



# ALBERTA Jewish NEWS

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April, 2026

## Muslim-Jewish group brings peace mission to YYC

By Mark Cooper, LJI Reporter

CALGARY- Like many of her peers across the Arab world, Fatema Alharbi's early education was steeped in anti-Israel sentiment and Holocaust revisionism.

If they talked about it at all, teachers often framed the genocide of six million Jews as an exaggerated Israeli propaganda campaign or a tragedy the victims had invited upon themselves.

Today, the 34-year-old Bahraini author is leading a different conversation.

As a peace activist, she has made it her life's work to challenge those deep-seated prejudices and build a bridge between her culture and the Jewish community.

"Being in an Arab and Muslim country you hear only one narrative and it is all bad about Israel," said Alharbi, the Gulf Affairs Director of Sharaka, a non-governmental organization founded after the signing of the Abraham Accords by young leaders from Israel and some Gulf states to promote "warm peace" and normalization through people-to-people diplomacy.

"Because I'm a writer, I know that every story has two sides, so I always wanted to hear the other side that we don't get to hear."

In May, Alharbi and a Sharaka delegation – comprising representatives from both the Arab world and Israel – will embark on their inaugural visit to Canada. The group was invited by the Calgary Jewish Federation's Holocaust and Human Rights Remembrance and Education department and will spend a week in the city.

According to CEO Rob Nagus, the Federation is

## Special guest Ann Dancyger inspires CJA students



Calgary Jewish Academy Grade 6-9 students recently had the profound privilege of welcoming a very special guest: Holocaust survivor Ann Dancyger.

seeking creative approaches to the future of Holocaust education and views Sharaka as an inspiration for such innovation.

"In 2026 there's a growing amount of Holocaust distortion and denial and we have to find new and engaging ways to educate about the Holocaust and talk about it, specifically reaching out beyond the Jewish community," said Nagus.

"Sharaka provides a really innovative approach to both Holocaust education and building allyship between Jewish and non-Jewish communities."

The Abraham Accords represent a landmark series of U.S.-brokered agreements that established full

diplomatic normalization between Israel and several Arab and Muslim-majority nations. Named after the biblical patriarch Abraham – a figure revered by Jews and Muslims as a common ancestor – the name symbolizes a shared heritage and a renewed push for regional collaboration.

### Young leaders focused on lasting peace

However, for the young leaders of Sharaka (Arabic for "partnership"), these accords needed to be more than just signatures on a page.

Rachel Brynien, Sharaka's U.S. Affairs Manager,

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## EJFF celebrates 30 years of stories on the big screen

By Tammy Vineberg and Bar Lavy

There is something timeless about gathering in a theatre – settling into your seat, sharing laughter or a quiet moment with strangers, and allowing a story to unfold larger than life. For three decades, the Edmonton Jewish Film Festival (EJFF) has been creating those shared experiences, bringing Jewish stories to the screen and to our community. This spring, the festival celebrates its 30th year with a thoughtfully curated lineup that reflects the richness, complexity, and humanity of Jewish life around the world.

Running from May 3 to 13, this year's Edmonton Jewish Film Festival features a diverse selection of films that explore relationships, identity, history, and connection. While some titles will be available to stream online, the heart of the festival remains its in-person screenings, where films are experienced as they were meant to be – together, with a live

audience, in a theatre.

Six feature films will be screened in a setting perfectly suited to the occasion: the historic Capitol Theatre at Fort Edmonton Park. Over the course of the festival, audiences are invited to reconnect with the joy of watching film on the big screen, where shared reactions and post film conversations become part of the experience.

Opening night on Sunday, May 3, launches the festival with a special reception and screening, setting the tone for a week and a half of compelling cinema. The program also includes several standout events, such as a free Mother's Day family matinee hosted together with Jewish Family Services, as well as a feature presentation in the evening followed by a post film conversation with that film's director, offering audiences the chance to engage more deeply with the stories being told.

"Film has an incredible ability to bring people together – to foster empathy, spark conversation, and

create meaningful connections," says Stacey Leavitt-Wright, CEO of the Jewish Federation of Edmonton. "We're proud to continue this tradition and to invite the broader community to experience Jewish stories in a shared, welcoming space."

In 2026, the festival will help raise funds to support bringing two Israeli emissaries to Edmonton for a year of service through The Jewish Agency for Israel's ShinShinim program. During their time in Edmonton, they will engage with the Jewish community, help support events, and new programs and connect with youth through PJ Library, BBYO and Hillel.

Whether you are a longtime supporter of EJFF or discovering the festival for the first time, this year's program offers something for everyone – thoughtful dramas, engaging documentaries, and moments of humour and warmth. Most of all, it offers an invitation to come together, celebrate three decades of storytelling, and experience the power of film as a community.

For tickets, schedules, and film details, visit [ejff2026.eventive.org](http://ejff2026.eventive.org).

Come celebrate 30 years of stories—on the big screen, together.

