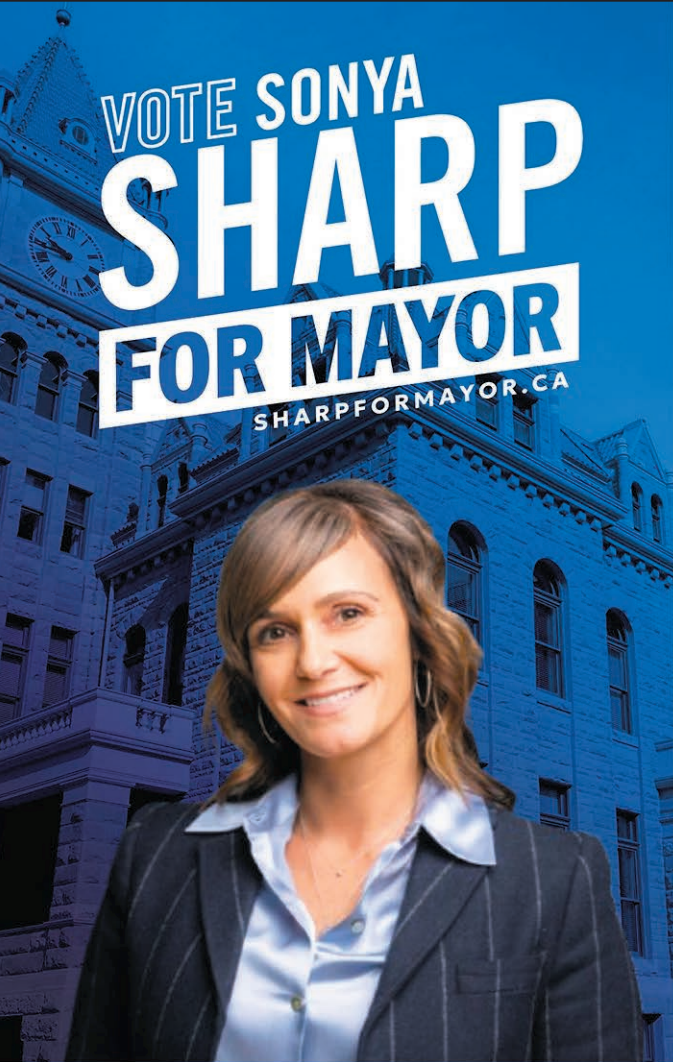
The Reach for the Stars Fund supports science programs at The Calgary Jewish Academy and Halpern Akiva Academy. This is but one example of how the film festival has supported the greater Jewish community over the years.

While it is fun to look back, it is time to look forward to another great Jewish Film Festival season, beginning with opening night on Saturday, November 1 and the screening of *The Blond Boy from the Casbah* (France 2024), a delightful semi-autobiographical feature film by Alexandre Arcady that promises an “... enchanting and nostalgic look at the vivid tapestry of life in the Casbah – a poor, multicultural section of [Algiers] where Jews, Muslims and Christians...lived together in peaceful co-existence for generations.”

Aptly, the film gives audiences a peek into the making of one filmmaker and is a love song to his community of origin and his craft.

Tickets for the 25th Annual Beth Tzedec Congregation Jewish Film Festival are \$85 for an all-access pass (\$20 for students). Single tickets for a full afternoon or a full evening of films are \$20. Entry to films for children and youth under the age of 18 is free.

Go to www.CalgaryJewishFilmFestival.com or www.bethtzedec.ca for the complete lineup of films and to purchase tickets. Sponsorship opportunities are always available. For more information, please contact the Beth Tzedec office at 403-255-8688.



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Sonya is running for mayor to create a safe and affordable city that works, and where Calgarians can trust City Hall again. Sonya doesn’t have a personal or ideological agenda, she has a to-do-list.

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SENSIBLE BUDGETING.

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REPEALING BLANKET REZONING.

