



ALBERTA Jewish NEWS

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Harry and Martha Cohen Foundation finds a new home at JCF Calgary

By Maxine Fischbein

The Harry and Martha Cohen Foundation has found a new home at the Jewish Community Foundation of Calgary (JCFC). With charitable assets of nearly \$2.3 million, the former foundation – now known as the Drs. Harry and Martha Cohen Memorial Fund – is one of the largest contributions in the history of the JCFC, which was established in 1990 with 10 funds and initial assets of \$80 thousand.

To date, successive leadership groups have helped to grow the JCFC to 270 funds and total assets of approximately \$43 million, which bodes well for the future financial viability of Jewish Calgary.

The trust in the JCFC demonstrated by Harry and Martha Cohen's children – Philip, Cheryl, Faye and David – and the Harry and Martha Cohen Foundation board of directors, reinforces the JCFC's proven track record as a prudent choice for philanthropists.

Harry and Martha Cohen's daughter Cheryl – who served for 35 years as the executive director and secretary of her parents' eponymous foundation – told *AJNews* that until very recently, she was unaware that fund holders at the JCFC could designate charitable funds to registered charities in support of both the Jewish community and the community at large.

"As an example, people send money in support of health care, the philharmonic, and the United Way," says veteran community leader Gerry Barron, a long-serving JCFC board member.

Lighting the Giant Menorah in Edmonton



On Dec. 14, the Edmonton Jewish community, friends, families and allies joined Chabad of Edmonton in celebrating Chanukah at the Legislature Grounds.

Like that famous New York ad campaign during the 60s and 70s – *You don't have to be Jewish to enjoy Levy's Real Jewish Rye* – one does not have to be Jewish to be a fundholder at JCFC.

Cheryl Cohen had been contemplating retirement and considering options for winding down her parents' foundation and finding a new home for its charitable assets when she got to talking with Barron late in 2024.

"My parents were huge supporters of the arts and volunteered in a lot of non-Jewish organizations," says Cohen of her late parents, whose generosity and voluntarism helped build the Jewish community too.

So, it makes sense that Cheryl and her siblings –

who also explored the possibility of partnering with other community foundations – found a home for their parents' foundation at the JCFC.

The Cohen clan has historical roots at the JCFC, where a fund bears the name of their grandmother, Rebecca Block, daughter of Canmore's first Jewish settler, Philip Diamond.

Block had earmarked charitable funds in the hope of supporting a Jewish retirement home in Calgary. While that vision has not yet been realized, the interest on that fund has been allocated to other worthwhile causes over the years on the advice of the Cohen family.

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Edmonton JCC announces its new name: The Oshry Kipnes JCC

By Regan Lipos

It is with the utmost pleasure and immeasurable gratitude that the Jewish Federation of Edmonton announces that the new Edmonton JCC will be named in honour of Alissia and Michael Oshry, and the Kipnes family for their abundantly generous monetary donations. "What the Oshry and Kipnes families have given is so incredible, and it's making all of this possible," expresses Jewish Federation of Edmonton's CEO Stacey Leavitt-Wright with humility and gratitude.

And there is more great news to announce. Maintaining the JCC facility in perpetuity needs to be part of the strategic plan, and thanks to a sizeable donation by Arliss Miller, there is now a seeded endowment that will contribute to the upkeep and ongoing operational costs of the JCC.

The long-anticipated Edmonton Jewish Community

Centre will soon be a full-blown reality. Construction efforts are in motion, and what was an image conjured in the imaginations of dedicated volunteers, is gradually becoming a tangible realization of a dream. "We are so excited," emphasized Leavitt-Wright. "But with this excitement, I keep coming back to all the hours of donated time, and how many years in the making this process has been." Leavitt-Wright spoke with *Alberta Jewish News* to highlight the tremendous work that has gone into the JCC project over the past two decades.

"In some ways this undertaking goes back even further," explained Reeva Parker, a member of the initial committee that recommended to sell the previous JCC building. "When we first began our process, we weren't set on selling, but there was a need to evaluate how this huge space was being utilized, or under utilized. Maintaining that kind of facility takes resources, and if the space isn't being used to the fullest, then we realized that perhaps we

needed a smaller space." Parker expressed to *AJN* that the decision was not an easy one. She has fond memories of the old JCC. "We needed to consider what would be practical and sustainable for our community's needs and wants," she concluded.

Parker recalls all the information gathering, and collection of community input. "I had ARC boxes full of all the notes we had taken listening to community members," she recalled. Then, it was time to hand the torch to a new team of volunteers. "I think we need to realize that so many people's efforts went into bringing us to this point," said Leavitt-Wright. "Everyone loves our Jewish community, and this outpour of volunteer hours really shows how committed everyone is to build our community – not just for today, but for future generations."

The next incarnation of the JCC planning committee began its work in late 2015. "This was round two of deliberations, and this group specifically dealt with looking at two possible sites: Talmud Torah and Beth Israel. Ultimately the decision was to not proceed with either location, which brought us to the next stage of the process which began in 2023."

Continued on page 16

Calgary Mayor brings Hanukkah crowd to its feet with promise to fight hate

By Mark Cooper

Calgary's new mayor is promising a series of municipal reforms targeting "radicalization and hate-driven violence" in response to what he called emboldened antisemitism and to prevent attacks like the one that claimed 15 lives and injured dozens more when terrorists opened fire on a Hanukkah celebration at a beach in Sydney, Australia.

Moments after taking part in the December 15 Menorah Lighting at City Hall, Mayor Jeremy Farkas told an overflow crowd, still stunned and heartbroken by the antisemitic attack the day before at Bondi Beach, that he would soon be bringing forward enhanced measures to strengthen safety for the city's Jewish community.

"Tonight as we light the menorah, we draw a line ... a line that says hatred will be confronted, not accommodated, a line that says intimidation will be met with action, not excuses... a line that says Jewish Calgarians will live openly, proudly and without fear," Farkas said during a speech that brought the audience to its feet at the event hosted annually by Chabad Lubavitch of Alberta.

"If you spread hate here, you will be challenged. If you threaten people here you will be stopped. If you try to import violence or intimidation into Calgary you will find a city united against you and a council prepared to act."

Farkas took aim at what he called "spineless leadership, moral cowardice and a failure to act decisively or stand unequivocally with the Jewish community."

Two years earlier, and just two months after the savage October 7, 2023 Hamas attacks in Southern Israel that killed more than 1,200, Calgary's former Mayor Jyoti Gondek boycotted the annual City Hall menorah lighting, saying the event had become politicized.

Farkas struck a starkly different tone, expressing his personal heartbreak about the Bondi tragedy and telling the crowd that he experienced antisemitism first-hand when he served for seven years as the

program administrator for the Israel Studies program at the University of Calgary.

"I learned how antisemitism often begins quietly with excused slogans, minimized threats until it grows bold, until it is allowed to grow bold. I learned this: When leaders hesitate, hate advances."

"So let me be absolutely crystal clear, there is no place for antisemitism in Calgary. Not on our streets, not in our schools or campuses, not at protests, not online, not hidden behind slogans, not excused as politics because Jewish lives are not expendable. Jewish safety is not expendable."

While formal details have not been introduced, Farkas said the reforms that he will bring to the next meeting of the city's Executive Committee will focus on measures to increase safety in gathering places such as synagogues and schools, strengthen coordination with Calgary Police Services and improve rapid response protocols.

It will also focus on early intervention and intelligence to identify warning signs, especially online, and intervene before violence occurs.

There will also be a focus on "prevention through education and leadership" with continued support of Holocaust education, human rights programming and public remembrance.

"I will establish the Mayor's Interfaith Council because an attack on one faith community is an attack on all of us."

"This is how we move from symbolism to substance, from reaction to prevention."

"Calgary will not normalize what history has already judged. Calgary will not wait for tragedy before showing courage. We know where silence leads and we choose a different path."

The Executive Committee was scheduled to meet next on January 13.

Calgary Jewish Federation President Lisa Libin said she was thankful for the support shown by Farkas and the many "allies" who showed up for the Jewish community at the lighting, which also included Alberta Premier Danielle Smith, former Mayor and current Leader of the Opposition Naheed Nenshi, city



Chabad of Alberta Rabbi Menachem Matusof with Calgary Mayor Jeremy Farkas at the Menorah Lighting at Calgary City Hall on December 15. (Facebook Photo)

councillors and federal Conservative and Liberal Members of Parliament.

"You chose to be here and stand with us and add your light to us and that matters," said Libin in her speech.

"But too many still don't. And these days standing with the Jewish community can't just be a social media post."

Libin said that the world is changing fast and hate is getting bolder and too many in the world are afraid to call it what it is.


"So tonight, as these candles burn together, I want us to say 'enough'. Enough of the leaders who look away while hate spreads. Enough of the institutions that hide behind 'balance'. And enough of the excuses when Jews are being targeted simply because of who we are. Enough fear. Enough silence, Enough complacency."

"It's time for courage, the very spirit of Hanukkah. It's time for leadership that stands as bright as this menorah will, even when it is uncomfortable. And each candle that we light this week is a declaration that we are here and we are proud and we will never let anybody else define who we are."

Chabad Lubavitch of Alberta Senior Rabbi Menachem Matusof said the recent tragedies that have befallen Jewish communities around the world will not extinguish the love and the positive messages that were delivered by Farkas and others at the menorah lighting.

"Our hearts our broken. Our hearts are shattered but our spirit is alive and well and only growing stronger," Rabbi Matusof said, joking that he wanted Farkas to be his speech writer and Rabbi.

Mark Cooper is a Local Journalism Initiative Reporter




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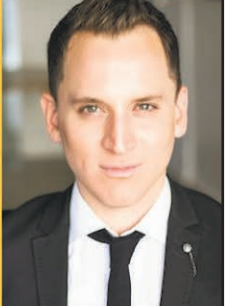
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International educator charts a path forward for world Jewry

By Mark Cooper

After losing three childhood friends to the trigger of a Palestinian suicide bomber, living through the “slow burn” of daily terror threats during the Second Intifada and not knowing whether the bus she was riding on or restaurant she was eating in would be the next target, most would understand if Charlotte Korchak carried some hatred in her heart.

But while the 38-year-old Israeli/American historian and educator is not immune to deep feelings of anger at the horror she and all Israelis endured, she has chosen to channel those feelings in a more constructive and instructive way she feels can best serve the future of Israel and the Jewish people.

It was with these tragic early experiences that began shortly after her family made Aliyah from Los Angeles when she was just nine, that sparked a passion in her to consume every bit of Israeli and Middle Eastern history and to use her vast knowledge to help people around the world better understand the complex nuances of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

“Most people out there, it’s not that they know and don’t care. It’s that they don’t know and therefore they don’t know to care,” said Korchak, who will be speaking in her role as the Founder and Senior Educator of the Jerusalem Education Institute (JEI) to Calgary and Edmonton audiences in early February at events presented by the Alberta chapter of Friends of JNF Canada.

“If we all see ourselves as educators we can get the average person to understand and to know, and therefore to care.

“Overall what we’re trying to do is to help people better understand Israel, Zionism, antisemitism and the Jewish people because we’re such believers that the problem in the world today is not hatred but ignorance or misinformation that feeds what appears to be hatred but is actually coming from a place of a lack of understanding, rather than malice,” said Korchak.

She uses an encyclopedic knowledge of history along with her personal experiences living through the Second Intifada where more than 1,000 Israelis were killed – many by a series of Palestinian suicide bombings – to help break down complex ideas into something the average person can digest.

She often speaks about February 16, 2002, the day she learned her friends Rachel Thaler, 16, Nehemia Amar, 15 and Keren Shatsky, 15 fell victim to a suicide bomber while out having pizza on a Saturday night at a mall in the settlement of Karnei Shomron.

So at 14 instead of celebrating her teenage years with her friends, she attended their funerals.

A year later, her parents moved away from Israel.

“There was a lot of angry feelings towards the Palestinians. I wouldn’t say I was somebody who believed in deep reconciliation or anything like that.

“But I was lucky that I got separation from the conflict. I hated that my family moved out of Israel but I do see now that I do look back and reflect that it did enable me to heal a little faster. And I think honestly I got to the place where I started to talk more about it. Because I was teaching all the time and it’s part of my story so I literally talk about it almost every day and that helps with the healing process.”

It also helped her forge a path forward for her education work after the events and aftermath of October 7 Hamas attacks on Southern Israel.

“I feel like the second intifada was the trauma of my generation and October 7 was the trauma of the next generation and there’s no way to compare them. One was a slow burn over multiple years, the fear took over day to day life and you remember those feelings and that kind of trauma that leaves you with.

“October 7 was one big hit in a brutal and unfathomable way.”

She says that in some ways, she is grateful that she went through the second Intifada as the experience helped her filter her emotions into a place that was more productive for her life’s work.

“I wanted to see a better future somehow and end the violence somehow.

“When October 7 happened, of course I was hit like every other Jew and I was so angry in the beginning and I had all of those same feelings. But I think I was able to overcome and move forward faster because I

just felt like I didn’t want us to go back to this place of trauma and hatred and hopelessness and an inability to see forward.”

After earning a degree in Middle Eastern History from the University of Southern California, Korchak moved back to Israel on her own at 25.

Encountering anti-Zionism at University, Korchak began what would turn into a career that has taken her to speak at high schools, universities, communities and young professional groups around the world.

A fellowship at StandWithUs in 2010 allowed her to engage with over 50,000 students annually both online and on five different continents for 14 years, working her way up to be the organization’s International Senior Educator.

In 2024, she founded JEI, where she intends to transform Israel education during what she describes as a critical period for the future of not only the Jewish people and Israel but of Western civilization.

She describes the climate of rampant antisemitism and globalized violence such as the Bondi Beach Hanukkah massacre in December as continuing to be very worrying and concerning but believes strongly there is a path forward.

Her Friends of JNF presentations, February 8 at the Calgary Jewish Community Centre and February 9 at a still-to-be announced Edmonton location will be about how Diaspora Jews and those who care about the preservation of Western values can move forward positively.

“But to do that, we have to understand where we are. And as a historian and as I speak to many of my other friends who are historians and analysts, we all are feeling that so much of what is happening in the world is echoing what was happening in the 1930s and we need to learn from history.



JEI Educator Charlotte Korchak will be in Calgary Feb. 8 and in Edmonton Feb.9.

“So it’s not like saying, it’s the 1930s, look at what’s to come. It’s a matter of saying, we could be in the 1930s, how can we prevent the 1940s from unfolding in front of our eyes.”

And that very much includes here in Canada, where she sees disturbing parallels to the climate of antisemitism that was ignored by the Australian government.

“The saddest part, other – of course – than the 15 people killed, was that the community had been screaming that antisemitism was at an all-time high, that things were very dangerous for the Jewish community and they felt completely ignored by the government. Because they were. It hit even harder because as a historian, you learn about the history of antisemitism and how more often than not Jews really tried to put their heads down and tried to ride it out.

Continued on page 15

FRIENDS OF JNF CANADA PRESENTS

DIASPORA, ISRAEL & THE GO FORWARD

Sunday, February 8, 2026
7:00 PM | CALGARY (location TBA)

With Special Guest Speaker
Charlotte Korchak

Charlotte Korchak is a leading educator with the Jerusalem Education Institute. She is a passionate Zionist advocate empowering audiences with clarity, courage, and truth about Israel.

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FRIENDS OF JNF CANADA

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Menorah lighting at the Ledge sees largest crowd ever

By Regan Lipes

The annual lighting of the twenty-one-foot menorah at the Alberta Legislature is always a beautiful sight to behold and attracts representation from all branches of the Edmonton Jewish community and all levels of government. On Sunday, December 14, North America awoke to the devastating news from Bondi Beach Australia that once again, the Jewish people and their allies, were the targets of violent terror after two gunmen, father and son, unleashed their antisemitic rage upon a peaceful celebration in honour of the first night of Chanukah.