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# Al Osten's Life & Legacy Gift is transformational for the community

By Maxine Fischbein

When Calgary philanthropist Al Osten z"l passed away in January, there were few dry eyes in Calgary and Edmonton. Osten, who lived to the ripe old age of 95, and his partner, Edmonton's Buddy Victor (who passed away at the age of 92 in 2023), lived generously, sharing their good fortune in support of the arts, healthcare, youth initiatives, and multiple Jewish and Catholic organizations, reflecting their respective religious affiliations.

Extraordinarily generous in life, Osten and Victor – who made their fortune with the sale of their Weight Watchers franchises in Alberta and Saskatchewan – planned their legacy and took intentional steps to support organizations that had been important to them during their lifetimes as well as others they considered essential to the well-being and vibrancy of the communities in which they had lived and prospered.

Especially during the last few years of his life, Osten gave tens of millions of dollars to an astonishing number of charitable organizations with a radiant joy that inspired anyone who had the privilege of basking in his reflected glow.

The names Osten and Victor came up frequently in the media as various theatres and initiatives were named for them throughout Calgary and Edmonton.

Readers of *AJNews* know that Osten gave generously within the Jewish community, most notably in support of his spiritual home, Temple B'nai Tikvah, and with an unprecedented \$1 million gift to Camp BB-Riback this past November. A gift of \$500,000 paved the way for the recent establishment of a CIJA (Centre for Israel and Jewish Affairs) office in Calgary. These are but a few examples of Al Osten's largesse.

Now, thanks to Osten's-after lifetime gift of \$1.65 million via Life & Legacy (L&L) – a program jointly organized locally by the Jewish Community Foundation of Calgary (JCFC) and Calgary Jewish Federation (Federation) – some of this community's bedrock institutions will continue to be supported in perpetuity.

Osten capitalized his Life & Legacy endowment

through a life insurance policy on which he named the JCFC as the irrevocable beneficiary. His fund resides at the JCFC and has become part of that organization's pooled investments.

Osten's fund agreement stipulates that 96 percent of the income on his endowment will be given annually – in varying amounts – to Temple B'nai Tikvah, Calgary Jewish Federation, Calgary Beth Tzedec Congregation Society, Calgary Jewish Academy, Jewish Family Service Calgary, Jewish Historical Society of Southern Alberta, and Paperny Family JCC. A portion of his gift will fund further grants to Jewish registered charities and/or scholarships for post-secondary students at the discretion of the JCFC Grants and Allocations Committee.

"Al gave with great intentionality including his desire to continue growing his fund," said JCFC Chair Stuart Myron.

"In any given year it allows the organizations Al named to expand some of their offerings based upon the increased growth of this fund," said JCFC Philanthropy Director Joseph Tappenden, noting that the extent of growth depends on the movement of the market in any given year.

The charities supported by the Al Osten Life & Legacy Fund will receive all of the distributable income earned on the first six months of his after-lifetime gift shortly after the JCFC Annual General Meeting in October, and annually thereafter.

Osten often said that he learned the importance of tzedakah at the knees of his parents who, though poor, always had a pushke in their home and extended helping hands to others.

Blessed with a beautiful voice and a passion for entertaining, Osten, who was raised in Edmonton, went east to pursue a career in showbiz. He sang with the Rover Boys, best remembered for their 1956 hit song *Graduation Day*. Buddy Victor later joined the group and became Osten's life-long partner.

The Rover Boys were instrumental in launching the career of Paul Anka and performed with stars including Bobby Darrin, Robert Goulet, and the legendary Sophie Tucker, still fondly remembered as the "Last of the Red-Hot Mamas."

In the leadup to the 2017 JNF Negev Gala, Osten, who was the honouree, recounted to this writer how he was influenced by Tucker, a woman who believed passionately in giving back to the community and did so with magnanimity.

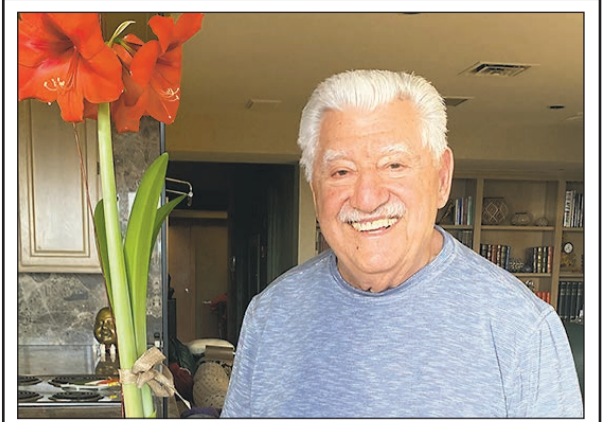
"We performed with her twice," said Osten. "She was larger than life, giving donations to everyone who asked. From Jewish causes to Catholic nuns, Sophie supported everything," Osten recalled.

The good news is that just about everyone reading these words can leave a legacy too.

Life & Legacy gifts come in all shapes and sizes, say Myron and Tappenden, adding that each donation makes a difference as local Jewish charitable organizations strive to raise endowment dollars that will help to ensure a viable and thriving Jewish community today and tomorrow.