Sonya has committed to repealing the blanket rezoning bylaw, re-instating graduated residential zoning with site specific public hearings, and reforms to the City's Planning Department.

BRINGING A STRONG FOCUS BACK ON CORE SERVICES.

From water flowing when you turn on the tap, to potholes being repaired and infrastructure projects that effect residents and businesses. Sonya is committing to a fix it first approach that prioritizes repairs and maintaining existing infrastructure, and delivering on the services that matter most.

Advance Polls Oct 6th - 11th

ELECTION DAY
OCTOBER 20th

from the

Sources

by Eliezer Segal

A celebration
for the Nations

Several decades ago, a distinguished looking gentleman in a Christian clerical collar used to show up annually at our synagogue during the Sukkot services. He explained that he did so in fulfilment of Zechariah's vision of the end of days, which describes how the nations of the world "shall even go up from year to year to worship the King, the Lord of hosts, and to keep the feast of tabernacles."

The perception that Sukkot has a uniquely ecumenical flavour is indeed quite widespread among several Christian denominations and inspires pilgrimages of gentiles to Jerusalem during the festive season.

The sages of the Talmud found an allusion to this idea in the Torah, in the complex sequence of the sacrifices offered in the temple during the festival's seven days. On each day the community brings as burnt-offerings two rams, fourteen lambs and a quantity of bulls that diminishes daily, commencing on the first day with thirteen and subtracting one each day until arriving at thirteen bulls on the seventh day. Thus, the total number of bulls adds up to seventy (13+12+11+10+9+8+7=70).

Of course, the Bible has a well-known predilection for the number seven and its multiples. But the Jewish sages also noted that the sum could be equated with the number of nations in the world as calculated from the scriptural listing of Noah's descendants. Indeed, some rabbis derived from this that the sacrifices offered on this holiday were intended to benefit all the nations of the world. Some medieval commentators limited the benefits to physical rainfall (one of the key themes of the rabbinic Sukkot celebration), rather than to the atonement of sins that is normally achieved by sacrifices.

Not everybody was eager to expound the numbers of sacrificial offerings.

In a remarkable passage in his *Guide of the Perplexed*, Maimonides dealt with the rabbinic distinction between rational laws and those that are designated as hukkim [statutes], that seem to defy explanation and were widely understood to have an

esoteric mystical purpose. He explained that the difference is really one between general principles and their particular applications. Thus, the general institution of sacrificial worship is something that can be justified in humanly comprehensible terms, however there is no rational basis for determining how many, what species or on which occasions the specific offerings should be brought. And yet, unless these were set out by Torah law, the general rule would never be implemented! According to Maimonides, it is these arbitrary random details of implementation that are designated as "statutes" and have no inherent significance of their own. "You ask why must a lamb be sacrificed and not a ram? But the same question would be asked, why a ram had been ordained instead of a lamb, so long as one particular kind is required. The same is to be said as to the question why were seven lambs sacrificed and not eight; the same question might have been asked if there were eight, ten, or twenty lambs, so long as some definite number of lambs were sacrificed." Few Jewish commentators followed Maimonides' lead in such cases.

As the relations between the Jews and their non-Jewish environment became increasingly hostile, the ancient texts came to be treated more negatively.

Rabbi Yohanan lamented how those myopic Romans had destroyed the Jewish temple from whose blessings they benefited. Several traditions introduced a reproof of the nations (having in mind, presumably, the Roman or Byzantine empires) along the lines of: "Israel said before the Holy One: Behold, we are offering up seventy bulls on behalf of the seventy nations. Therefore, they should love us. And yet not only do they not love us, but they even despise us!"

The Talmud imagined a scenario in the messianic future when the oppressive empires of Rome and Persia will beg for a last chance to redeem themselves by observing the pleasant precept of Sukkot; but at the first sign of inclement weather they back out, offering a damning contrast to the Jews who remain steadfastly committed to the mitzvah.