From the outside looking in, one might think that Australia's tragedy would make people in other communities anxious about attending public events so soon after, but this was certainly not the case in either Edmonton or Calgary.

Rabbi Ari Drelich from Chabad Lubavitch of Edmonton was very pleased to share with *Alberta Jewish News* that attendance exceeded 530, and on a particularly blistery cold night. The chatter amongst attendees reflected the sentiment that to live in fear would be to let dark prevail over light: contrary to the spirit of the holiday.

Security was in full force, and when the screening equipment stopped working because the temperatures were too inhospitable, a snaking line of guests still persevered to squeeze in and claim their spot at the festivities. The main floor of the grand Legislature Rotunda was packed, and a sea of overflow guests were ushered to the balconies of upper levels for a birds-eye-view. People stood shoulder-to-shoulder in heavy winter gear, while little ones crouched on the floor to peer out from between the marble banister posts of the railings.

The choir from Talmud Torah School did an exceptional job filling the space with their voices of joy

and celebration led by teacher Ben Ragosin. It was heartwarming to have the sound of children's voices usher in the warmth of the holiday after a day spent compulsively checking the news. This helped to calm frayed nerves and refocus everyone's minds, souls, and spirits as a united Jewish community.

Local community musician, Anton Tarnavsky is a banker by day, but he has become quite a staple within the Edmonton circuit as a guitarist, singer, and songwriter. Tarnavsky's signature sound is definitely his own but also wonderfully reminiscent of Aleksandr Rosenbaum, an artist from the Russian bard tradition. As Tarnavsky boldly and proudly sang "Am Yisrael Chai," eyes filled with tears, and voices united in strength during the chorus.

Everyone eagerly awaited Rabbi Drelich's annual Chanukah address. His powerful words at the menorah lighting of 2023 were formidable and comforting in their strength during a time when Jewish communities around the world were so fearful. With the news of Bondi Beach so fresh, again, the community looked for a powerful message.

Rabbi Drelich emphasized that the miracle of Chanukah took place in Eretz Israel. He reiterated that while those who live with hate in their hearts try



The Edmonton Jewish community came together to light the Giant Menorah at the Alberta Legislature on Dec. 14. Community leaders, allies and representatives from all three levels of gov't were in attendance including Edmonton Mayor Andrew Knack, Police Chief Warren Driechel, Chabad of Edmonton Rabbi Ari Drelich, Speaker Ric McIvor and Federation CEO Stacey Leavitt-Wright.

to fill the world with darkness, the Jewish people will again choose to rise with joy and light. He very meaningfully invited guests, both Jews and allies, to join him in covering their eyes and reciting the Shema. It was a somber and moving moment for everyone in attendance.

The Rabbi also explained that he has been working for some time to have a menorah permanently installed at the Alberta Legislature as a symbol of the Jewish community's longstanding presence and countless contributions to the province. He has yet to be successful but vows not to be discouraged.

As in past years, this thirty-fourth celebration was attended by dignitaries from all three branches of government: municipal, provincial, and Federal and by representatives from the Jewish Federation of Edmonton, who co-sponsored the event. This year, out on the Legislature grounds, Edmonton's new Chief of Police Warren Driechel, was given the honour of lighting the shamash. It was cold, and children were beginning to get squirmy, but as soon as the shamash lit the first candle of Chanukah and Rabbi Drelich belted out the Brachot, the light filled everyone with the warmth of the season.

The celebration then moved inside for a feast of latkes and sufganiyot, activities for children and opportunities to visit with friends and family. It was an event that stood as testament to the strength and unity of Edmonton's Jewish community. While in line for fresh and fragrant Chanukah goodies, people definitely checked the news on their phones, and whispered quietly and respectfully about what information was being released. However, the mood was not one of mourning, but of solidarity and the need for Jewish pride – light in the void of darkness, love in the face of hate.

Overhearing chatter from gatherers, many expressed that they had not planned on attending, but made a point of doing so because of the massacre in Australia. Following the event, Rabbi Drelich expressed his impressions of the evening declaring that he remains so impressed with the resilience of the Jewish community.

Regan Lipes is a Local Journalism Initiative Reporter.

FRIENDS OF JNF CANADA PRESENTS

DIASPORA, ISRAEL & THE GO FORWARD

Monday, February 9, 2026
7:00 PM | EDMONTON (location TBA)

With Special Guest Speaker
Charlotte Korchak

Charlotte Korchak is a leading educator with the Jerusalem Education Institute. She is a passionate Zionist advocate empowering audiences with clarity, courage, and truth about Israel.

Meet & Greet | **General Admission**
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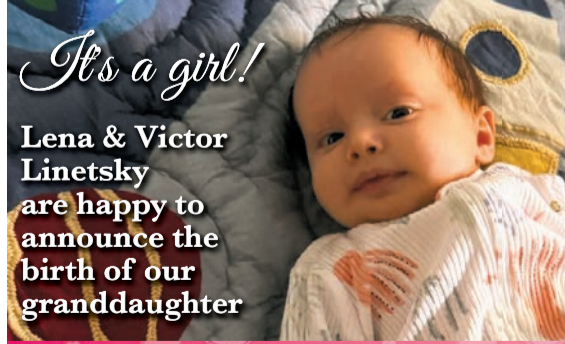


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Sophia Luna Linetsky-Weiss

October 24 2025



Grade 5 students take on an inspiring project of giving

By Regan Lipes

Nothing warms the heart more than seeing true altruism in action. It is an uplifting reminder that people are capable of the pure kindness, generosity and benevolence that the Torah encourages. The winter season is typically when North Americans amp up their good cheer and spirit of giving, and this fills even the most cynical of onlookers with hope. When young people take the initiative to do a mitzvah, the community can be most proud, and confident in knowing that the future of *Tikkun Olam* rests in good hands.

Two grade five Talmud Torah School students recently took on a project of giving that proved to be nothing short of astounding. "I do these 'Passion Projects' with the class," explained their teacher Jennifer Kovacs in an interview with *Alberta Jewish News*. "I want them to be imaginative and take their existing interests to new levels." The learning outcomes that Kovacs targets with this assignment are key life skills that students may not fully appreciate in the moment but will benefit from in the future. "They need to find resources from different sources, one being books from the library, which gets them used to doing research. Knowing how to find information in different ways is an important life skill."

Kovacs' students also need to work on time-management and independent accountability to help their work progress and since they select their own direction for their 'Passion Projects' she has found that their engagement is impressive. "As they are researching they need to indicate their sources and find a way to present their information in some form. It can be a poster, a slideshow, a song. It's intentionally open to allow students to show their learning in different ways."

This year, two of her students wanted to use their project to give back to the community.

"I had students years ago who chose to do a juice-box and cereal drive. That example, along with the cold weather approaching, may have planted the idea for these two students to do a sock and shoe donation drive. The class is also doing a read aloud right now which is a story about a young girl and her mom who are struggling to get by. It's from the point of view of the little girl, who shares that she does not have shoes that fit her. This topic has come up multiple times in the book, and we have had class discussions about it; not everyone can afford shoes." The book *Awake and Dreaming* by Kit Pearson moved the two ten-year-olds to act and take their 'Passion Project' to a new, and unprecedented level.

Ella Paull and Maya Parker have been best friends since grade one so when their teacher gave them the option of working together, the girls jumped at the

opportunity. "We got the idea from the book we are reading, because the main character has shoes that are ruined," explained Ella. "So, we thought it would be something good we could do to give warm socks and shoes to people who don't have them," added Maya. After running their idea by their teacher, and Principal Darin Johnson, the motivated young ladies set to work. "They needed to work on writing professional emails, and how to present this information to different audiences, which are skills they will use many times throughout their lives," Kovacs offered thoughtfully. "They had to think about the language they used, who they were targeting the information to, and revise their writing." The career teacher was pleased with the multidimensional educational targets that were covered unexpectedly because of the intensity of the project.

"We had to figure out where the donations would go once we collected everything," explained Maya. "We put together a slide show, mostly for Ms. Kovacs, with details about what we planned and the ways we were going to share our information to people." Ella continued: "We had to do research to figure out where the donations would go, and we decided on the Bissell Centre. But this was also kind of confusing because they have two parts: a part where they give the donated things to people for free, and a thrift store." Navigating the ins and outs of a big undertaking can be intimidating for adults, so the ingenuity and problem-solving skill showcased by the girls truly distinguished them as young leaders. "We knew we wanted people to get the shoes and socks for free," elaborated Maya, "Because we wanted the people who need these things most to be the ones who get them, and it was important to us that they wouldn't pay anything. They may not have money, like the character, Theo, in our book."

With the support of their teacher and principal, the Bissell Centre was contacted, and the girls were even invited to take a tour of their facility. Moved by the altruism of their classmates, several other students started lending Maya and Ella a hand during their free time, making posters and handing them around the school. "The hardest part was going to the older classrooms to make announcements about it,"



Edmonton Talmud Torah students Maya Parker and Ella Paull completed a heartfelt sock and shoe drive for the Bissel Centre for their Grade 5 "Passion Project."


confided Ella. "We don't know them as well and they're older, so it was a little scary at first." For several weeks they collected donations dropped in a big cardboard box by the front door, right next to the Ten Commandments engraved on the foyer floor. "We would empty it out regularly. We kept everything in Ms. Kovacs' room," Maya explained. "Yes, but they organized things very nicely," Kovacs added proudly.

Shortly after school wrapped up for the winter break, they, driven by their parents, delivered their loads of donation to the Bissell Centre, and were greeted with gratitude and awe. "I think it's so important for them to see the impact of what they've accomplished," Kovacs explained. "I'm so proud of them!"

Maya and Ella, the two best friends from Jennifer Kovacs' grade five class agree that this was a tremendous experience, and one they would love to repeat. When asked what they would each like to be when they grow up, both girls expressed a desire to become teachers or possibly go into the performing arts. "If I become a teacher, I'd want to be an elementary teacher. I would probably want to do this kind of project with students," Maya added.

The spirit of Tikkun Olam is strong at Talmud Torah, demonstrated not just by the astounding chesed endeavour undertaken by two impressive ten-year-olds with exceptional leadership skills, but also by the outpouring of donations from the community. We applaud the work of Maya and Ella, two girls with big Jewish hearts!

Regan Lipes is a Local Journalism Initiative Reporter.




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 EDMONTON TALMUD TORAH SOCIETY
תלמוד תורה כנגד כולם

Israel activist Noa Tishby encourages Jews to “over contribute with love”

By Mark Cooper

Battle rising antisemitism one Shabbat dinner at a time, one of the world's most recognizable post-October-7 Jewish activists told a captive Calgary audience.

Celebrated Israeli-born actor, producer, author and social media influencer Noa Tishby said Diaspora Jews should “over contribute with love” and show Western societies the “extraordinary” values held by the Jewish community, rather than becoming consumed by haters.

“A lot of people in the Jewish community are really bothered by the haters and I think that’s a waste of time,” Tishby told a crowd of more than 800 during a conversation-style event December 7, hosted by B’nai Brith Calgary at the city’s Beth Tzedec Congregation.

Instead, she advised people to expend their energy showing wider society the Jewish way of life and its obsession with community, education, respect for elders and strong family values.

“There’s something beautiful about the way of living as a Jew. We need to show that out, show that to the world.

“If I can leave you with that. Literally have a Shabbat dinner once a month for your non-Jewish friends. Bring your family, your friends and everybody around together and just see how it spreads out like magic.”

After more than 20 years of pro-Israel activism, including a stint as Israel’s Special Envoy for Combatting Antisemitism, the 50-year-old Tishby has learned there’s little value in arguing with those

entrenched by hatred for Jews and Israel.

In more than a one-hour discussion moderated by Amanda Eskenasi, the Director of Honest Reporting Canada, Tishby said what’s critical at this time is that Jews don’t run and hide.

“Every Jew in the world is thinking ‘where are we going to go’. Everybody’s going ‘where do we escape’ and the thing to understand is there’s nowhere to go. You stay put and you work in your community and you dig in. That’s what we’ve got to do.”

“Everybody has a lane. Find out the lane and be bold and with chutzpah, open up and tell the truth.”

That includes working to build allyship with like-minded immigrant communities that love the West, share a similar work and life ethic and are grateful to leave oppressive government regimes and make Canada their home.

Tishby has found her lane, using her production experience, deep knowledge of the Middle East and communications savvy to bring awareness to the well-coordinated propaganda war being waged on Western streets and campuses.

She focuses on getting the message out, especially to younger generations online and on social media platforms where she has grown her following, gaining several hundred thousand followers on Instagram alone since the October 7, 2023 savage Hamas attacks. Her work reaches millions of people daily.

While her efforts are making significant impact, she recognizes she and other pro-Israel activists are up against a well-coordinated, and executed propaganda campaign and massive social media bot farm more than 30 years in the making that receives “unfathomable” amounts of funding by multi-state



Noa Tishby in Calgary. Photo by Limelight Photography

actors focused on delegitimizing Israel and destabilizing the West.

“They realized that they cannot take Israel down militarily and they shifted their strategy to delegitimize Israel’s standing in the world as the homeland of the Jewish people,” she said. “They are after dismantling Israel as a Jewish state by all means necessary which is why, when October 7th happened they were ready with a narrative of ‘resistance is justified’ all of that.”

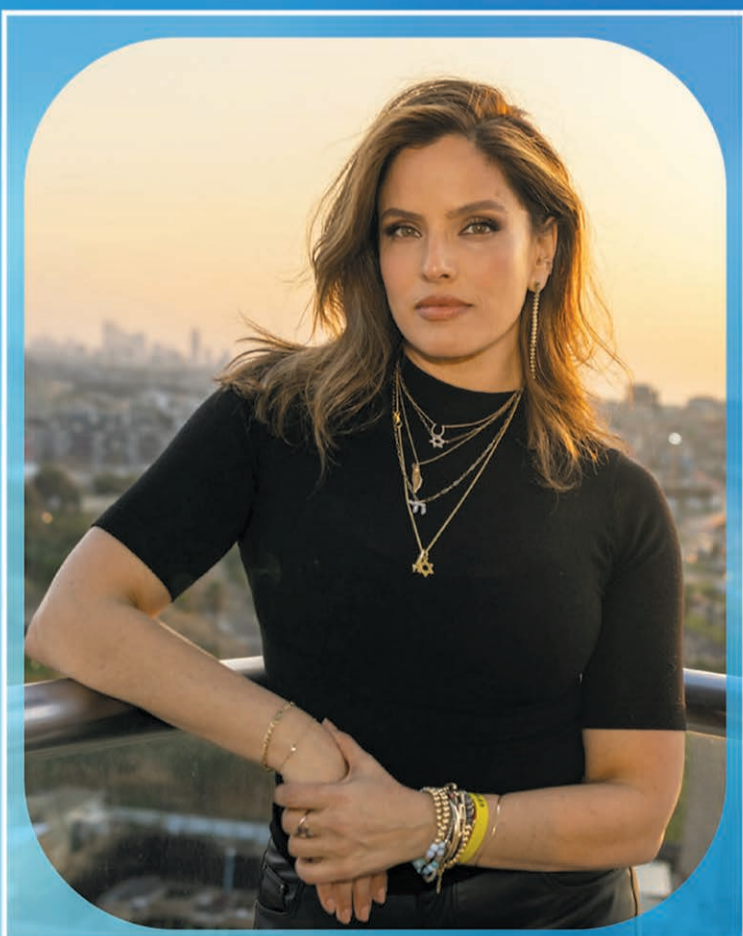
“The fight on social media started far before people started to realize there was a fight on social media.”