Life & Legacy commitments can be made by anyone and do not require cash up front. Some donors name organizations in their wills, while others prefer to support their favourite causes during their lifetimes in a variety of ways.

Myron, Tappenden, and Calgary Jewish Federation Development Director Diana Kalef – whose organizations worked in partnership to bring the Life & Legacy program to Calgary – take a donor-centric approach; for them, job one is helping community members to fulfill their philanthropic dreams.



The Life & Legacy gift from Al Osten, OBM is transformational for the Calgary community.

Al Osten was among the first Calgarians to sign a Life & Legacy letter of intent (LOI) in 2019, when this community became the first in Canada to sign on to the program, an initiative of the Massachusetts-based Harold Grinspoon Foundation.

"I think it's safe to say that Al's gift is the largest Life & Legacy gift our community has seen so far," said Tappenden, adding that Osten single-handedly doubled the quantum of realized L & L gifts.

"As a result of the legacy dollars we have already realized, we were able, just in January, to drop off checks to each of our partner organizations, in varying amounts, totalling to just over \$108,000. That was prior to the \$1.6 million generously given by Al Osten," Stuart Myron said.

Locally, the Life & Legacy program has garnered LOIs from 272 individuals and families totaling an estimated \$20 million, a figure that is expected to increase as promised gifts are realized.

"All of this begins with a conversation," added Tappenden, who – together with Myron and Kalef – is thrilled to be having meaningful conversations with potential donors of all income levels.

Trained volunteers are also speaking with community members on behalf of 10 Life & Legacy partner organizations: Beth Tzedec Congregation, Calgary Jewish Federation, Camp BB Riback, Halpern Akiva Academy, House of Jacob Mikveh Israel, Jewish Family Service Calgary, Jewish Historical Society of Southern Alberta, Paperny Family JCC, Temple B'nai Tikvah, and The Calgary Jewish Academy.

"Gifts come in a variety of ways," Tappenden told *AJNews*, adding that it is important for donors to be strategic in their giving to reduce taxes during their lifetime or, if it is more advantageous for them, on their estate.

Tappenden says that he has had a number of conversations with younger donors over the past year who have opted to purchase life insurance policies, paying the premiums on them – and receiving the tax benefit today – while making their most cherished charitable organizations beneficiaries of the policies.

"They're paying relatively low annual premiums for an initial policy of what may be \$25,000 \$50,000, \$75,000," adds Tappenden. "Should they live to life expectancy, the value of these policies may be upwards of \$100,000 or more."

Tappenden and his colleagues hope that it will be a very long time before the funds are realized. *Bis hundert und zwanzig...until 120!*

Osten already owned his policy when he created his fund. After his passing, his estate received the tax benefit.

The value of Osten's life insurance policy grew by roughly one third in value in the nine years between the time that he signed his LOI and his passing, said Tappenden, adding that life insurance is but one way of making an after-lifetime gift without using one's liquid assets.

"It is important for community members considering after lifetime gifts to speak with professionals like

*Continued on page 12*



*Lag Ba'Omer Dinner*



Tuesday, May 5

6:00pm Service | 6:30pm Dinner

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# CMDA Stampede Gala: The purpose is coming together and saving lives

Canadian Magen David Adom's annual Calgary Gala will be held on May 31, and it is one you definitely won't want to miss. The theme for the evening is Stampede with a Purpose. The décor, the entertainment and the cuisine will all be Western inspired - under strict kosher supervision. So it's Cocktail Western, says Sharon Fraiman, CMDA's dynamic Western Regional Director, Major Gifts.

Like all CMDA galas, this one is sure to impress. Fraiman and her dedicated volunteers are planning a fabulous evening – but the purpose is serious, she

explains. "It's to come together and save lives."

The event will feature top-flight country music by Tyler Two Guns, a renowned Tsuut'ina Nation entertainer as well as Palladio Music, a Calgary-based electric and acoustic violin duo featuring Manon Mitchell and Steven (Slava) Klevsky.

Joining the evening as a guest speaker will be Uri Shacham, MDA's Deputy Director and Chief of Staff, who will travel from Tel Aviv to provide an update on Magen David Adom's life-saving work.

The keynote speaker is Loay Alshareef, an Arab Muslim peace advocate, historian and social media influencer with a mission to champion peace in the Middle East.

Saving lives takes strong community support, notes Fraiman. "Here in Calgary, we've played a huge role. Our community has donated ambulances, emergency scooters, and vital supplies that save lives every single day. I can't say thank you enough."

We are so grateful to our donors and supporters," says Fraiman. "Am Israel Chai!"

Sponsorships, table sales, and tickets are now available.

To learn more, contact Sharon at 587-435-5808 or [sfraiman@cmdai.org](mailto:sfraiman@cmdai.org). Or book online at [cmdai.crowdchange.ca/128479](http://cmdai.crowdchange.ca/128479)



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CALGARY CHAPTER

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# May 31, 2026

### The Carriage House Hotel & Conference Center

**ENTERTAINMENT**

## Tyler Two Guns

Tyler Two Guns is a country rock and blues artist from The Tsuut'ina Nation.