Some commentators, like Rashi, pointed out that the

descending order of the number of bull-offerings should be read as a portent of the weakening and eventual elimination of the heathen peoples and their celestial representatives. One midrashic text explained that the sacrifices were intended not to protect the seventy nations, but to safeguard Israel from them.

Rabbi Bahya ben Asher explained that the festival sacrifices served to unite the world's nations and bring them close [the basic meaning of the Hebrew word for sacrifice: "korban"] to the realization that the entire universe derives ultimately from the one Creator, the metaphysical First Cause of being. In this sense they achieve atonement for their sins of heresy and idolatry, as they realize that they wield no earthly dominion that does not originate from the Almighty.

A similar approach was taken by Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch, writing in the optimistic spirit of the nineteenth-century European Enlightenment. For him the diminishing numbers of offerings denote the lessening of the spiritual and ethical differences that separate the Jews from their neighbours— the result of Israel's beneficial influence in instructing humanity. As we approach history's metaphoric "seventh day," the differences cease to exist, and all humankind is unified in their acknowledgement of the one supreme "shepherd." Although Jews and non-Jews will then have equal spiritual worth before the Lord, this will not mean that differences will be completely eradicated. Jews will continue to be bound to the commandments of their unique Torah, while the rest of humanity will achieve their fulfillment by observing a more general religious code.

In our present situation, Rabbi Hirsch's vision of human moral progress hardly seems imminent. And yet, the serene Sukkot ambience inspires us not to abandon hope for a future when the tabernacle of divine peace will be spread over Israel and the world.

*'From the Sources' by Eliezer Segal
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Oct. 7th

Cont. from page 11

as mothers coming together to fight growing antisemitism in their children's schools or the example of an American family and an Israeli family coming together to create a new kind of extended family as they grieved the loss of the lone soldier they both knew and loved. The film also doesn't shy away from asking the audience to consider if the differences that

divide Jews theologically, politically, culturally, and geographically matter much less in a world full of those determined to see Jews as a monolith.

The event also included blessings and poems read by various participants, a thank you to Harvey Cyngiser and a promotion for the upcoming Calgary Jewish Film Festival he founded and directs, and a beautifully sung *El Maleh* from Elliott Steinberg (Creative Director, Western Region, of the Friends of JNF Canada) who also led the gathering in reciting the *Mourner's Kaddish*. As one sat amongst the throng, noting the variety of backgrounds, communities, and lived experiences of those present; contemplating the stories and themes of the film, combined with the awareness that the event itself was a collaborative effort of

multiple organizations and individuals from across Jewish Calgary, the closing remarks which included the wish that we "may find strength in each other. Am Yisrael Chai" carried an immense weight and the precise sense of hopefulness that is necessary to cope with the grief that has rocked our communities every day since October 7th.

The events of that day have made clear that the most extreme proponents of hatred in this world will never distinguish amongst us. Many of us have heard the stories of peace activists whose lives were spent trying to better the lives of their Palestinian neighbors who were murdered just as readily as active duty IDF soldiers and secularly minded young Jews who just wanted to dance. Though terrorists see fit to flatten and attack Jews as a single entity, it is our great pride and privilege to uphold and celebrate our kaleidoscopic unity as a blessing. We may differ in perspectives on theology, law, dress, politics, and even food; as the saying goes, "two Jews, three opinions." But perhaps the tongue-in-cheek cliché might be amended to "two Jews, three opinions, one people" because, to reiterate Lisa Libin's words, "it's about community."

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L'Chaim and Linked: An evening of transformative mentorship in Edmonton

By Danielle Shaposhnikov

We've all attended networking events. But how often do you leave feeling refreshed and truly seen? Most of the time, you walk away with a million brochures, business cards, and tote bags you'll probably never use. On September 18th, Jewish Family Services Edmonton set out to connect, and we did just that.