“Just imagine if Hitler had TikTok. All these ideas that would take them longer to spread are spreading out like wildfire and again this is not just about the

Continued on page 11

THANK YOU, CALGARY

An Unforgettable Afternoon with Noa Tishby



B’nai Brith Calgary Lodge #816 and the Calgary Lodge Menorah Foundation extend our heartfelt appreciation to everyone who attended, volunteered, and supported our community event featuring the exceptional Noa Tishby.

With nearly 700 people in attendance – including dignitaries, community leaders, and sponsors – the afternoon was truly inspirational and a powerful reflection of unity, strength, and community engagement.

Thank you for your continued support, which has enabled us since 1917 to serve the community on your behalf.

Ψ B’NAI BRITH
CALGARY LODGE #816
& LODGE MENORAH FOUNDATION





Celebrating the light of community at CJA's annual Latke Lunch

By Krista Wilson

Hanukkah is a time to celebrate light, resilience, and togetherness, and this year, the CJA community embodied all three at our annual Latke Lunch celebrations. With more than 400 guests in attendance, our school was filled with the warmth and joy of students, staff, parents, grandparents, alumni, and community members coming together to celebrate the Festival of Lights. The aroma of fresh latkes, the sounds of laughter and music, and the shared spirit of connection created a truly meaningful celebration.

This year's annual Latke Lunch for Grades 1-9 was a beautiful reflection of the strength of our community. Guests gathered to enjoy performances by our students, reconnect with one another, and share in a tradition that brings generations together. It was especially meaningful to welcome alumni and community members alongside our current families, reinforcing the enduring bonds that make CJA such a special place.

We were also thrilled to introduce a new event this year: our Early Years Latke Lunch, welcoming over 250 guests, including our youngest students and their

families. This special celebration offered a joyful opportunity for families to experience Hanukkah traditions together within the school community, creating memories that will last for years to come.

Seeing parents, grandparents, children and other family members share latkes, songs, and smiles was a powerful reminder that the foundation of community begins early.

None of this would have been possible without the incredible dedication of our Parents Association volunteers, who cooked over 1,600 latkes to ensure that every guest felt welcomed and well fed. Their time, effort, and generosity are a true testament to the spirit of giving and

collaboration that defines CJA.

At CJA, we believe in the power of community and the light we create when we come together. This Hanukkah, our Latke Lunch celebrations reminded us that the brightest light is not just found in the menorah, but in the connections we share, the traditions we pass on, and the community we build together.



Explore CJA at our Open House

From Nursery to Grade 9


See learning in action.
Meet our community.
Learn why families choose CJA.

February 5th 9:00-10:30 AM

Where belonging grows. **CJA**



Register Here
cja.ab.ca/exploreaja



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CELEBRATING GENEROSITY. ANNOUNCING OUR FUTURE.

The Oshry | Kipnes Jewish Community Centre \$3 million in capital and endowment gifts



Alissia and Michael Oshry

“We were both fortunate to grow up with a JCC in our respective cities. In fact, our first work experiences were there. Alissia was a gymnastics coach, and Michael worked the front desk. Giving back to our community is more important to us than ever. We all need a place where we can come together, feel safe, and ensure that future generations have the same sense of belonging and connection that we do.”



Kipnes Family

“Our family has always believed that a vibrant community needs a central hub, and we are proud to ensure that this legacy endures for the next 40 years and beyond. When we first helped establish Edmonton’s Jewish Community Centre over 40 years ago, it was about creating a home—a place where Jewish life could thrive for generations. Today, investing in the new JCC is not just about bricks and mortar; it’s about continuity, identity, and belonging.”



Arliss Miller

“I hope the new JCC will become a gathering place for the Jewish community. I’m happy to have been able to be a part of helping it both now and in the future with the operating endowment. I’m also glad that the building is in a central location and visible to the people of Edmonton, as we should be proud of our presence and our contribution to the city.”

Proud partners in our community’s future



EDMONTON Jewish Community Charitable Foundation



Check out our community calendar at jewishedmonton.org.

The Hub

Your bridge to Jewish Edmonton



A MESSAGE FROM CO-PRESIDENTS REBECCA ASBELL AND BENARON GLEIBERMAN

As we step into 2026 together, we are thankful for the strength and resilience of our community. This past year reminded us of the power of unity—how, when we unite, we can overcome challenges and build a future filled with hope.

Sustaining our community: UJA momentum

Our Federation's mission remains clear: to sustain and strengthen Jewish life here at home, across Canada, and in Israel.

Your immense generosity to the United Jewish Appeal campaign sustains crucial programs like support for seniors, youth engagement, and institutional security. These contributions are not just dollars; they are acts of tzedakah, affirming our shared responsibility to care for one another.

If you haven't yet made your contribution, please consider doing so this week. Your gifts make possible for us to stabilize operations and expand our immediate impact.

Advocacy and security: Making our voices heard

We recognize the growing and urgent need for advocacy. Antisemitism has risen to levels we have not seen in decades, and we are responding with determination.

To guarantee our voices are acknowledged and our community's security is maintained, we are working hard on continuous interaction with the government and improved community engagement. Security continues to be a foundational priority of the Federation.

Vision for the future: New JCC development

Looking ahead, we are excited to advance the plans for our transformative new Jewish Community Centre—a future hub for culture and belonging.

This vision will only become a reality through collective effort, and we invite you to join this historic moment. We look

forward to sharing more details about key progress milestones in the upcoming weeks.

Ties that bind: Global Jewish Peoplehood

Our links to Israel remain strong through critical initiatives like Partnership2Gether (P2G), connecting Edmonton to our friends in the Galilee. These relationships remind us that we are part of something larger—a global Jewish family bound by shared heritage and destiny.

As we embrace 2026, let us continue to say Hineni—I am here. Here for each other, here for our community, and here for the generations to come.

Thank you for standing with us, for giving generously, and for believing in the future we are building together. On behalf of the Federation, we wish you and your loved ones a year of health, peace, and blessings.

INTERNATIONAL HOLOCAUST REMEMBRANCE DAY

Understanding Nazi ideology through medicine

Jewish Seniors Citizens' Centre

Tuesday, January 27 | 12 p.m. Lunch & Learn

\$13 members | \$15 members

Speaker: Zion Barany

Email programmer@jdicseniors.ca to register



Interview & discussion MacEwan University

Thursday, January 29 | 3:30 p.m.

Dr. Alexander Marcus interviews Dr. Melanie Carina Schmolz about her new book, *Hatred of Jews - A Failure of Holocaust Education?*

Free & open to the public
Email holocaustedu@edjfed.org for more information

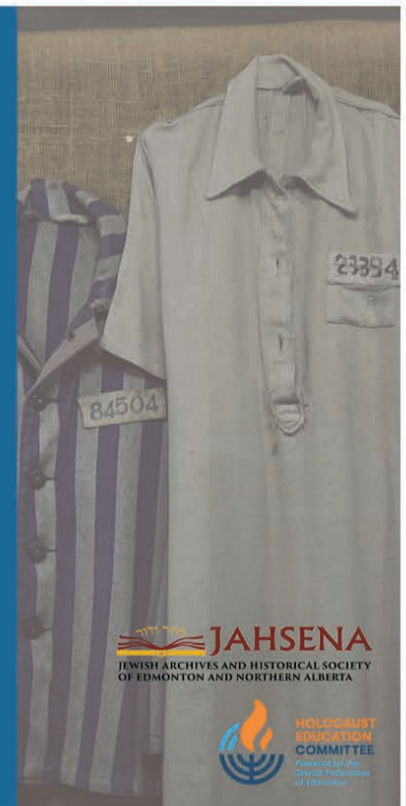


We are collecting local stories of Holocaust survivors

Please contact us if:

- You haven't been interviewed by the Shoah Foundation and would like to give an interview.
- You have items related to the Holocaust that you wish to donate.

To learn more, contact: holocaustedu@edjfed.org



Where's my tax receipt?

This year, hundreds of donors supported our community through the UJA. With that generosity comes a high volume of tax receipts, and our small but dedicated team is working hard to ensure each one is accurate and delivered on time.

Please rest assured that your charitable tax receipt will be sent by email to the address we have on file by the end of February, in time for your Canadian tax return. If you require a hard copy, please contact us at info@edjfed.org or 780-487-0585.

In the meantime, we thank you sincerely for your generosity and patience—your support truly makes a difference.



2026 Earl Parker Award for Jewish Film

Open to all Canadian filmmakers, students, schools, and organizations.

Submission deadline: March 31, 2026
Learn more and enter at jewishedmonton.org

Winner to be announced May 3 at Opening Night of:



The crisis is an opportunity at Calgary Chevra Kadisha: On the tail of a dragon.

By Harold Lipton and Susan Dvorkin

Our Calgary Jewish community is facing a potential crisis in the near future. On the other hand, this could be seen as an opportunity, albeit a challenging one.

Most organizations are facing a similar problem of attracting new volunteers. We do not know how long our current volunteers will be able to continue, even though we genuinely hope they will be with us for many more years. As today's volunteers gradually retire, or, sadly, pass on, organizations must contend with the ongoing challenge of finding younger replacements.

All of the agencies and organizations in our community perform valuable services. Some of these services must be considered "essential" to sustaining our Jewish identity. Without these essential services, the risk of the Jewish community faltering is too great.

One of these essential services is the Chevra Kadisha. It has long been known that one of the first functions a Jewish community establishes is the provision of burial services that conform to Jewish law. Indeed, the Chevra Kadisha of Calgary is the second oldest Jewish organization in Calgary and has been providing services for over 120 years.

It is common for many volunteers in the Chevra to work on its behalf for numerous years; several are the second or third generation in their family to do so. But as time stands still for no one, it is inevitable that these volunteers will eventually leave the service. Many of our volunteers are currently in their 70's and 80's, and though we pray for their continuing vitality, the work is becoming increasingly demanding on them. The Chevra has been actively seeking a new and younger generation of volunteers for several years with some success, and we are grateful for those who have stepped forward. However, the numbers have not been large enough to ensure that the service will be sustained in the years to come.

We have heard many reasons for declining an invitation to volunteer:

"I am still working and I can't spare the time."

"I have other commitments, to my family or elsewhere."

"I am retired but I go away for much of the year."

"I don't think I could manage performing these services."

"Someone else will have to do it."

Leaders of the National Association of Chevra Kadishas maintain that this is an ongoing problem for many Chevra Kadishas, not just ours. But it is more acutely experienced in smaller communities such as Calgary.

Before putting this article down, readers are encouraged to stop for a moment and consider this. The Chevra provides services for deceased members of our community from all levels of observance. That includes individuals who have not identified with the Jewish community or have not practiced any Jewish observance at all, yet still desire when the time comes to leave this world in accordance with Jewish practice. Imagine your reaction should the time come to provide end of life service for your loved one. You contact the Chevra to arrange a funeral, and you receive the following response:

"We cannot help you as we don't have enough volunteers left to provide the service."

"We can bring your loved one into our care, but we will not be able to perform the ritual Tahara as we don't have enough volunteers."

"We can bury your loved one, but we cannot guarantee there will be a minyan present, so you may not be able to say Kaddish."

What are you going to do then?

The Chevra's Board of Directors has debated many times on what options there are to sustain the service. Should those who provide end of life service be paid for their efforts, adding to the already expensive cost of a funeral? Should non-Jewish volunteers be recruited,

NEW REAL ESTATE PAGE COMES TO ALBERTA JEWISH NEWS



Starting in our February Print Edition, and as of this writing online, Alberta Jewish News will have a page devoted to Real Estate.

The page will feature listings and ads from agents who want to work within and for our Jewish communities, and who want to make sure their listings are seen by you!

This is something our readers and agents have been asking for, and we are excited to have listings for residential and commercial opportunities delivered right to our readers' fingertips.

Through our online portal, or through contact with one of our salespeople, agents and owners will be able to book their listings to appear in the newspaper, and online. We will feature residential and commercial listings, short-and long-term rental opportunities, vacation property rentals, timeshare rentals, and more.

Submissions will be accepted for both properties in Canada, and internationally.

Keep an eye out in our February edition for the **Alberta Jewish News Real Estate Page**, and online at www.albertajewishnews.com/realestate

which would surely end the centuries old tradition? We keep coming back to the same alternative. We must find more members of the Jewish community to step forward and help maintain the obligation to provide a genuinely Jewish service to the community.

As the generations who came before us made sure that Jewish end of life care was available, now is the time that the current younger generation begin to take on this responsibility. Please consider what time you could devote and contact us (403-244-4717 or email to info@chevraofcalgary.org). We are very willing to discuss various volunteer opportunities and how we can properly prepare you to ease into a volunteer role with us. No assistance is considered too small a measure as it will take the entire community to sustain the Chevra.

In the same light as the late John F. Kennedy once said, ask not what the Chevra Kadisha can do for you, but what you can do for the Chevra.

We wish you all a long and healthy life. May you not need our services for many years, but knowing that you will, please help us ensure that those services will be available.

Harold Lipton and Susan Dvorkin are co-presidents of Calgary Chevra Kadisha.

Southern Alberta Jewish Family Histories Exhibit

Has your family been here for 10 years? 20? 120? However long, you are part of our history! And we want to know your story.

Where did your family come from?
When did you get here?
What did you do?
Who is here now?

Visit the online exhibit to see our current family profiles ...



For more information contact JHSSA: 403-444-3171 | jhssa@shaw.ca | www.jhssa.org



Or see our table in the Calgary JCC lobby February 9-12

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Best wishes for 2026!

YYC PJ Library Simcha Series redefines inclusivity

By Jana Zalmanowitz

Jewish Calgary is home to a wealth of children’s programming. There is a steady stream of holiday parties, learning, and social opportunities hosted by Jewish organizations in the community. A little something for everyone from early childhood to adolescence. Amongst all these engagements is one that is quietly and mindfully paving the way to make sure all Jewish kids (and their parents) can find a space they belong. Enter PJ Library Calgary’s Simcha Series, thoughtfully curated and executed by special educator Andrea Scharfstein.

Andrea is a mom to two young children, a role that first drew her to the PJ Library programming in the community. She also has a passion for education. It’s a passion that earned her a Master’s Degree in supporting education in inclusive classrooms. Before moving to Calgary, Andrea spent her career in Vancouver, teaching in Jewish schools and modeling the tools to create inclusive spaces.

Inclusion put simply can be compared to the difference between choosing to build stairs into a building versus a ramp. A flight of stairs excludes some from entering a room, however building a ramp provides access for all. Inclusion for those with disabilities is not restricted to the physical. Neurodiversity is a concept becoming more well-known. Being “neurodivergent” (as opposed to “neurotypical”) means your brain functions differently from the majority. It includes diagnoses such as ADHD, autism and learning disabilities. Estimates are that 20% of people are neurodivergent, meaning a whopping 20% of people are navigating a world not built for them. Where are their figurative ramps to access Jewish programming? Andrea’s speciality is in equipping people and spaces with those figurative ramps, ensuring that everyone has a point of access.

When you bring together Andrea’s specialized background and love for Jewish education, you get a “Simcha Series.” Now in its second year, the Simcha Series offers a program approximately every two months centred on a Jewish holiday or value. There are classic themes like Hanukkah and Purim which typically attract a lot of community engagement, but there are others like Mitzvot (good deeds) or Tu B’Av, the Jewish day of love which may not be a focus for a lot of children’s programming.