**KEYNOTE SPEAKER**

## Loay Alshareef

Peace-with-Israel Arab advocate, historian and social media influencer

## Sharon Fraiman

Western Region Director, Major Gifts

**C: 587-435-5808**

**E: [sfraiman@cmdai.org](mailto:sfraiman@cmdai.org)**

**GUEST SPEAKER**

## Uri Shacham

Deputy Director and Chief of Staff MDA

# Na'amat Calgary presents 'Marathon Mom' to raise funds for School Supplies

By Maxine Fischbein

An out-of-the-box documentary about Beatie Deutsch – a marathon-running American Israeli ultra-Orthodox wife and mother of five – and her efforts to qualify for the 2020 Tokyo Olympics will be screened by Na'amat Canada Calgary at the Cardel Theatre on Thursday, June 4.

The film documents Deutsch's journey as she travels the world, competing in high-profile marathons to achieve the required time that will allow her to compete on behalf of Israel.

There are more than the usual challenges along the way. In accordance with Jewish laws pertaining to modesty, Deutsch – a three-time Israeli national champion – runs with her head and arms fully covered and her knees obscured by a long skirt. She cannot compete on the Sabbath and Jewish holidays.

How can Deutsch find a balance between an ultra-Orthodox world where marathon-running women are, at the very least, an anomaly, and her fierce will to win? With every step she takes toward her goal, Deutsch – who began running marathon races only four years before the Tokyo Olympics – becomes a bit of a folk hero for young observant women.

A trigger warning: There lurks in the background of Deutsch's story an eating disorder. And the COVID-19 pandemic creates significant roadblocks for her as various races are cancelled or postponed.

Through it all, Deutsch keeps her eye on the prize.

Stephanie Sacks – the current Na'amat Canada Calgary president – learned about the *Marathon Mom* documentary during a Na'amat national board meeting and contacted the film distributor so that she and her Calgary executive could preview the film.

"I was totally enamoured with the movie," recalled Sacks, adding that her *chaverot* on the executive also found the film compelling.

"It was inspiring to see this woman being so motivated and committed to her religion, her family, and her running," said Sacks – founder and long-serving chair of Na'amat Canada Calgary's School Supplies for Kids Program (SSFK) – adding that the Calgary Na'amat leadership found the film ideal for screening at this year's SSFK fundraiser.

"Na'amat is devoted to advocating for equality of opportunity for women. While we are not a religious organization, we support all Israeli women, and it is just wonderful to share a film about a strong woman

who comes from an Orthodox community and is motivated to succeed at her sport even though some within her community might frown at her efforts."

The 90-minute documentary will be followed by refreshments and – no doubt – plenty of spirited conversation as Na'amat members, friends and sponsors gather to raise funds for SSFK, a program that, for nearly 29 years, has provided backpacks filled with school supplies to thousands of kids temporarily residing with their mothers in Calgary and area domestic violence and homeless shelters.

Over the years, SSFK has been adopted by Na'amat chapters in other Canadian centres, helping even more Canadian children to resume their education and achieve desperately needed normalcy during the darkest of times.

According to Sacks, an estimated \$40,000 must be raised this year to meet the demand for backpacks at Calgary and area shelters.

"Some very generous sponsors have supported us since day one, with many more joining in over the years," said Sacks, who will be succeeded by Aviva Lifshitz as Na'amat Canada Calgary president this summer.

Sacks plans to continue chairing SSFK through to its 30th anniversary in 2027.

One Calgary philanthropist who has supported School Supplies for Kids since close to its inception is a non-Jewish man – unnamed here because he prefers to remain anonymous – who saw a sign about the initiative at an Office Depot location and contacted Sacks because he felt moved to become involved.

Decades later, this stalwart friend to the organization not only gives generously but often shows up in person, working shoulder to shoulder with Na'amat faithful and other volunteers from within and beyond the Calgary Jewish community, Sacks told *AJNews*.

Sacks – who expressed gratitude for the many sponsors who have supported SSFK through the years – hopes that others will feel inspired to go the extra



CJA Student Council held a drive to support Na'amat Calgary's Providing the Essentials program. Pictured are some of the students with CJA Student Council lead teacher Alex Kouperman and Na'amat Calgary VP Linda Gutman.

mile in supporting a program that brings much comfort and hope to women and children experiencing the trauma of domestic violence.

For decades, Sacks has received letters from Calgary and area shelters thanking Na'amat for their support through SSFK.

"When children and their moms arrive at Discovery House, they are moving to a safe and healing space, where they can reimagine and rebuild their futures," says one such letter, adding, "When the children in our care get to choose a new backpack that is filled with all the supplies they need, they just light up."

Beatie Deutsch's story seems a good fit for Na'amat, which has harnessed girl power on a massive scale since it was established in Israel in 1921, with Golda Meyerson – soon to be known as Golda Meir – as inaugural director general of the organization.