The Western Sandwich Company in Manchester Square buzzed with the scent of pumpkin spice, warmth, energy, and the unmistakable hum of meaningful conversation. It wasn't just another networking night; it was *L'Chaim and Linked*, a new community event uniting young adults, seasoned professionals, and organizations under one vision of connection, growth, and belonging.

Hosted by Jewish Family Services Edmonton (JFSE) in partnership with the Jewish Federation of Edmonton's Genesis adult group, Moishe House, and ORT-Edmonton as part of our youth and young adult outreach strategy. This event marked the conclusion of a vibrant summer series dedicated to addressing the needs of young adults, with a specific focus on mental health, inclusion, and community strength. For many, it was more than an evening; it was a turning point toward a more connected and compassionate Edmonton Jewish community.

With 40 attendees, what made *L'Chaim and Linked* truly memorable was its innovative approach: bringing eager young adults face-to-face with established professionals across diverse fields, including medicine and healthcare, law and justice, education, science and engineering, technology and innovation, finance and strategy, leadership and governance, skilled trades, and community service.

It was, quite literally, an evening of "L'Chaim," a celebration of purpose paired with "Linked," the power of professional and personal connection (and yes, a nod to LinkedIn, to solidify new contacts). Attendees engaged in rich discussions about career paths, personal journeys, and shared values, forming bridges between newcomers and long-time community members across different industries. Thanks to the many professionals who volunteered their time to inspire, mentor, and lead a new generation of Jewish professionals, participants left feeling not only welcomed into the workforce but also supported and encouraged through this important yet intimidating

transition. One volunteer professional reflected, "It was lovely to connect with young professionals."

The event was truly elevated thanks to our outstanding venue, Western Sandwich Company, a proudly Russian Jewish-owned business in the heart of Manchester Square, which provided the perfect setting. The chef, Alexandr Kaygorodov, a Red Seal chef with international culinary arts credentials, brought his passion for cooking to Edmonton after travelling the world. The exquisite food and generous hospitality elevated the night, offering both kosher and kosher-style refreshments that encouraged conversation and connection around every table.

Guests savoured not only the flavours but also the atmosphere, one that felt equal parts family gathering and professional summit. The setting symbolized the strength of local Jewish entrepreneurship and the power of supporting one another within and beyond our community walls.

One young adult attendee shared, "Amazing work with connecting people in the Jewish community." Another quoted "I've been feeling lost after graduating, and after speaking with some people, I have a better understanding of what I want in my future career"

One of the evening's defining messages came through clearly: no matter who you are or where you come from, Jewish Family Services Edmonton is here for you.

"Youth and young adults in our community face so many challenges," noted JFSE Director Danielle Dolgoy. "Barriers to employment and access to networks shouldn't be a factor in the already complicated process of establishing and navigating a career path. We hope that more folks in Edmonton reach out if they are struggling. Chances are we have a program and a support worker who can provide meaningful and affirming



(L to r): Anna Jongeleen, Danielle Dolgoy, Danielle Shaposhnikov, and Nika Silinsh. Photo by Tammy Vineberg

assistance and resources to help you, wherever you're at."

L'Chaim and Linked emulated the diversity, talent, and potential of Edmonton's Jewish community. From those just beginning their professional journeys to those who've spent decades serving the city in various capacities, everyone left feeling inspired, connected, and full, both in heart and in belly. As the evening came to a close, the sentiment shared by organizers and attendees alike was one of gratitude. Gratitude for the opportunity to come together, learn from one another, and strengthen the community in times when connection is more important than ever.

This event stands as a testament to what's possible when community organizations, local businesses, and individuals unite with purpose. It's not only an opportunity to celebrate Yiddishkeit in our city, it's a promise to keep showing up for one another, to nurture well-being, and to build a community where everyone feels they belong.

Here's to stronger connections and collaboration. L'Chaim!

Danielle Shaposhnikov is Outreach Coordinator at JFSE.

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