While the themes slightly differentiate the Simcha

Series from other Jewish programming, it’s the style that really sets it apart. “I want children and parents to come and feel like they belong. It’s not a program for one type of kid. It’s an environment for all types,” Andrea explains. “I want parents to know that if their kid is different, especially if they’re neurodivergent, that they’re welcomed and not judged.” Andrea had the idea after becoming involved in PJ Library as a parent connector. Many of the PJ Library programs are joyful, promoting a party-like togetherness. Just like a set of stairs, this atmosphere is great for many, but does not provide access for all. Andrea wanted to create something that modelled what a different approach could look like.

When you register for a Simcha Series program, you register for one of three times slots. One caters to the crowd under three years old, another for those who thrive in a calmer setting and a third for those who like the hustle and bustle of a busier environment. When you enter the room, your eye is drawn to different stations. “I want them to have choice. Stations is my favourite word when it comes to anything for the kids.”

Andrea isn’t kidding around with these stations. Each one is thoughtfully planned and taps into different strengths kids may have. There are activities focusing on dramatic play, arts and crafts, building, sensory exploration, book enjoyment, teamwork and of course snacks. December’s Hanukkah program demonstrated this in action. In one area, kids could create gift bags and art for Hanukkah. They could follow this up with rebuilding the temple out of lego or pretending to cook felt sufganiyot (crafted by Andrea herself!) in a play kitchen. Wrapping up might look like packing warmth bags assembly-line style for a shelter or searching the room for hidden dreidels.

When you look around the room, you see children engaged in these intentional activities. They play together, or apart. Whatever they’re inclined to do. Andrea circulates and facilitates in her calm, gentle manner. She follows their lead and offers guidance to kids within the activities while parents also choose their own adventure. “It should feel like a playdate. The parents can get involved, play with their kid and then step back and also talk to other adults. It’s fluid,” she explains.

While the kids have fun, parents also pick up something valuable like a tidbit of unknown or forgotten Jewish knowledge. “For Shavuot we had



Special Educator Andrea Scharfstein.

little digestible books of the book of Ruth and so many parents didn’t know about the book of Ruth.” They may also find some inspiration in something new they want to do at home to liven up their routine during those long days and short years of having little children... I’ve had people say they’re going to try these things at home which is great to hear.”

You may be marveling at how lucky the community is to have such a welcoming program, planned by a skilled educator. The piece of the story you don’t already know is that Andrea also comes at this project through the lens of a parent. “My oldest son is neurodivergent. He’s not always so successful in the traditional programs so I really had him in mind in terms of what would help him be successful at a program while still learning and engaging in Jewish things.” The Simcha series is proving to do just that. It’s helping all kids enjoy being a part of their community. How does Andrea know she’s meeting her mission? “The kids have enjoyed it. They’ve felt taken care of and they want to come back. That’s the biggest compliment.”

Jana Zalmanowitz is a Local Journalism Initiative Reporter.

Israel activist *Cont. from page 6*

Jewish people or the State of Israel. The Jewish people and the State of Israel are patient zero on a worldwide war on truth, on reality...”

But she left the audience with a fierce confidence that while the battle will be long, the Jewish people will overcome this, just like they have at numerous times in history when various empires tried to destroy them.

“We know this has happened before and we know how this ends and it’s not going to end well for our enemies. It never does.

“That is the thing that keeps me hopeful and should keep all of us hopeful and not discouraged and not disheartened or exhausted.

“What’s a Jewish holiday? They tried to kill us, they didn’t succeed, let’s eat,” she quipped.

“Because we know that, we know that we’re not just going to survive this, we’re going to thrive this. We are

actually really good under pressure.”

While things seem bleak now, she said it’s important to remember that Jewish ancestors had to deal with things much worse and even more terrifying and the faith continues to live on.

“We don’t know what the world is going to look like 500 years from now or a thousand years from now. We don’t know what borders are going to look like, what countries are going to look like, what humanity is going to look like. We have no idea.

“But if there’s one thing that we know for sure and that is that even a thousand years from now Jewish women are going to be lighting Shabbat candles. We know that.”

B’nai Brith Calgary President Stacy Shaikin said he was thrilled with the community turnout and the message that Tishby brought that while

no one person will change the situation on their own, but each can use their own personal reach to contribute to the whole.

“Use your reach,” Shaikin said. “Don’t silo yourself and hunker down. Show the world that we are exactly as how Noa described us.

“We’re warm people. We’re interested in having a world that is lit up with kindness and joy and all of it.”

Mark Cooper is a Local Journalism Initiative Reporter.

In Memory of Morris Reef

Morris Reef, of blessed memory, (born September 25, 1939) passed away on November 6, 2025.

Morris is survived by his children Trevor (Melanie) of Toronto, Colin (Ilona) of Calgary and Hayley (Mike) of Baltimore. As well as by 14 grandchildren and 7 great grandchildren.

Morris immigrated to Canada from South Africa in 1979 and went on to build a successful accounting practice. He is predeceased by his loving wife, Celeste (of blessed memory).



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community calendar

Want to know what's going on in Jewish Calgary? Check out the Community Calendar at jewishcalgary.org

Have an event? Click on "Suggest an Event" to add it to the calendar



jewishcalgary.org



A MESSAGE FROM ROB NAGUS

Dear Friends, As I reflect on the past year, I am filled with an overwhelming sense of pride and gratitude for our community. The momentum we are experiencing right now at Calgary Jewish Federation is extraordinary and it is entirely because of you.

Thanks to your generosity, commitment, and belief in our shared future, this year's UJA Campaign was our most successful since 2013. That achievement is not just a number. It represents the strength of our collective values, the power of community, and our shared confidence in what we can accomplish together.

With this remarkable momentum behind us, our focus now turns to the future. We are deeply

engaged in an important strategic planning process in partnership with Finley and Associates, with the goal of setting a clear and inspiring vision for the next three years. Again, this work will help guide our priorities, strengthen our impact, and ensure that Calgary Jewish Federation continues to meet the evolving needs of our community with purpose and intention.

In the coming weeks, you can look forward to a series of exciting announcements as we share more about this work and other initiatives that will shape the next chapter of Jewish life in Calgary. I encourage you to stay connected, lend your voice, and take part in the conversations ahead.

At a time when Jewish communities around the world face real challenges, I want to say this clearly and

proudly: it is good to be Jewish in Calgary. Do we have work to do? Of course. But our community is strong, engaged, compassionate, and deeply connected. When we show up for one another and invest our time, ideas, and energy in our shared future, we will continue to thrive.

Thank you for being part of this journey, for believing in our mission, and for all that you do to strengthen Jewish Calgary.

With gratitude and optimism,

Rob Nagus
CEO
Calgary Jewish Federation

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

PJ Library SAVE the date calendar listing events: Mahjong (Jan 22), PJ Goes South (Jan 25), Magical Family Fun Night (Jan 29), Wicks & Flicks (Jan 31), and Celebrate Tu B'Shevat (Feb 1).

CHAIR OR NOT CHAIR - THAT IS THE QUESTION CELEBRATING JDAIM 2026 AND ITZHAK PERLMAN. SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 22 • PAPERNY FAMILY JCC. ARTIST AND RESOURCES MARKET | 10AM - 3PM. MOVIE AND CONCERT | 2:30 - 5PM. FEATURING GUESTS Violinist Mariya Usachev Bukhta, Pianist Rachel Kreiner.

INTERNATIONAL HOLOCAUST REMEMBRANCE DAY LE CHEMIN DES JUIFS: A SURVIVOR'S JOURNEY. TUESDAY, JANUARY 27 | 7PM. CALGARY CENTRAL LIBRARY IN-PERSON AND VIRTUAL. Join Calgary Public Library and Calgary Jewish Federation for a screening and live performance of the score of Le Chemin des Juifs: A Survivor's Journey.

SEEKING SUBMISSIONS for Holocaust Memorial Park. AS PART OF PHASE II OF THE REDEDICATION OF THE HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL PARK, WE ARE COLLECTING NAMES OF THOSE, WITH A CONNECTION TO CALGARY, WHO PERISHED IN THE HOLOCAUST. PLEASE SEND NAMES BY APRIL 30 TO HOLOCAUSTEDU@JEWISHCALGARY.ORG.

GIVE TODAY. STRENGTHEN TOMORROW. TOGETHER WE CAN



CAMPAIGN TOTAL
\$2,939,877



The UJA 2025 Campaign was our most successful one in over a decade!

It was made possible by the extraordinary generosity, leadership, and commitment of our community and allies. From the **Walk with Israel** to the inspiring visit and message from **Jonny Daniels**, Jewish Calgary showed up with passion, unity, and strength. These powerful moments were more than events—they were expressions of shared values, collective responsibility, and a commitment to one another and to the future of Jewish life. Because of you, our community is not only stronger and more connected, but also energized and ready to make an even greater, lasting impact in 2026 and beyond.



FOCUS ON FINANCE

Cohen Memorial *Cont. from page 1*

Harry B. Cohen (1912-1990), the son of poor immigrants, grew up in Winnipeg's North End and moved to Calgary in the 1930s where he initially worked for Warner Brothers first as a shipper and later as a general manager. He and his five brothers later formed General Distributors, which expanded over time to include Saan and Metropolitan Stores, the Sony Canada franchise, and distribution rights for Paper Mate pens.

They later diversified, most noticeably with interests in oil and gas and real estate.

Cohen – who married Martha Block in 1945 – grew in prominence, becoming a well-respected community leader and philanthropist. He was an ardent supporter of B'nai Brith, and he and Martha were among the builders of the Beth Tzedec Synagogue, established in the mid-1980s with the amalgamation of the Beth Israel and Shaarey Tzedec synagogues. Countless simchas and community events have since taken place in the Drs. Harry and Martha Cohen Social Lounge at Beth Tzedec.

On the civic scene, Harry Cohen was a proud supporter of the Boy Scouts.

"My dad loved being a Scout. His scoutmaster was like a second father," said Cheryl Cohen, adding that her father paid his happy experience forward as one of the founders of the Chinook Scout Foundation, the second-largest organization of its kind in Canada.

Cheryl followed in her dad's footsteps, supporting the work of the foundation as its first female chair.

Other organizations that benefited from Harry Cohen's leadership and/or philanthropy included State of Israel Bonds and the Canadian Council of Christians and Jews. Cohen's civic passions included the Calgary Stampeder Football Club and various arts and culture initiatives.

Martha Cohen (1920-2015) was a force in her own right, her accomplishments legendary. A woman ahead of her time, she was the driving force behind the establishment in 1960 of the Jewish Family Service Bureau (now Jewish Family Service Calgary) where, armed with a social work degree from the University of Toronto, she served as inaugural social worker, never drawing a paycheck.

Martha also gave generously of herself to the National Council of Jewish Women, as a donor and volunteer – eventually ascending to the presidency of the organization.

On the civic front, Martha was the first woman to chair the board of directors of Mount Royal College (now Mount Royal University). She later co-chaired Old Sun College in Gleichen, Alberta. She is, perhaps, best known for her tireless efforts toward the establishment, in 1985, of the Calgary Centre for the Performing Arts – now known as the Werklund Centre – where the Martha Cohen Theatre is an enduring tribute to her arts legacy.

Among numerous other awards and recognitions – too many to mention in these pages – the Cohens were the first married couple to receive the Order of Canada, Harry in 1974 and Martha in 1975.

"They grew up during the war and the Depression. I find that generation very charitable because they can relate to hard times," said Cheryl Cohen, herself an

avid volunteer.

"It came from my parents' example," explains Cohen, who joined her first board at the age of 28.

In 1988, Harry established the Harry B. Cohen Foundation for the Arts, later the Harry B. Cohen Foundation and eventually the Harry and Martha Cohen Foundation.

Sadly, Harry passed away suddenly and unexpectedly in 1990, a loss felt throughout the Jewish community, the City of Calgary, and well beyond. At that time, Cheryl took over the running of the foundation, inheriting its board of directors, mainly friends of her father.

Martha served on the board and remained a generous donor until her passing in 2015, when the community mourned the loss of a matriarch.

"Martha was very involved in many of the meetings up until the last little while as she aged. She was a clear, outspoken force on the foundation," recalls Brian Rogers, who chaired the Harry and Martha Cohen Foundation from 1993 to 2006, remaining active on the board as past president until 2025.

Rogers remains deeply moved by letters the foundation received over the years from grateful grant recipients including "...a young artist who could not make ends meet and [for whom] the foundation made a difference."

Harry and Martha Cohen's philanthropy touched multiple segments of the Calgary community and beyond, recalls Rogers, including grant recipients whose lives had been upended due to violence against women.

"People would write and be appreciative of being cared for and protected," Rogers said. "Though I don't come from a very religious family, it sure made me think about the principle of tzedakah...there is an inner warmth when you give to the most vulnerable."

"It always made me feel better if I could leave a meeting feeling that in some small way I've left the world a better place. The Foundation did that for me for many years," Rogers said, deeply moved when reflecting on "...all the people whose lives were made just a little bit better."

The composition of the Harry and Martha Cohen board of directors morphed as Cheryl Cohen brought on new people, including Rogers.

"I ended up with my dream board," Cohen recalls.

"[Cheryl] was really the glue. She had a tireless commitment and contributed greatly to the foundation. She was the one...reviewing all the grant applications and did a fabulous job. She really honoured her family," Rogers said.

But after running the foundation for 35 years, Cohen thought the time was right to find a new home for its charitable assets.

"Cheryl told me that she was thinking of retiring. I said we should talk, that maybe the Jewish Community Foundation could be of assistance and play a role," said Gerry Barron.

"When someone has their own private foundation, they have a lot of obligations they have to fulfill, from filing their charitable returns with CRA to fulfilling audits and managing investments," says JCFC Philanthropy Director Joey Tappenden.

"It is not uncommon for private foundations to seek



Archival photo of Martha and Harry Cohen outside the Martha Cohen Theatre at Werklund Centre.

out community foundations in order to fulfill their objectives.... In the grand scheme of things, bringing a private foundation over to an organization like the JCFC is a great way to fulfill your philanthropic objectives in an efficient and cost-effective way," Tappenden adds.

All fund holders benefit in a similar way.

"When you consolidate all your gifts in an organization like JCFC, you only have to manage one tax receipt, which is issued by us. Giving in this way, you can support many charities while using your time effectively," Tappenden said.

Cheryl Cohen and her siblings did their due diligence, exploring community foundation options, among them the Calgary Foundation, a well-respected organization that their father helped to found. Cheryl – who speaks highly of the organization – served on one of its granting committees for six years.

She began to seriously consider the JCFC when she learned that fundholders there can give to both Jewish and civic causes. And she felt an especially strong pull to strengthen Jewish organizations, especially in the wake of the October 7 attacks on Israel by Hamas terrorists and, subsequently, a rising wave of antisemitic acts worldwide.

"Especially in these times, I just felt way more comfortable going into the Jewish Community Foundation of Calgary, knowing the people who are involved and knowing that they are trying to benefit and engage future generations."

The official transfer of the charitable assets in the Cohen Foundation took place toward the end of October, following months of dialogue that included Zoom meetings with the geographically distant Cohen siblings, who were supportive of the transition.

"It wasn't a hard sell," recalls Cheryl.

The board of the Cohen Foundation – composed of both Jewish and non-jewish members – was similarly supportive, as they had been when the foundation opted to make substantial grants to Beit Halochem and Magen David Adom in 2025.

"I think it is really an appropriate transition," said

Continued on page 15

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FOCUS ON FINANCE

Cohen Memorial *Cont. from page 14*

Brian Rogers. “Supporting the vibrancy of our own community, with Cheryl’s focus, is really appropriate at this time.”