Meir went on to become Israel's first – and only – female Prime Minister.

Established in Canada in 1925, Pioneer Women – as it was known until the organization rebranded worldwide as Na'amat in 1976 – quickly spread across the country. A chapter was established in Edmonton in 1931 and another in Calgary in 1934. A 1936 visit to Edmonton by Golda is well-documented, and she is believed to have also met with her Pioneer Women *chaverot* in Calgary around the same time.

Israel's largest social service organization, Na'amat serves Israelis of all faiths through their large network of social services, including schools, daycares, a domestic violence shelter, counseling programs, and the like.

Calgary and Edmonton Na'amat chapters mirror locally the work they do in Israel. In addition to School Supplies for Kids, Na'amat Canada Calgary granted annual scholarships to women studying in local post-secondary institutions for many years.

Close to a year-and-a-half ago, Na'amat Canada Calgary established the "Providing the Essentials" program, which supplies personal care and hygiene items to Jewish Family Service Calgary clients supported by that organization's food bank.

It was a source of pride for Na'amat and Jewish Calgary when Stephanie Sacks was honoured with a 2007 Global Calgary Woman of Vision Award recognizing the positive impact she had made in Calgary through the SSFK program.

In Calgary, Na'amat reached another pinnacle close to three years ago, when Susan Inhaber became the first woman west of Winnipeg to ascend to the presidency of Na'amat Canada. As she completes her term, Inhaber will be feted by members from across the country at the Na'amat Canada Triennial Convention, slated to take place in Montreal October 30-November 1, 2026.

Closer to home, opportunities are still available for the 2026 School Supplies for Kids fundraiser here in Calgary. Those who make their commitment by May 15 will be acknowledged at the screening of *Marathon Mom* on June 4.

To donate, go to [rogerscharityclassic.com/ssfk/](http://rogerscharityclassic.com/ssfk/). Rogers Birdies for Kids presented by AltaLink, a long-time supporter of SSFK will match up to 50 percent of all donations. Tax receipts will be issued for all donations.

*Marathon Mom* will be screened at the Cardel Theatre on Thursday, June 4 at 6:45pm sharp. Doors open at 6:15pm. To purchase tickets, go to [naamat.com/Calgary/](http://naamat.com/Calgary/) or call 1-888-278-0792 toll-free.

Maxine Fischbein is a Local Journalism Initiative Reporter.

Na'amat Canada Calgary presents an exclusive screening of the documentary

## Marathon Mom

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Cardel Theatre 180 Quarry Park Boulevard SE

Tickets \$36.00 | Sold only in advance | Limited seating



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**School Supplies for Kids** provides backpacks filled with school supplies to children taking refuge in Calgary area domestic violence and homeless shelters.

**Donations will be matched up to 50% by Rogers Birdies for Kids presented by AltaLink.**

Questions? [calgary.info@naamat.com](mailto:calgary.info@naamat.com)



# Beyond allyship: MP stands with Jews in Western civilization fight

By Mark Cooper, LJI Reporter

When the topic of "allyship" comes up, Shuv Majumdar bristles.

The term feels too detached for the Conservative Member of Parliament's deep-rooted connection to the Jewish community.

"I don't consider myself an ally," he says, before explaining that his work isn't about standing next to the community but being part of it.

For Majumdar, representing Calgary Heritage is less a political duty and more a gift – where the boundaries of "us" and "them" disappear in a shared fight for the values of civilization.

"The great gift about representing the Calgary Jewish Community and supporting Jewish communities across Alberta and Canada is I never feel "othered," said Majumdar. "I feel completely part of it. It's a great, great gift.

"I don't see this as an ally stepping in to stand with the Jewish world. I see this as an opportunity to stand with the Jewish world as the Jewish world fights for civilization itself."

Since becoming a Conservative MP in a 2023 by-election, the 46-year-old has become one of Parliament's leading voices in support of the Jewish community's fight against hate and extremism on Canadian streets and campuses.

He immediately became a pillar of strength and comfort for Alberta's Jewish community, standing in solidarity at Calgary's Beth Tzedec synagogue during a gathering held just after the October 7, 2023 Hamas attacks on Southern Israel.

"I don't arrive here as Jewish, I don't arrive here as an ally. I arrive here as a Zionist," he said that evening, something he calls the "test of truth."

At the upcoming May 24 Friends of JNF Edmonton Gala, Majumdar will join his mentor, former Prime Minister Stephen Harper, to discuss the opportunities and risks facing the Jewish community during a time of deep global complexities.

For Jay Cairns, executive director of the Alberta chapter of Friends of JNF Canada, it is vital to showcase the Calgary MP's selfless Jewish advocacy to an Edmonton audience.

"He's not doing this for political gain; he truly feels it's the right thing to do," Cairns said, noting Majumdar has followed Harper's lead as a next-generation torchbearer standing firmly with Israel and the Jewish community.

"Shuv is bringing the issues that are really concerning to the Jewish community across Canada to the floor. He's bringing the conversations and the awareness and he's doing it in a meaningful way, not just platitudes strung together to make us feel good."

As the only child of Bengali Hindu immigrants from India, Majumdar's rapid ascent as one of Parliament's sharpest minds in foreign affairs and national security feels like a natural progression. The Conservative Party has increasingly positioned him as a moral compass within Canadian politics – a role he is well-equipped to handle. His self-described "nerdish" obsession with Middle Eastern political history is backed by grit: he has worked on the ground to implement democratic reforms in conflict zones, later serving as a foreign affairs advisor to Minister John Baird and Harper. His roots in the movement run deep. Having watched the conservative movement evolve since his youth, he still cites Reform Party founder Preston Manning as a foundational influence.

"From him I really learned about foundational first principles of conservative life," he said. "I learned about the balance of populism and conservatism... I learned (from his) incredible integrity and decency in public life.

"He showed me how important it is not just to have the conviction that you carry in your core, but the core moral values that come with it."

After earning the inaugural Reform Party internship in Ottawa in 1998, alongside a class that included the likes of current Conservative Party leader Pierre Poilievre and former leader Andrew Scheer, he would work in the Opposition Leader's office where he became a Manning loyalist.

After Manning's retirement, Majumdar would become the very first employee of the Manning Centre,

founded by Manning in 2005 to foster the growth of the conservative movement in Canada.

Recognized for his work fighting human trafficking in Southeast Asia, he was recruited in 2006 to lead on-the-ground initiatives in Iraq and Afghanistan by the International Republican Institute to support democratic development.

Seeing the devastation of radical ideology firsthand sharpened his purpose. He returned with a newfound mission: to protect the values of Western civilization from what he describes as an escalating assault.

"Our Western civilization, the concept of who we are, has been radically under attack for decades," he said. "We've been the frog in the water. It's just been boiling."

Majumdar would leave the Middle East in 2011 to take a job working in the Harper government. It was there he would direct foreign affairs policy in then Minister Baird's office and later as an aid to Harper, he would learn how to govern for the first time.

"I got so lucky because I was working with John Baird, who's a gregarious, fearless guy. I had full license to challenge the prime minister's office and the bureaucrats, to get the job done. And I think it resulted in an incredible record of the Harper Legacy, of which I played a small part."

He was part of a government that took a strong stance against the Iranian regime, helping to close Canada's embassy in Tehran and expelling all Iranian diplomats from Ottawa in 2012.

"We did massive work in the United Nations to hold the Iranian human rights abuses to account at every turn... We looked at regional terrorism, international terrorism, and part of that was listing the IRGC (Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps) as a terror organization and Iran as a state sponsor of terror."

Today, Majumdar stands as a vocal critic of the federal government's perceived inaction regarding reports that anywhere between 200 and 1,000 members of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) are currently residing in Canada.

"I will through all means necessary every day try to purge this country of this threat to our safety."

A witness to growing antisemitism on Canadian streets and acts of violence against Jewish businesses and institutions, he fears something worse will come unless action is taken.

"We're at the beginning of the end of a 47-year-old tyranny that has been the principle source of instability and terrorism across the Middle East and the biggest source of terrorism in the world. They are desperate. They are a wounded animal and they're lashing out around the world. They know they have an existential fight.

"Ever since October 7th, I wake up and go to sleep every day worrying about a Bondi Beach type attack in Canada," he said, referring to the savage attack on Jews celebrating Hanukkah last year at the iconic beach in Sydney, Australia.

Despite everything, Majumdar remains



MP Shuvaloy Majumdar with his mentor former Prime Minister Stephen Harper.

unshakable in his conviction: Jewish life will do more than just survive – it will flourish.

"The Jewish world in the diaspora is protecting itself. It's strong and it is successful. It's fighting. It's not taking this quietly," he said, noting more and more people are reconnecting with Jewish life.

"Jewish identity is one of a culture of life, not one of death. And it's about human connection and all those beautiful things that I think the world needs more of. Like we need to be more inspired by Jewish life. rather than marginalize it. And in the diaspora, I'm actually encouraged with how tough the Jewish world is, how tough the kids are."

It's a message he will take with him to the Friends of JNF event as he gets a chance to once again sit down with his mentor and thank him for his contributions to Canada.

"That's a very special thing I get to do for a man on whose shoulders I stand," said Majumdar.

"He's a man who has fierce moral clarity, who intelligently organized Canada to be more at peace with itself and confident in the world that it had been in maybe a generation."