Cheryl also spoke at length with her former Calgary Hebrew School classmate Darlene Switzer Foster, a fundholder and board member at the JCFC, who assured Cheryl that the Harry and Martha Cohen Memorial Fund would be in good hands.

“I don’t have kids, and my nieces are in Toronto,” said Cheryl, for whom succession planning was top of mind.

Harry and Martha Cohen’s descendants will still be in the picture, helping to ensure that the donor-advised memorial fund will continue to honour their parents’ philanthropic objectives.

Donors can set up donor-directed and/or donor advised endowment funds. According to JCFC Chair Stuart Myron, philanthropists with donor-directed funds designate charitable organizations as the beneficiaries of their fund’s annual income. Those with donor-advised endowment funds make recommendations for grants to charitable organizations throughout the year. Both of these types of funds preserve the fund’s capital in perpetuity.

The Cohen fund has come to the JCFC during a period of tremendous growth with the JCFC poised to take another leap, thanks to the promise of future gifts. The lion’s share will come from donors who have provided letters of intent promising after-lifetime gifts via the Life & Legacy Program, co-administered by the JCFC and Calgary Jewish Federation.

One need not be wealthy to participate in Life & Legacy, which has attracted participation from Jewish Calgarians across the economic spectrum.

“With Life & Legacy, nobody is asking for money right now,” explains Tappenden. “We encourage potential donors to consider an after-lifetime gift to support in perpetuity the organizations and causes they care about.”

“Calgary Life & Legacy commitments currently total approximately \$19 million,” said Stuart Myron, who played a pivotal role in making Calgary the first Canadian Jewish community to join the program.

A couple of other commitments of at least \$1 million each are also in the offing, Myron said.

In addition to having grown the assets managed by the JCFC, the foundation’s leaders have steadily professionalized in terms of governance, policy development, and stewardship.

“JCFC is competitive with much larger foundations in terms of investment returns, administration fees and more,” said Myron, adding that “community members have, in turn, demonstrated their confidence in the JCFC.”

Cheryl Cohen is thrilled that she and her siblings can continue to honour their parents’ memories and shared legacy of giving both within and beyond the Jewish community.

“My dad always said that Calgary was good to him and his family, recalled Cohen, adding that her mother shared that feeling of gratitude.

“They believed that if you want to have a viable city, you have to give back.”

“The Cohen family bringing their foundation over is a real vote of confidence in the Jewish Community Foundation of Calgary,” said Gerry Barron. “As directors we are very pleased to support their vision.”

“As elected by the donor, whenever a gift is given, we recognize their names. Thus, the names of Harry and Martha Cohen will be honoured in perpetuity,” Barron added.

When leaders of charitable organizations see charitable gifts coming via the Jewish Community Foundation of Calgary, they are witness to the commitment of many in the Jewish community toward the betterment of society in general.

This is particularly important in times like these, says Brian Rogers.

“I’m so concerned about antisemitism.... The more we get the messaging out about gifting, not only to the Jewish community but beyond, I think the better we are for our community,”

“Hopefully the fact that the Cohen family has moved their foundation to JCFC will be an inspiration to others to follow their lead,” Gerry Barron said.

“Harry and Martha Cohen had a vision for their community,” says Joey Tappenden. “Their family still has that vision. We are very proud that JCFC will help to perpetuate their legacy.”

Maxine Fischbein is a Local Journalism Initiative Reporter.

Path forward *Cont. from page 3*

“And in this case they didn’t put their heads down and they weren’t trying to ride it out. They were putting their heads up and they were screaming and their screams went completely unheard. It was added insult to injury, the fact that everyone in the community that I know said that it was shocking but it wasn’t surprising.”

She’s heard from Canadian Jews who feel the same way.

Jay Cairns, the executive director of the Alberta chapter of Friends of JNF Canada, said those who come out to see Korchak speak will be impressed by her powerful presentation and the balance and positivity she brings to the discussion.

He said the organization is responding to an identified need to find educators who can help the Jewish community better articulate the Jewish and Israel narrative as post-October 7 has seen a revisionist history of the conflict come forward.

“I am really enthusiastic to bring her here and for her to give us an idea of what the reclamation of our narrative could look like,” said Cairns.

“We want to hear solutions. We want to talk about a future that makes sense and that we can see.

“I think she’ll be able to give us a really good sense of what the temperature is out there ... and give us a sense of what resonates with people ... what people are digesting and what they aren’t and I think that’s a really critical piece as we move forward.”

Despite a situation that she says remains worrying and acute, Korchak says she is beginning to see signs of optimism.

American universities are waking up to the challenge of foreign funding by bad state actors and more attention is being put to the fact some educators have veered away from education to indoctrination.

She sees a tremendous growth in a willingness and a want to be active amongst Jewish students around the world.

“And then you have the October 8 Jews, so many people who came back to the Jewish community who really felt that this moment impacted them, that it tapped into their Jewish identity and there’s this revival going on within the Jewish community that I find is very positive.”

And after the Bondi tragedy she has seen an awakening from people and an outpouring of support – especially in Australia – by people who saw the attack not only as an attack on Jews but on the western way of life.

“I really do see a lot of hopeful signs and I also see a lot of worrying signs so I’m constantly balancing those two things,” said Korchak.

For more information and to register for Korchak’s Calgary and Edmonton sessions Diaspora, Israel, and the Go Forward go to the events section at friendsofjnfca.org

Mark Cooper is a Local Journalism Initiative Reporter.



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FOCUS ON FINANCE

Edmonton JCC *Cont. from page 1*

Lisa Miller remembers that this was a monumental task of consulting with the community: “After the facilities committee determined the type of building and location, they brought forward the idea of purchasing the old Boy Scouts building in January 2024. After the purchase, new rounds of community consultations began.” The team was entrusted with listening to all suggestions, no matter how extravagant. “People were asking for everything,” she chuckled. “Chocolate fountains – I mean, we could potentially have a chocolate fountain for an event, but obviously that wasn’t going to happen on a permanent basis. My point is, jokes aside, that we needed to get a full picture of what our community was looking for from their JCC.”

This committee held countless ‘parlor discussions’ open to all of Jewish Edmonton – their task: listening and fact-finding. “Different generations wanted different things, and we quickly began to see that we needed a space that would reflect some diverse asks.” Miller and her cohort of volunteers noted that a full physical recreational facility would be costly to maintain, and duplicate existing establishments. “People voiced that they want a gathering space,” she emphasized. Leavitt-Wright elaborated: “We knew we needed a JCC that could serve the needs of families with young children, like our PJ Library programing, adults, and seniors.”

The current site took time to find. “We had to find a location that would be the right fit,” explained Karen Leibovici. “We had to think about accessibility, we looked at public transportation routes, thought about distance from core infrastructure, and definitely security.” The committee, chaired by Leibovici, considered everything that the previous group identified as essential, and began scouting out locations. “We actually found, based on Statistics Canada’s census, that many younger Jewish families aren’t settling in the West End, but a bit further out; that’s what made this location ideal.” The team voted to purchase the land and building, continuing the inspired momentum of the volunteers that came

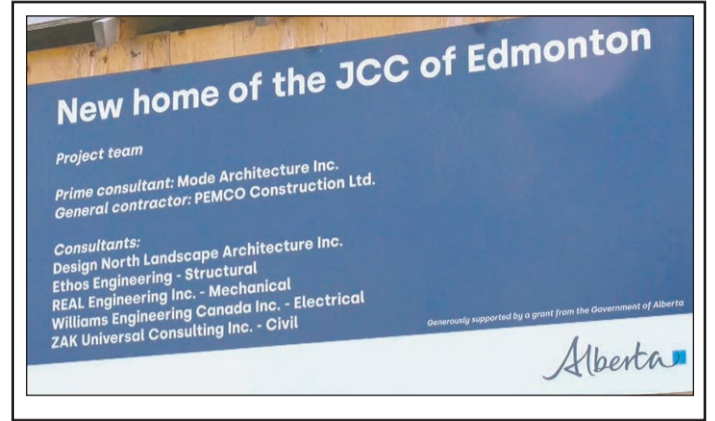
before them.

Leibovici leads the committee in its next phase of the process, that is currently underway. She explained that further community consultations were conducted to come up with the design for the building’s interior, and that this was extensive. “The building, even when we purchased it from the previous owner, was already completely gutted,” she explained. “Which has made our job much easier. We hired Marshall Hundert as our Project Manager, and now there’s active progress being made. We have an excellent design from Mode Architecture, and piece by piece the new JCC is coming together,” she concluded with excitement.

“I’m an Edmontonian born and raised,” said Miller. “And we knew from our consultations with community, that everyone, regardless of observance, knew we needed a Jewish space. We have newcomers to the community, and we want the JCC to be that ‘go to’ destination when people make Edmonton their home,” she emphasized.

“Yes,” added Leavitt-Wright. “I remember first coming to Edmonton when my husband was being recruited for work. I told the driver that I wanted to go straight to the address of the old JCC because I wanted to see what the Jewish community of Edmonton felt like. He asked if I was sure I wanted to go there because it was a residential neighborhood. We want new arrivals to Edmonton to walk into this JCC and feel like they’re home, and to feel connected with Jewish Edmonton,” she said passionately. “We need a central space where we can gather as a broader Jewish community to be Jewish and celebrate who we are. It’s also important for the larger population to see that we have this united central space that we share.”

Leibovici and her fellow volunteers are now occupied with two consuming tasks: project management, and interior design. “We remain responsible for the oversight of the renovation including the budget.” They also have aesthetic decisions to ponder: “We are looking at things like what flooring to install, the paint



color, and what sort of furniture we’d like.” The new JCC hopes to open its doors to the public in approximately one year – a project two decades in the making.

“It’s amazing to see how things are developing, and with each step of the construction it feels more real.” Leavitt-Wright emphasized: “There are so many people who have given so much of their time to bringing things to this point. This process started before I assumed my role, and if we were to name everyone it would be such a long list. Needless to say, they each need to be sincerely thanked, and their dedication to our community and its future recognized.”

The job is certainly not done, and the larger community should feel welcome to contribute whatever they feel able to. “There are still donation opportunities available,” emphasized Leavitt-Wright. “And every bit is appreciated,” added Miller. Edmonton’s new JCC will be a centerpiece of the Jewish community for generations to come, and everyone has a front seat as history is made. “We want this to be about community, and everyone should feel pride in what is materializing,” Leavitt-Wright continued. “There is so much to be thankful for, but this is a testament to our strength as a united Edmonton Jewish community.”

Regan Lipes is a Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

Noa Tishby weighs in on current issues in Israel

By Mark Cooper

(AJNews) – Along with her message of hope, Jewish life and resilience, activist Noa Tishby touched on a number of issues during her appearance as guest

speaker at the Calgary B’nai Brith Lodge event on December 7. Her remarks appear below.

On what’s fundamental to her stance on the conflict:

“I’m pro-Israeli and I’m pro-Palestinian and these two things are not mutually exclusive. The only thing

that I’m against is the Jihadi terrorist organization that wants to enact Sharia Law all over Israel, the Middle East, the world at large and Canada too. That’s what I’m against.”

On the Government of Canada’s recognition of a Palestinian State and the decision of some municipalities to raise the Palestinian flag:

“Magical thinking is something that should be kept for children. It’s lovely, it’s great but I don’t think it necessarily works when it comes to geopolitics or to the state of the world right now... There’s a lot of work that needs to be done even to have that conversation.

“There’s no doubt in all of our minds that this whole rigamarole of acknowledging a miraculous Palestinian State is nothing but virtue signaling for your extreme

Continued on page 23

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From the Promised Land to the Prairies

Moving for love and building Jewish identity in Edmonton

By Jana Zalmanowitz

Tzipi Abu doesn't shy away from adventure. That sense of adventure is what led the 30-year-old career consultant to leave her life in Israel, and move to Edmonton. The Canadian chapter of her story actually started in Thailand where she met her boyfriend. "I met a Canadian. I fell in love with him deeply and I decided I didn't want to give that up," she says.

Tzipi always had plans to try living away from Israel. She was born there, raised by her grandparents and has no family left in Israel (although she is careful to clarify that it's home to many "friends who are more than family"). The events over the last couple years encouraged her to take the leap. "With the war, things started getting really bad. From a financial standpoint it was hard living in Israel as well." Canada was never on the list of where to go. She had considered moving to the United States, New York specifically. When she met her boyfriend, they thought of settling in Thailand, but the job prospects were slim. Originally from Okotoks, her boyfriend got a job in Edmonton and Tzipi threw caution to the wind and moved to Alberta with him this past June.

She came to Edmonton knowing only her boyfriend, who is not Jewish. It has been up to Tzipi to navigate what it means to be Jewish in Edmonton. "When we were in Thailand it was really important to me to go to kiddush, do Shabbat and all the traditional stuff," Tzipi says. "You have plenty of Israelis there so you would never feel alone." Her experience in Edmonton is different from Thailand. She is finding the opportunities to participate in community events are hard to find and can be expensive. "If you want to go to a kiddush, you have to pay a lot which is frustrating for people who are single and don't have family."

True to the modern experience, Tzipi has made connections on a WhatsApp group for Israelis living in Edmonton. She estimates that 99% of the people in the group have families so it can be hard to make friends

when their lives look very different. When you meet Tzipi, her welcoming demeanor hints that even if it's difficult, she won't simply stop looking for meaningful Jewish connections in the city. She tells a story about going to see the movie *The Road Between Us* in theaters in October with a friend who was visiting from Israel. "There was this guy sitting right next to us and we started chatting. This guy knew more about Israel than I do. He told us he's in the process of converting and ever since then we became friends," she describes of the chance meeting.

Being in a small Jewish community has made Tzipi's dedication to her Jewish identity grow. In Israel she always acknowledges the Jewish holidays but since coming to Edmonton she's made an effort to formally celebrate major holidays like Passover and Rosh Hashana. "To me, celebration has always been about staying connected to where I come from, my roots and my identity. Here I feel so proud to be Jewish." That pride and Jewish enthusiasm has gained her some allies, such as her boyfriend's Christian father. "I told him what it's like to be Jewish and how it can feel dangerous to walk in the streets with a Star of David." In a show of support, he decided to get a Star of David tattoo. "I was completely speechless," she says.

That grand gesture of support hasn't shielded Tzipi from the antisemitism rampant in Canada right now. She describes an incident where she and an Israeli friend travelled to Montreal and found themselves in an Uber. "We started speaking in Hebrew because that's our mother tongue. That's how we feel comfortable. The driver decides to turn up a song in French and there was one sentence I was able to understand and it was [speaking negatively] about Israel. He was talking on his phone saying in Arabic that there were two Israelis in his car." While they were both rattled, it didn't dampen Tzipi's Jewish spirit. "The next day I was walking, saw this jewelry store, and got myself this," she says pointing to her



In Edmonton, Tzipi is embracing her first experience with snow.

Star of David necklace. Her partner has also had a taste of antisemitism when he lost a friend who found out he was dating an Israeli. "He wanted to educate her and explain to her that what she thinks about Israel and Israeli's is completely wrong, but she used such harsh words." With his support, Tzipi stands proudly in her Judaism. "I will never apologize for who I am, for my roots."

Even though moving to a new place is challenging, Tzipi is living proudly in the moment. She has found herself in a new situation many Albertans can relate to, of often being the only Jew in the room. She's using that position to ensure the people around her have a better understanding of what it means to be Jewish. "I'm making sure everyone knows about Judaism, understands the culture and understands that we will never be the victim. We care about moving forward and making things better."

When asked if she will stay in Edmonton, Tzipi's not sure what the future holds. Israel is not simply where she was born. "I don't know what will happen in the long run. I would be happy to go back to Israel because at the end of the day, that's my home. A lot of people here can't understand the Israeli sarcasm and it comes across as being rude," Tzipi says of her Israeli *chutzpah*. "Israel is in my DNA."

Jana Zalmanowitz is a Local Journalism Initiative Reporter for Alberta Jewish News.



Halpern Akiva Academy closes off 2025 with style

Halpern Akiva Academy was fortunate to host and participate in several special events before the students headed off to winter break. All of the students, from toddlers to teens, took part in the school Chanukah show. They created beautiful and creative artwork, performed Chanukah songs in both Hebrew and English, and shared their learning and talents with family and friends.

This year, the Akiva students joined with children from CJA in singing at the 37th annual Calgary Community Menorah Lighting at City Hall. Decked in hand-painted dreidel shirts, the children inspired the crowd with their rendition of "Maoz Tzur" and "Chanukah oh Chanukah".

In addition, Halpern Akiva Academy was honoured to have Rabbi Joshua Levy, Ed.D., visit the school. He is an executive school consultant for Torah U'Mesorah,

an organization with a mission to ensure that every Jewish child in a Torah day school in North America receives the highest standards of Torah education, along with the skills to lead a successful life and become a productive member of society.

Rabbi Dr. Levy was impressed by several things he noticed at Akiva during his visit. First, the quality of the administration and staff and their commitment to the highest professional standards. He also noted that the administrators at Halpern Akiva Academy are both excellent educators and leaders, taking parent concerns seriously and fostering a warm, caring learning environment. Finally, Rabbi Dr. Levy commented on the big-tent feeling in the school, noting that it provides an inclusive learning space that can be relied on to foster the Jewish and general education of the children entrusted there. These remarks

provided reassurance to everyone at the school—staff members, parents, and students—that they are all part of creating an excellent educational institution, respected and appreciated both locally and in the broader world of Jewish education. Reflecting on Rabbi Dr. Levy's feedback, combined with a growth mindset, will help Halpern Akiva Academy stay strong and become even better going forward.

Looking ahead in 2026, there will be even more excitement with the upcoming Special Friends Day, Science Fair, and Open House. Children ages 0-5 and their caregivers are invited to see the magic for themselves with "PJ Goes to Preschool" on Friday, February 20, 2026. Please contact Sydney Truax at struax@jewishcalgary.org for more information.

Edmonton Seniors welcome Chanukah with music

By Maxine Fischbein

The weather outside was frightful, but the Chanukah celebration was delightful as the JDIC Jewish Seniors' Centre in Edmonton welcomed 130 people for a Chanukah celebration on December 18.

Following a warm welcome from the drop-in centre's Executive Director Svetlana Pavlenko, Rabbi Mendy Blachman, of Chabad-Lubavitch, brought Chanukah greetings beginning on a sombre note as he recalled the devastating Massacre that took place on the first day of Chanukah at Bondi Beach in Sydney, Australia.

"I'm sure you are all aware of the tragedy that happened starting off this Chanukah," Rabbi Mendy said, referring to the terrorist mass shooting that claimed the lives of 15 people, among them a Chabad-Lubavitch Rabbi, a Holocaust survivor, and a 10-year-old girl.

Rabbi Mendy cited statements by members of the Australian Jewish community whom, he said, "were all in agreement that those who gave up their lives would want the celebration to continue."

"The spreading of the light should continue on because that's what's going to keep us going," Rabbi Mendy said.

True to those words, Rabbi Mendy spread a little light of his own with the joyous news that he and his wife welcomed a son on the first day of Chanukah and that his bris would take place on the eighth day of the festival.

Other highlights at the Chanukah celebration, expertly stickhandled by longtime JDIC Executive Director Svetlana Pavlenko and her right-hand Luba Allen, included a Chanukah candle lighting led by choir members Judy Goldsand and Sue Winestock, a festive concert by the Young at Heart Seniors' Choir, and a delicious lunch by Chef Daniella Drisdell.

The multi-generational audience was invited to sing along as the choir gave a spirited performance consisting of Chanukah favourites as well as contemporary tunes under the direction of Choir Director Deanna Clee and accompanied by pianist Elaine Dunbar.

One evocative piece, led by soloist Dr. Jerry Katz,



A lovely Chanukah celebration was held at the Edmonton Jewish Seniors' Centre on December 18. Highlights included a rousing musical performance by the Young at Heart Seniors' Choir, a moving solo by Dr. Jerry Katz, a candle lighting and a delicious lunch by Chef Daniella Drisdell. Photo by Milt Fischbein.

was *Har Nevo* (Mount Nebo). The song – for which Katz wrote the lyrics and conceived the melody – imagines the plea Moses might have made to God when he told Moses that he would see but never enter the Promised Land.

Katz, who regularly chants the Torah portion during Shabbat services at Beth Shalom Synagogue, says that the Torah portion from Deuteronomy that inspired his soulful song never fails to move him. Interest in performing the song has been expressed by other Canadian choirs, Katz said.

An upbeat crowd-pleaser was the Ladino song *Ocho Kandelikas* (Eight Little Candles), accompanied by "Ukeladies" Audrey Brooks (tenor ukelele) and Susan Lynch (bass ukelele), both members of the choir.

Young at Heart President Susan Baram urged audience members to consider joining the choir.

"No audition required," Baram said, urging potential members to "run, not walk to register."

Speaking of running, rocking, and rolling, Katz had a public service message of his own, urging Centre members and guests to support the 2026 Bagel Loop this spring. The annual fundraiser helps to ensure that Jewish seniors and their allies and friends can continue to enjoy the many services and programs offered by the JDIC.

"So, remember," said Katz, "give, give, give."

Sounds like a good hook for a great new song!

For more information about the JDIC Jewish Seniors' Centre, go to www.jdicseiors.ca

Maxine Fischbein is a Local Journalism Initiative Reporter.

Support is available at Jewish Family Services Edmonton

By Meital Siva-Jain

Why Edmonton

When people first learn I wasn't born in Canada (my accent is a strong hint), they often ask why I chose to settle in Edmonton. It's a fair question – Edmonton is very different from my hometown of Tel Aviv and from other major Canadian cities. While the weather wasn't the deciding factor, Edmonton has allowed me to build a life here, and much of my successful settlement is thanks to the support I received from local non-profit organizations.

Twenty years ago, I arrived in Edmonton without ever having seen snow or experienced below-zero temperatures. A few days after landing, my roommate invited me to join a group of immigrant Jewish women hosted by Jewish Family Services Edmonton (JFSE). Having never accessed social services before – and despite my strong Israeli sense of independence and confidence – I am grateful I gave it a try. Through this group, I met some of my closest friends, and today, in 2026, I have the privilege of offering similar support to new members of our community.

Why Jewish Family Services

Friends and family form our natural support systems, but newcomers often need to build these networks from scratch while navigating employment, housing, education, and health services in a new country. Early in my time in Edmonton, once I became familiar with JFSE, I sought guidance through the challenges of settling in a new city and, later on, managing the demands of parenthood – or simply having a listening ear when I needed one. Even small gestures, such as receiving a Passover food basket during COVID, helped me feel less isolated and stay connected to my faith.

Over the past two decades, I have come full circle. Jewish Family Services not only supported my own

journey but also enabled me to continue contributing to the Jewish community, especially over the past two years, when some spaces have felt less welcoming.

Today, JFSE supports approximately 10% of Edmonton's Jewish population, offering services that range from practical assistance – such as navigating government applications and accessing food resources – to mental health support, Older Adults Services, workshops, and one-on-one guidance.

Some clients seek support from a Jewish organization because of their familiarity with Jewish culture, while others may not have met a Jewish person before arriving at JFSE. Our Outreach team has been supporting new immigrants from many countries, including Israel, Ukraine, Turkey, Iran, Russia, and many more.

What to Expect When You Call Us

When you first access our Outreach Services, you will meet with a community worker or social worker to share your challenges and goals. We will ask a few questions – in English, Russian, or Hebrew – to better understand your circumstances, identify your priorities, and create an action plan. Please know that we take your personal information seriously and maintain strict confidentiality, ensuring you receive support in a safe, respectful, and private environment.

While we may not always have an immediate solution, we will support you as you explore your options and take the next steps.

What's Next

Looking ahead, we plan to continue expanding our social support services and reach more people in the Edmonton community. We emphasize our relationships with local Jewish institutions and work collaboratively with synagogues to ensure community members do not face financial barriers when celebrating Jewish holidays or practicing their Judaism.



Outreach Manager Meital Siva-Jain

As part of our ongoing settlement and integration efforts, we have been supporting job seekers for the past year. Beyond earning a living, employment contributes to our sense of self-worth and belonging.

This February, we plan to offer a workshop to help job seekers prepare for job interviews in Canada. Whether you recently arrived in Edmonton or are a long-time community member, you are welcome to join our workshop and connect with us to learn more about our community events.

Note: JFSE Outreach Services is supported by generous donors, including the Jewish Federation of Edmonton and the Jewish Community Charitable Foundation.

Meital Siva-Jain is Manager of Outreach Services at JFSE.

New exhibit, *One Thread, Six Million Lives*, launches at Calgary Public Library

By Amy Glassman-Boiko

Samantha Kassel fondly describes her great uncle (by marriage) Wolf “Willie” Woznica’s gentle kindness, generous smile, and the pride he took in his family and work. “He was easy to be around; his presence was calm and cheerful. His eyes sparkled with warmth. It was always Willie and Dora [his wife], never just Willie. They were a true duo,” says Kassel.

Growing up, Samantha and her cousins were aware that Willie and his wife Dora had survived the Holocaust – they had seen the tattoo on his arm, but it was not something that was ever discussed directly. As she got older, she learned bits and pieces of their story, like how Willie was interned at Auschwitz-Birkenau or how Dora survived a death march, but it wasn’t until the past year, prior to co-creating *One Thread, Six Million Lives*, that she learned the full scope of Willie and Dora’s experience by watching and listening to their testimonies in full.

Inspired by Willie, this past year Samantha joined forces with arts professional, Brandon Hearty, to create the exhibit *One Thread, Six Million Lives* which launched on January 5th and is now on display at Calgary Central Library. Using historical narrative, testimony from Willie, facsimile documents, and 3D replicas, the exhibit poignantly traces mechanisms of Nazi persecution through the lens of Willie’s experience. One of the central themes of Willie’s story, referenced in part of the title, ‘*One Thread*,’ was Willie’s occupation as a tailor which saved his life multiple times during the Holocaust.

“Very early on we really wanted to reference Willie’s occupation as a tailor, [as it] was such a part of how he survived,” shared exhibit co-creator, Brandon Hearty. Hearty explained that if they look closely, patrons can find subtle references to this in the artistic design of the exhibit such as the two panels which have a very light fabric covering and the image of Willie, which depicts him with an iron on his belt and other tailoring tools.

Hearty first became involved with Calgary’s Jewish community two years ago when Calgary Jewish Federation’s Holocaust and Human Rights: Remembrance and Education department brought the *Violins of Hope* exhibit to the National Music Centre, where he worked at the time. Now, despite working full-time at Contemporary Calgary and caring for a young family, Brandon continues to volunteer his time and talents to Calgary’s Jewish community and the broader Calgary community, driven by the desire to build a better society in which he lives and be an example to his kids.

“I’ve got two young children and I’m trying to teach them what community means and what neighbours are and how it’s important to expand your circle beyond just your family and your own faith community,” shares Brandon.

For both Brandon and Samantha, volunteering their time to create this exhibit from scratch was a labour of love with an extensive, creative, and research-heavy process. Aside from Willie’s testimony, Brandon and Samantha not only drew heavily on resources from Yad Vashem and the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum but also found themselves deep diving into the Polish internet to draw on information specific to Willie’s life in Będzin, Poland. Some of the most labour intensive and visually gripping parts of the exhibit included recreating Willie’s displaced persons certificate, his photograph from the DP camp where he can be seen wearing his prisoner uniform from Auschwitz, and the detailed 3D printed model of the Auschwitz I gate entrance, “I didn’t know what everything was going to look like until like the day before it [the exhibit] was installed,” said Hearty.



Creators of *One Thread, Six Million Lives*, Brandon Hearty (left) and Samantha Kassel (right), at the entrance of the exhibit at the Calgary Central Library.

What stands out to Samantha the most about Willie’s experience is not only that these events could happen, or that he survived them, but that “he went on to build such a peaceful, hopeful, and productive life afterward.” She hopes that people will remember when learning about the Holocaust that if it happened once, then it can happen again. “We saw how persecution built gradually, and we must never again ignore the early warning signs. The questions we ask, the choices we make, and the actions we take shape our society – I hope to live in one that pushes back against propaganda, scapegoating, and bigotry, no matter how convincingly they may be disguised.”

One Thread, Six Million Lives will be on display until February 2 at Calgary Central Library’s Shaikh Family Welcome Gallery (the main area through the front doors). It is free of charge and open to all.

This exhibit was put on in partnership with Calgary Jewish Federation’s Holocaust and Human Rights: Remembrance and Education department and Calgary Public Library, generously supported by the Balaban Family, the Krell Family, Viewpoint Foundation, and donors to the Human Rights and Holocaust Education Fund at Calgary Public Library Foundation.

Amy Glassman-Boiko is Calgary Jewish Federation’s Holocaust and Human Rights: Remembrance and Education Coordinator.

Reflecting on my summer in Israel

By Shayna Cairns

This past summer, I had the opportunity to travel to Israel on the NCSY TJJ (The Jerusalem Journey) program, an experience that profoundly reshaped my understanding of both me and my heritage. What initially felt like a simple six-week trip quickly evolved into a deeply personal journey marked by spiritual growth, emotional connection, and meaningful self-discovery. Throughout the program, I was consistently challenged to reflect on Israel’s significance, my Jewish identity, and my role within a history that stretches back thousands of years.

From the moment we landed, Israel felt fundamentally different from anywhere I had ever been. There was a powerful energy in the air – a blend of history, faith, and resilience. Walking through the ancient streets of Jerusalem, touching the weathered stones of the Kotel, and learning Torah in the very places where generations before me had stood, transformed Jewish history from something distant into something tangible.

These experiences allowed me to connect to Judaism not only intellectually, but emotionally and spiritually. I began to understand that Judaism is not simply a set of traditions, but a living identity that continues to shape who I am today.

As we traveled across the country, Israel revealed itself in all its complexity and diversity. We explored ancient cities, hiked through natural landscapes, and experienced modern Israeli life. Each location offered a new perspective, helping me appreciate the depth and resilience of the Jewish people. From the spiritual atmosphere of Tzfat to the vibrant energy of Tel Aviv, I saw how Israel seamlessly blends past and present. This contrast deepened my understanding of how



Shayna Cairns attended the NCSY summer program - The Jerusalem Journey, thanks to a Friedman Scholarship Grant from the Edmonton Talmud Torah Society.

Jewish history continues to influence contemporary Jewish life.