*The May 24 Edmonton Negev Gala Leadership and Legacy begins with a VIP reception at 5:30, with the main program beginning at 7:30. Tickets can be purchased at [friendsofjnfca.org/edmnegev2026/register.asp](http://friendsofjnfca.org/edmnegev2026/register.asp). The location will be shared after registration.*

FRIENDS OF JNF CANADA

EDMONTON

NEGEV GALA 2026

LEADERSHIP & LEGACY

SUNDAY, MAY 24, 2026

FEATURING THE 22ND PRIME MINISTER OF CANADA

The Right Honourable  
Stephen J. Harper

in conversation with  
Shuvaloy Majumdar,  
MP Calgary Centre

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Registration open at  
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# Goldie Morgentaler, speaks in Calgary about the great Yiddish writer, Chava Rosenfarb

By Irena Karshenbaum, LJI Reporter

The night before Goldie Morgentaler's lecture in Calgary, she, her husband and I are having dinner in the restaurant of the hotel where they are staying, the federal by-election playing on the TV suspended on the ceiling. Goldie wants to talk politics, and judging by how she speaks about certain issues, I can tell instantly that she and I live on opposite ends of the political divide. Our time is so limited, I steer the conversation towards our mutual interest, her mother, Chava Rosenfarb's, literary work.

Goldie steers the conversation back, "But I want to talk politics!" she exclaims in a manner only a native-Yiddish speaker can with that mysterious power to pull at the heart strings. Then she recounts how growing up, politics was a big topic of conversation in her home and would lead to heated discussions. My home was similar growing up, but I don't say anything.

It is the evening of April 13 and Dr. Goldie Morgentaler and her husband, Dr. Jonathan Seldin, have just driven in to Calgary where the following evening she will be presenting a lecture, *The Canadian Afterlife of the Great Yiddish-Language Holocaust Novelist, Chava Rosenfarb, as told in Letters and Stories*. The lecture will be hosted by the University of Calgary Centre for Military, Security and Strategic Studies and presented in a first-time partnership with the Jewish Historical Society of Southern Alberta and the University of Calgary Jewish Community, a committee of Jewish faculty and staff that formed as a response to October 7.

Goldie mentions she is nervous about her lecture, which I tell her is natural, and as I leave the couple for the night, I also leave behind my copies of her mother's books for her to autograph, which she says she is "honoured" to do.

Goldie Morgentaler is the daughter of Dr. Henry

Morgentaler (1923-2013) and Chava Rosenfarb (1923-2011), one of the most important writers — as a poet, fiction novelist and essayist — in the Yiddish language after the Second World War, and she is also her mother's literary translator, from Yiddish to English, having translated most of her mother's works.

I first met Goldie two years ago when I conducted an oral history interview with her, since she lives in Lethbridge, that will be held in the oral history collection of the Jewish Historical Society of Southern Alberta for use by future researchers and historians. The extensive interview was transcribed by Laura Shuler, one of the vice-presidents of JHSSA, and the chair of JHSSA's Oral History Committee.

On the evening of April 14, I pick up Goldie and Jonathan at the hotel and we drive to The Military Museums where her lecture will be held. At the entrance, there are happy hugs and greetings by members of the event's organizing committee and as soon as the museum doors open, the guests start arriving, and keep coming, until the Atrium is almost full.

Then the best part of the evening, the lecture. There is no movement, no fidgeting, everyone's attention is on Goldie Morgentaler. She explains her talk is not about the Holocaust, *per se* [the lecture falling exactly on Yom HaShoah], but, "On the aftermath of the Holocaust as it appears in the fiction and letters of my mother."

Using the latest work, published in June of 2025, *Letters from the Afterlife: The Post-Holocaust Correspondence of Chava Rosenfarb and Zenia Larsson* [McGill-Queen's University Press] and the 2023 collection of short stories, *In the Land of the Postscript* [White Goat Press], Goldie explains that her mother's work encompasses the Holocaust as well as the immigrant experience,

"Specifically, what it was like to settle in Canada after having experienced and survived the horrors of the Łódź ghetto, Auschwitz and Bergen-Belsen."

Goldie recounts how her parents arrived in Montreal in February of 1950, from Brussels, after travelling in the steerage section of the boat, Samaria. The couple landed in Pier 21, in Halifax, then travelled by train to Montreal where they were welcomed by members of that city's Yiddish literary community including, Harry Hershman.

Hershman, Goldie describes as, "a big *macher*," and who, in 1948, published her mother's first book of poetry, *The Ballad of Yesterday's Forest*. Hershman also sponsored to Canada Chava and her husband, and later Chava's mother and sister because, as Goldie explains, "He knew how to pry open the very reluctant jaws of the Canadian immigration system," after persuading the Canadian government to accept Jewish orphans from Ukraine in



Dr. Goldie Morgentaler with some board members of the Jewish Historical Society of Southern Alberta. Photo by Logan Jaspers.

the 1920s.

Goldie continues, "It was in Montreal that Chava finally settled down to writing in earnest." Her work first included poetry, then a play, "All on the subject of the Holocaust," then her masterpiece, *The Tree of Life*. Written as a trilogy, the novels covered the four years of the Łódź ghetto and were, "Based on her own experiences of incarceration in the Łódź ghetto." This extensive work was followed by novels, *Bociany* and *Of Lodz and Love*.