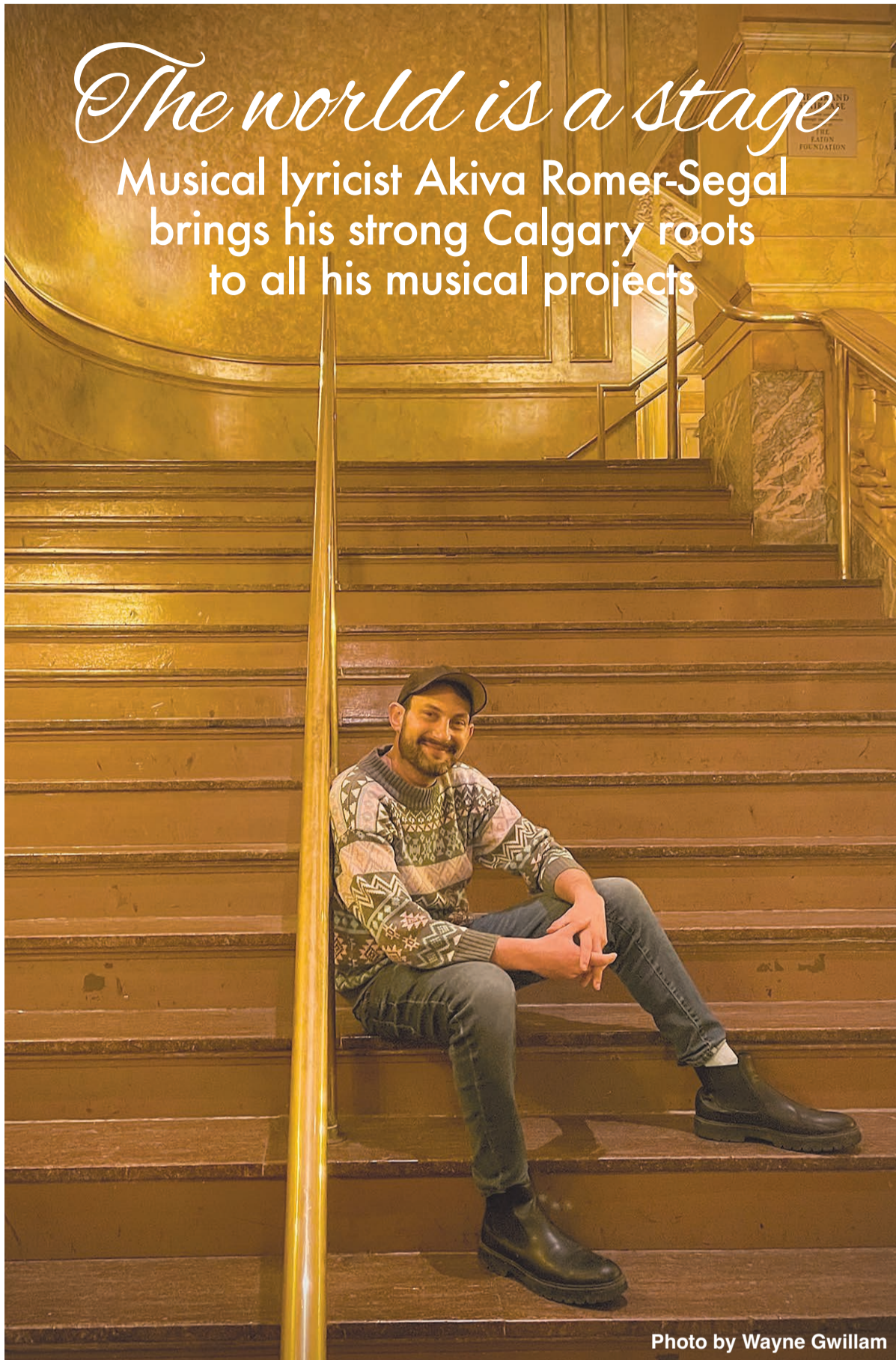
One of the most impactful aspects of the TJJ program was the learning. The rabbis and madrichim did more than present information – they encouraged us to question, reflect, and engage critically with our beliefs. Through meaningful discussions and thought-provoking classes, I was challenged to think about what Judaism means to me personally and why it remains relevant in my life. This process helped me take ownership of my Jewish identity and pushed me to grow both intellectually and spiritually.

Equally significant were the relationships I formed throughout the summer. Spending six weeks living, traveling, and learning together created strong bonds built on shared experiences and mutual growth. Being surrounded by peers who were also exploring their identities fostered a sense of community and belonging. These friendships provided support, perspective, and encouragement, making the journey even more meaningful.

By the end of the program, it was clear that I was returning home changed. I gained a stronger connection to Israel, a deeper appreciation for my heritage, and a clearer understanding of my values and goals. The NCSY TJJ trip was not simply a summer experience; it was a turning point that influenced how I see myself and my place in the world. Special thank you to the Edmonton Talmud Torah Society for providing me with the Friedman scholarship and for their help in making this such a meaningful summer.

In reflection, this journey continues to shape my perspective long after it ended. Israel is no longer just a place I visited, but a part of my identity that will continue to guide my personal and spiritual growth.

This trip was made possible thanks to an H.A. and I.R. Friedman Scholarship grant through the Edmonton Talmud Torah Society. Anyone wishing to inquire about this grant can contact nataliesoroka@talmudtorahsociety.com.



The world is a stage

Musical lyricist Akiva Romer-Segal brings his strong Calgary roots to all his musical projects

Photo by Wayne Gwillam

By Maxine Fischbein

Musical theatre lyricist Akiva Romer-Segal did some serious celebrating in Edmonton this past November as the Citadel Theatre premiered *Vinyl Cafe: The Musical (VCTM)*, a holiday production based on *The Vinyl Cafe*, the popular CBC radio show that aired between 1994 and 2015, consisting of stories by the late Stuart McLean, including the unforgettable Christmas favourite “Dave Cooks the Turkey.”

The *Edmonton Journal* review gave the proverbial two thumbs up to the crowd-pleasing show.

It has been quite a journey for the multi-talented Romer-Segal, who was raised in Calgary and is now based in Toronto.

That he co-wrote the songs for *VCTM* – together with his former Henry Wise Wood classmate, composer Colleen Dauncey – seemed pre-ordained as Romer-Segal walked down memory lane during an interview with *AJNews* days after the musical’s world premiere.

“I woke up on Sunday mornings to the smell of my mother making French toast and to the sound of Stuart McLean’s dulcet tones regaling us with Dave and Morley’s latest antics,” recalled Romer-Segal.

“When the opportunity arose to write this show, I actually called my mom and said, ‘If I could write any musical for you, what would it be? She said Vinyl Cafe, and I said great, and I hung up,” chuckled Romer-Segal. “This one’s for my mom and dad.”

Romer-Segal, who recently celebrated his fortieth birthday, was not at all sure he would be able to travel to Edmonton for *VCTM*, given that the show was

staged between two major surgeries following his diagnosis – just over a year ago – with stage 4 liver and colon cancer.

“It was really fun to experience in person...the joy that [*VCTM*] brings a live audience and the gleeful response,” Romer-Segal said.

It is hoped that the show, which was commissioned and directed by Citadel Artistic Director Daryl Cloran, will gain traction as a holiday tradition in other Canadian theatres and south of the border, where *The Vinyl Cafe* was also broadcast on public radio.

VCTM, says Romer-Segal, “... was conceived very intentionally as an alternative to *A Christmas Carol*.” The two plays were staged in adjacent theatres at the Citadel this past holiday season, giving audiences a contemporary choice in addition to the adaptation of the time-honoured Dickens classic.

Armed with a degree in technical theatre production from Toronto Metropolitan University (formerly Ryerson), Romer-Segal spent the first decade of his career as a set and costume designer, often assisting major designers.

“Major design opportunities in this country are limited, and they were going to my mentors,” recalls Romer-Segal who felt uncomfortable with the growing realization that for his big break he would have to wait for his mentors to retire or die.

After hearing actor and singer Sara Farb at a cabaret, Romer-Segal wrote lyrics for a song he thought would be perfect for her. She told him that if he could get someone to compose the music, she would perform it.

Romer-Segal reached out to his friend Colleen Dauncey, with whom he had acted in high school and summer stock. She had moved on to other things, having earned a business degree and was living in Quebec.

Dauncey agreed to write the music, and the song received great response, said Romer-Segal, adding that people began asking them what else they had.

It was not long before Dauncey relocated to Toronto. Colleen and Akiva (check out their website) began to write more songs for Farb (who has performed on Broadway and at the Stratford Festival and will portray Fanny Brice in her Shaw Festival debut in a production of *Funny Girl* set to open this coming spring.)

“At a certain point Sara Farb said, well, if you write enough songs, I’ll produce a concert or a song cycle. So, we wrote our first show...called *The Subway Songs*, which has now been retooled into a show called *Going Under*,” Akiva said.

A licensable show, *Going Under* “...explores connection through a group of high schoolers en route to their graduation, when the subway they are riding comes to a screeching halt.” The play has been popular with youth theatre groups, Akiva said.

Things started to take off for Colleen and Akiva, who self-produced their first Toronto Fringe Festival show, *Bremen Rock City*, for which Farb wrote the book. The show – a family-friendly rock musical based on a Brothers’ Grimm fairytale – was a hit at the Fringe.

Next came *The Louder we Get* – originally produced as *Prom Queen: The Musical* – based on the true story of Marc Hall, an Ontario teen who took on the Catholic school system in his fight for the right to take his boyfriend to his school prom. The play was staged at Theatre Calgary, the Segal Centre in Montreal, and the Grand Theatre in London, Ontario.

“My writing career started taking off, and it got to a certain point where I had to decide between writing and set design,” Akiva said. “The writing won.”

Like so many in the theatre community, Akiva had to take on other jobs in order to make ends meet. He spent more than a decade with the JCC at Bloor and Spadina serving in various capacities.

“In Canada, there are maybe a handful of people who can say that they are full-time musical theatre writers,” said Akiva, though he and Colleen got to the point where most of their time was spent writing, traveling, and workshopping shows.

In 2020, *The Louder We Get* opened at Theatre Calgary. Another of their shows, *Grow*, was set to open at the Grand Theatre in London, Ontario when the COVID-19 pandemic thrust the world into chaos. Colleen and Akiva found themselves grounded as theatres went dark and projects were put on hold.

Akiva got a job at a marketing firm, working remotely. Once the theatre world was back up and running, he had the flexibility to travel and work on shows while they were in preview.

Then, just over a year ago, Akiva received his cancer diagnosis.

Ironically, his close friend, writer Andrea Scott, got hers around the same time.

“We’ve sort of been going through this together,” said Akiva, who has since undergone 11 rounds of chemotherapy and, just weeks ago, his second surgery.

Before that, he traveled – with his medical team’s blessings – for the preview performances and premiere of *VCTM*.

“Previews are one of my favourite parts of the process,” said Akiva who thrives on the collaboration that takes place as theatre professionals take notes, observe audience reactions and tweak a show during the following days’ rehearsals, making changes to scripts, orchestration, and sets. The real-time metamorphosis unfolds through to opening night.

In Edmonton, Akiva had a cheering section of his own, including friends and family who traveled from Toronto, Red Deer, and Calgary.

He was the toast of Edmonton that evening and remains the pride of Calgary.

“A lot of my formative theatre and cultural arts experiences were in Calgary,” said Akiva who recalled the “surreal feeling” of watching a dress rehearsal for *The Louder we Get* from the same box at Theatre Calgary where he watched *Into the Woods* with his mother and grandmother when he was a kid.

Akiva, who was 10 years old at the time, vividly recalls how captivated he was by the action, both onstage and backstage.

Continued on page 21

Romer-Segal *Cont. from page 20*

"I had a slight peek into the wings where you could see the show behind the show and it...opened my eyes to this idea that there are people behind the scenes that are helping tell this story."

The experience was "formative," said Akiva, as was his later discovery of a musical theatre cast recording section at the Calgary Public Library.

"Those two experiences formed into this idea that I could be someone that is on the other side of the performance," Akiva said.

As a student at Henry Wise Wood High School, Akiva met Colleen, with whom he performed in school musicals, including *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat*. Together they also acted in plays staged by the Summer Stock Conservatory program at Olympic Plaza, including *Guys and Dolls*, *Fiddler on the Roof*, and *Annie Get Your Gun*.

Akiva fondly remembers the early influence of Lana Skauge...a storyteller and performer who has worked with students and teachers throughout Calgary – including those at Akiva Academy, the Orthodox Jewish day school where Akiva attended elementary and junior high school.

Skauge – who has influenced countless kids in the performing arts – later taught Akiva at the Theatre Calgary Drama Camp.

"I think of her sometimes as a very early mentor that saw the artist in me and fostered that," Akiva said.

As he continues to heal, Akiva looks forward to the opening of *Grow* at the Segal Centre in Montreal this spring.

"The show is about two Amish twin sisters who leave their sheltered community for the first time to explore life in the modern world and get caught up in the world of cannabis," said Akiva.

That smells like fun!

"The legalities and culture around [cannabis] have changed so much in the last nine or so years that the show has been around," said Akiva. "We've had to rewrite from scratch every few years because when we first wrote the show, [cannabis] wasn't even legal in Canada."

So, Akiva has more lyrics to write as new ideas for future projects with Colleen also continue to percolate.

The shared cancer journeys of Akiva and Andrea Scott may lead to another interesting project.

"We have been scheming up a TV show very loosely inspired by us, about two younger best friends who get a cancer diagnosis around the same time and their journey through that together," Akiva says.

It is a dark comedy, just the kind of thing, he adds, that has "become essential to my healing."

"I think it's also been a really interesting way to track the people around me and the way that they've come to deal with the news of my diagnosis," Akiva says. "People who couldn't say the word cancer about a year ago are now sending me really dark jokes. They know that's our way of getting through this.... You have to laugh or sing through the darkness sometimes in order to survive."

Akiva's friends and family have been there for him, including his brothers Yannai and Hananel and parents Agi and Eliezer, whom he credits with planting the seeds of creativity.

Eliezer Segal, now Professor Emeritus at the University of Calgary, where he specialized in Rabbinic Judaism, is also the author of the delightfully whimsical rhyming children's book *Uncle Eli's Passover Haggadah*.

He is also a monthly columnist with *Alberta Jewish News* - contributing his unique biblical offering From the Sources.

Agi Romer Segal – who together with a friend worked backstage on McGill University plays – earned a degree in library sciences. A writer and translator,

she worked for many years as the archivist at the Jewish Historical Society of Southern Alberta and, before that, as a beloved kindergarten teacher at Akiva Academy. Her son Akiva recalls the tremendous creativity she brought to making crafts and puppet shows depicting biblical stories.

"There certainly was a creativity bubbling," said Akiva of the home in which he grew up.

"*Vinyl Cafe* is very specifically an ode to that," he added.

Akiva's parents can still pinpoint moments they knew their youngest son was destined for the arts.

"There was no choice. Since he was two that was where he was going to go, said Agi Romer Segal, thinking back to the 1988 Winter Olympics in Calgary.

"He liked to watch the 'finger skating,' that was what he called it, and mostly the twirling," recalled his mom, who saw that it was the showy parts of the sport that really tickled her son.

Akiva was around 11 when his family first laid eyes on their Braeside home, and he noticed that the house had two decks, one overhanging the other like a balcony.

"Akiva said, 'Yes, we have to buy this house, there's a stage,'" recalled Agi Romer Segal.

According to his parents, Akiva thrived at Akiva Academy, where he enjoyed participating in talent shows. He benefited from small class sizes and the way teachers encouraged student creativity. He took music lessons in Calgary with the late Fran Snukal and spent Grade Nine in Israel with his parents while they were on sabbatical, participating in plays based on biblical passages.

Speaking of Israel, Akiva adapted the Israeli play *Layla Echad B'April*, by singer and songwriter Keren Peles, helping to ensure that the play would work for American audiences and penning English song lyrics that would fit the rhythms of Peles' original compositions.

April Fool – as the play became known to English-speaking audiences – was staged at the Segal Centre in Montreal in a 2022 production directed by Moshe Kepten, artistic director of *HaBima*, the National Theatre of Israel.

All the world's a stage for Akiva, who has had the opportunity to gain experience from giants in the musical theatre world.

"In 2017 we were invited to present excerpts of *Grow* at The ASCAP Musical Theatre Workshop in Toronto, in front of a distinguished panel that included Broadway legends Stephen Schwartz, Joe DiPietro, and Bob Martin," said Akiva. "Schwartz had some high praise for our ballads, which was a great compliment coming from the king of the genre."

The following year, Sir Andrew Lloyd Webber attended a workshop presentation of *The Louder We Get* at the Other Palace, a theatre Lloyd Webber owns in London, England.

"He ended up attending our show, and when we met him afterwards, he had some very kind things to say and invited us to tea the next morning with his wife. They were both quite lovely," said Akiva, who added that they discussed his show and future projects, as well as some of Lloyd Webber's.

"He was very encouraging," Akiva said.



Musical lyricist Akiva Romer-Segal with long time musical collaborator Colleen Dauncey at the premiere of 'Vinyl Cafe: The Musical' in Edmonton.

These days the theatre community is rallying around Akiva as he continues his recovery.

"During his illness, people have really shown up for him," says Eliezer Segal, including Akiva's brother Hananel and his wife, who have created a comfortable space in their Toronto home, where Akiva has stayed at intervals while recovering from chemo and surgery.

"The care has been so caring," Agi Romer Segal said of her son's medical team and supports, among them, the community of cancer patients who truly look after one another.

There is great material there. And, no doubt, Akiva Romer-Segal – who looks to the future with optimism – is already imagining lyrics that will soar as his star continues to rise.

Maxine Fischbein is a Local Journalism Initiative Reporter.

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Calgary school honours Dr. Martha Cohen z”l

By Maxine Fischbein

It should come as no surprise that the late Dr. Martha Cohen is the namesake of a Calgary Public School given her lifelong commitment to education.

The announcement that the middle school serving the Southeast neighbourhoods of New Brighton and Copperfield would bear Cohen’s name came just months after her passing in February 2015 at the age of 94, with the official opening of the school taking place two years later, on April 27, 2017.

A couple of months after the opening, Cohen’s daughter Cheryl hosted a small reception at the school so that friends and family could see it, but many in the Jewish community may not have been aware – until now – that school had been named for Martha Cohen, a community icon.

When Cheryl received the letter from the Calgary Board of Education asking for her family’s permission to name a new school for her mother, she responded immediately with a resounding yes...and then shared the news with her siblings Philip, Faye and David, each of whom made a happy homecoming to mark the momentous occasion.

“My mother would have been so thrilled to know there is a school named after her,” said Cheryl during her address on the day that the school, located on Brightondale Park, was officially named for her mom.

“Education was a huge priority for my mother. She felt a good education improves your lives and makes one more valuable to their community,” Cheryl added.

The great-niece of Calgary’s first permanent Jewish settlers – Jacob and Rachel Diamond – Martha Cohen later made Jewish history herself as founder of, and first social worker at, the Jewish Family Bureau (today Jewish Family Service Calgary).

Education meant the world to Martha Cohen.

Born and raised in Calgary, she was the only child of immigrant parents Peter and Rebecca Block. A proud product of public schools, Martha attended McDougall School throughout elementary and junior high and graduated from Central High School.

Always ahead of the curve, Martha Cohen began her studies at the University of Alberta at the age of 15.

“She was an excellent student who skipped two grades in elementary school,” Cheryl said to the children in attendance at the school’s opening.

Martha earned her Bachelor of Arts degree at the University of Alberta at the age of 18, later completing a Diploma in Social Work at the University of Toronto.

In 1945 Martha married Harry Cohen, who rose to prominence as a businessman, philanthropist, and community leader.

Martha Cohen racked up her own accomplishments

on many civic fronts, including education. It was on her watch as chair of the Mount Royal College Board of Governors that a new campus, today the home of Mount Royal University, was built. She later served for 12 years as vice-chair of Old Sun College in Gleichen.

The list of honours Martha Cohen merited during her life is a long one, among them the Alberta Achievement Award (1975), the Calgary Board of Education Distinguished Alumni Award (2006), a University of Calgary Honorary Doctor of Laws (1982), and an Honorary Bachelor of Applied Communications from Mount Royal University (1995). She was recognized as a Global Calgary Woman of Vision in 2009.

Between donations made by friends and family when Cohen passed away and a grant that was made by the Harry and Martha Cohen Foundation, the family was able to establish the Drs. Harry and Martha Cohen Promising Student Award said Cheryl.

At the official school opening, three students were honoured with the award. Since then, it has been given annually to one deserving student.

“It goes to a graduating Grade 9 student who shows scholastic ability and good school spirit,” Cheryl said, adding that an additional consideration is financial need.

“The Cohen family really wanted the award to go to kids that needed it, obviously earned it as well, so were looking at those kids that are great citizens,” says Principal Jason Hartl, who has led the Dr. Martha Cohen school since it opened.

“We let the parents know in advance to make sure that they’re coming to our farewell for the Grade Nine students,” said Hartl, adding that the name of the award recipient is otherwise a closely guarded secret and a wonderful surprise.

“They light up,” says Hartl. “It’s the only award we give out as a school, so it’s a pretty special day for that student.”

The excitement of award recipients and their parents have led to some memorable moments for Cheryl, who presents the award annually on behalf of her family and shares in the excitement of kids who show so much promise.

One little girl responded, “I’m so beyond excited,” when she accepted the scholarship, which typically amounts to several hundred dollars, Cheryl said.



Archival photo of Faye Cohen standing next to a framed photo of Dr. Martha Cohen, of blessed memory at the opening of her namesake school in 2017.

Each year, teachers create a shortlist of deserving Grade Nine students which is then shared with Cheryl and her siblings who, in turn, make the final selection.

“Quite a few of the recipients, I think most, have been from immigrant families,” Cheryl said, adding that the children are sometimes immigrants themselves or first-generation Canadians – as her parents once were – a fact she always mentions in her remarks at the annual Grade 9 graduation.

The Dr. Martha Cohen School is a lovely and large ultramodern school, says Cheryl. More than 900 students are enrolled this year.

“We have great kids and great families that come to this school,” said Hartl. “I think if Dr. Martha Cohen were alive, she’d be pretty pleased with how the school operates and the people that contribute to this learning community.”

Hartl takes pleasure in the name of the school that opened on his watch, especially “...given who Dr. Martha Cohen was and the large impact she left on the city.”

“I think it’s awesome to have the name of someone who was a Calgarian on a school that’s in Calgary. Often, we see names on schools that are former prime ministers, etcetera, but I think it’s really special that the name of someone who had such a profound impact on our community is on our school.”

That impact included Martha Cohen’s stellar contribution to the arts. She was one of the driving forces behind the enormously successful fundraising campaign for the Calgary Centre for the Performing Arts, today the Werklund Centre, home of the Martha Cohen Theatre.

“When we opened Dr. Martha Cohen School, we talked about the importance of the arts and so they do play a role here. We wanted to continue that because of who [Martha Cohen] was and what she was passionate about.”

The naming of the Dr. Martha Cohen School was not the only exciting thing to happen on April 27, 2017. Later the same day, the Dr. Martha Cohen Master Classroom – a performance space at Mount Royal University’s Taylor Centre for the Performing Arts – was dedicated in memory of Martha.

Close to a decade after her passing, it is inspiring to remember the role education played in the making of Martha Cohen.

“She was a typical Jewish mother, always emphasizing education, education, education,” recalls Cheryl.

Education, after all, was a blessing in Martha Cohen’s life. Dedicated to giving back during her lifetime, her gift continues to give at the school that bears her name and throughout the multiple communities she served so well.

Maxine Fischbein is a Local Journalism Initiative Reporter.

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from the **Sources**
by Eliezer Segal

We Are the Tree (?)

In discussions about Jewish attitudes toward nature, the most widely quoted biblical text is probably a passage in Deuteronomy that sets guidelines for the treatment of trees when laying siege to an enemy town.

The Torah teaches there that although it is permissible to eat fruits from those trees, it is forbidden to cut them down. This restriction applies only to fruit trees. As for those that do not bear fruit, the Torah voices no objection to felling them to erect fortifications. Some commentators mention additional valid grounds for destroying trees, such as to prevent the enemy from acquiring lumber or using groves as hiding places.

As the rationale for the prohibition against harming fruit-trees, the Torah offers an enigmatic statement, standardly translated as “Is the tree of the field a man, to go into the siege before you?” That is to say, the text is read as a rhetorical question, rejecting any equation of humans and trees or their produce.

This approach was favoured by Rashi, who understood it in the sense of: “Is a tree of the field really comparable to a human, so that it might be classified as an inhabitant of the besieged town whom you are driving inside the town to share the tribulations of hunger and thirst with the townspeople?”

The vagaries of Hebrew grammar allow for an alternative interpretation of the scriptural text—reading it as a declarative sentence that comes to equate humans and trees. Thus, the ancient midrash *Sifre* explained it as a positive assertion that we should refrain from damaging the tree “because human life stems from the tree.” It is out of respect for our dependence on botanical sustenance that the Torah urges us to refrain from destroying trees even in wartime when such considerations are often neglected.

This interpretation was favoured by Rabbi Abraham Ibn Ezra. He was convinced that employing rhetorical sentences to express negation is not a feature of Hebrew grammar precisely because it lends itself to misunderstandings; it would have been more straightforward to simply formulate the idea with the negative particle: “for the tree of the field is not a

man.” There is no need for scripture to state the obvious fact that trees should not be confused with human enemies who are trying to flee from our forces. At any rate, the restriction is not an absolute one, as evidenced by the fact that it allows exceptions when utilizing wood from non-fruit trees for essential military purposes.

Nahmanides favoured Ibn Ezra’s explanation, from which he inferred that we must hold back entirely from the gratuitous destruction of trees in recognition of our reliance on them for sustaining human life. Despoiling fruit-trees is never permitted, and exceptions are allowed only for those that do not bear edible fruit.

Nahmanides realized that his understanding differed from the approach of the talmudic sages. They had ruled that even fruit-trees may be destroyed for strategic purposes, and what the Torah is telling us is only that we should not resort to that option as long as non-fruit trees are available.

Based on this Torah passage, Rabbi Bahya ben Asher derived a broad appreciation of the Jewish perspective on nature, observing that “it is not the way of a wise and understanding nation to needlessly destroy such a valuable resource. Therefore you should not labour to cut down a tree of the field; rather you should protect it from destruction and damage, and derive benefits from it.” When scripture states “for you may eat from them,” it means that such destruction would be counterproductive, depriving us of their precious benefits.

The nineteenth-century Italian scholar S. D. Luzzatto cited several Jewish and non-Jewish commentators who explained the prohibition in terms of expediency, since our besieging soldiers might require the fruit either during the campaign or after successfully occupying the town. Luzzatto himself dismissed such pragmatic calculations, arguing that it is not the Torah’s purpose to advise people about obvious matters of self-interest. Quite the contrary, it comes to instruct us in ethical values. It encourages altruism by urging us to forgo our immediate gratification in order to cultivate compassion and stave off tendencies to cruelty. Furthermore, by forbidding

needless destruction of trees whose fruits we have enjoyed, even after their usefulness has expired, it is instilling a valuable lesson about gratitude in our interpersonal relationships.

Israeli popular music produced a thoughtful exposition of our biblical text in a 1983 composition by poet Natan Zach that achieved success in a musical arrangement by Shalom Hanoach. Zach read the Torah’s wording as a declarative sentence, and pondered how apparent similarities between the human and botanic spheres can also reveal crucial contrasts: Yes, like trees we are subject to growth and upward striving; both species thirst for water and are vulnerable to axes and fires. Yet the same earth that nurtures the tree’s life is allotted for burial of humans.

The song concludes enigmatically: “And I don’t know where I’ve been and where I’ll be, like the tree of the field.”

Two thousand years ago, Philo of Alexandria interpreted the Torah’s classification of trees as an allegory about moral education and the ideal curriculum for training souls. In keeping with his general pedagogical theory, Philo explained that science is being symbolized as a field of trees and plants, with moral virtues as their fruits. Logical reasoning and theoretical disciplines, although they may not provide tangible benefits, are likened to a hedge or bulwark surrounding a field, which protects the essential fruits of rational education from the forces of ignorance that threaten to destroy them. In this way, the study of logical thinking offers protection to moral virtues and science by safeguarding them against specious and deceptive arguments.

Philo’s intellectual ideals are exemplified by the generations of scholarly debate about the meaning of the difficult biblical text. His allegorical interpretation might contain useful lessons for withstanding the present-day assaults against truth and reason.

‘From the Sources’ by Eliezer Segal is sponsored by the Zeisler Families of Calgary, Edmonton, New York and Los Angeles

Noa Tishby *Cont. from page 16*

voters in order to pacify them and calm them down. I don’t even know that the elected officials themselves think that’s useful but they say it anyways and as a result, what happens is that it’s open season on the Jews again and nothing moves within the Middle East.”

On the current state of progressivism in America:

“Progressivism the way it is presented in America right now is absolutely ridiculous. It’s not progressive, it’s not liberal and it’s not tolerant and I want nothing to do with that.

“It became intolerant. You can’t have different opinions, you can’t have conversations. It’s horrible.”

Her views on the current state of the peace plan

“I think it’s one the most dangerous and severe moments that we have right now because within Gaza and inside the yellow zone (a buffer zone to which Israel is staying outside of for the time being) Hamas is re-arming, re-establishing its hold on Gaza and murdering Palestinians who are resisting it.

“It’s getting money again from Iran through Turkey with money exchange and digital money.

“One of the things we have to make sure is that there will be no rebuilding of Gaza without Hamas being removed from power. It cannot happen. And right now they are doing everything they can to reestablish their hold on Gaza.”

On the election of Zohran Mamdani as Mayor of New York



The Calgary B'nai Brith Lodge event committee: Left to right is Sandy Martin, Lily Lister, Polina Brener, Noa Tishby, Beverly Sklar and Howard Silver

“What was unthinkable to say or to think before now gets you elected as the Mayor of New York City. What he already did is inserted into the conversation the notion that he doesn’t think that a Jewish state needs to exist, should exist or has the right to exist.

“Literally New York City chose an anti-Zionist mayor and this again is part of the long game that has been played. All of this is to say ‘the narrative is not

changing anytime soon. We need to be able to weather this storm, understand it’s a very big game that is being played against the West.”

Mark Cooper is a Local Journalism Initiative Reporter.



Gala event honours Nechama and Rachmiel Feldman

By Regan Lipes

“Kindness should be practiced, not only spoken,” according to Rebbetzin Rifka Drelich head of Edmonton’s YES Kosher Friendship.

In honour of two inspired community leaders, YES Kosher Friendship held a gala celebration this past Chanukah. As the Jewish world gathered for the festival of lights, a dedicated crowd came together at Chabad Lubavitch of Edmonton to recognize the ongoing light brought to the community by Rachmiel

and Nechama Feldman.

“My parents are the epitome of what it means to be a true mensch,” explained Mira Feldman Campbell, daughter of the honorees. “Our entire family could not be prouder of them and the lessons of perseverance, selflessness, generosity, and dedication to Yiddishkeit they have taught us. We are grateful to Chabad, YES Kosher Friendship, and Rabbi and Rebbetzin Drelich for honoring them in such a meaningful way.”

The event was lovely and well attended by generations of leaders from the Edmonton Jewish

community. A raffle was held, and three fortunate prize winners will be traveling to Israel: Nechama Bernstein, Aliaya Vynshteyn, and Bruma Vatsilitsky.

Each of the winners is eagerly looking forward to their trip to Israel and will wrap up these visits with a day of volunteering at a women’s college there. Mazel tov to Rachmiel and Nechama Feldman and the entire Feldman family; the Edmonton Jewish Community is grateful for all you do to support Yiddishkeit locally!

Regan Lipes is a Local Journalism Initiative Reporter



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