Rosenfarb also wrote short stories that were never published during her life, and were based on her early years living in Canada. This collection, *In the Land of the Postscript*, was assembled by Goldie who also named the book, explaining, "For many Holocaust survivors, their after-lives in Canada served as a certain postscript to the main event of their lives, which was the Holocaust."

One of the most complicated stories in the collection, *Edgia's Revenge*, was inspired by an incident Chava experienced with a kapo during her incarcerated in Sasel. The story delves into the dual lives of the characters who outwardly lead vibrant lives, "But inwardly, they have never left the Europe that tortured and rejected them." She explains this story is, "An indirect tribute" to Chava's childhood best-friend, Zenia Marcinkowska (1922-2007), who later became Zenia Larsson after marrying her Swedish husband, Per-Axel Larsson.

Goldie recounts how the two women were "inseparable" in Łódź before the Second World War and during the Holocaust. Soon after Bergen-Belsen was liberated in April of 1941, Zenia accepted an offer of asylum by the Swedish government and left for the Scandinavian country where she lived for the rest of her life.

This perpetuated a separation of the two friends where they did not meet for almost twenty-five years, yet maintained their friendship through letter writing. These letters were gathered by Goldie and published in, *Letters from the Afterlife*. Goldie admits that she published the letters with "trepidation" since the practice of handwritten letters is nearly extinct now and she "thought that no one would be interested in reading the book."

The letters, beginning in December of 1945 and ending in December of 1971, are personal, while still being literary, where the two women discuss their inner lives, their loves, their heartbreaks, their work struggles, and their love for each other.

Goldie reveals that the correspondence actually continued beyond the timeframe of the book well into the 1990s.

After the lecture, I drive Goldie and Jonathan back to the hotel. When I return home, I look through my personal Chava Rosenfarb library now made precious with each book being autographed: *Letters from the Afterlife*, *Confessions of a Yiddish Writer and Other Essays*, *In the Land of the Postscript*, *Bociany*, and *Of Lodz and Love*.

Every note moves me. Like her mother, Goldie Morgentaler has the power to touch hearts.

The complete recording of this lecture will be uploaded in the near future to the Jewish Historical Society of Southern Alberta website: <https://jhssa.org/>. Better yet, I recommend reading Chava Rosenfarb's books.

In addition to the presenting partners mentioned in this story, the lecture received generous funding from the KSW Calgary Holocaust Education & Commemoration Endowment Fund held by The Jewish Community Foundation of Calgary.

Irena Karshenbaum is a board member with the Jewish Historical Society of Southern Alberta and she writes in Calgary. [irenakarshenbaum.com](http://irenakarshenbaum.com)

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**NEGEV GALA 2026**

TRUTH & SECURITY IN AN UNCERTAIN WORLD

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PROGRAM 7:00pm

TUESDAY  
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Middle East Security Expert

in conversation with **Kevin Libin**  
Executive Editor, Postmedia Network Inc.

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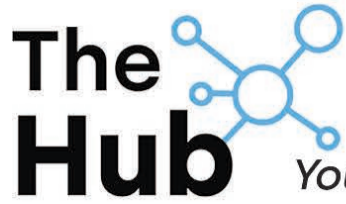
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Check out our community calendar at [jewishedmonton.org](http://jewishedmonton.org).



Your bridge to Jewish Edmonton



# A MESSAGE FROM CEO STACEY LEAVITT-WRIGHT



As we mark National Volunteer Appreciation Month, it feels important to say this plainly: volunteers are the backbone of Jewish life in Edmonton. Without them, there are no festivals, no commemorations, no programs that educate, inspire, or connect us across generations. Their gift is time, but the impact is belonging.

Jewish community does not happen on its own. It is built carefully and lovingly by volunteers. By people who arrive early and stay late. Who schlep, cook, plan, welcome, remember, and stand. Often quietly. Always generously. The secret sauce to a Jewish Federation is how we can support and partner with our volunteers who continuously show up for our community.

Showing up also means building for the future. As our new Oshry | Kipnes Jewish Community Centre emerges, it is being

guided not only by vision, but by volunteers who have taken on the careful, complex work of stewardship—asking thoughtful questions, offering professional expertise, and holding the long view of what our community will need in the decades ahead. Their leadership is a reminder that volunteering is not only about what happens today, but about creating the foundations for Jewish life tomorrow.

In the weeks ahead, that same spirit of presence will be visible again. At the Edmonton Jewish Film Festival, volunteers help transform films into conversations—spaces where stories deepen understanding and spark connection. Later this summer, at the Israel Pavilion at Heritage Festival, volunteers will once again welcome thousands of visitors with warmth, dialogue, and pride. These moments of public Jewish life happen because people choose to say yes.

Volunteering is not about filling a slot or checking a box. It is about stepping into relationship. Many volunteers will tell you—often with a smile—that they receive more than they give: friendships formed, purpose renewed, and the quiet satisfaction of knowing they helped shape something meaningful.

Community does not endure because of buildings or budgets alone. It endures because people say *Hineni, here I am*—to each other, to memory, to responsibility, and to hope.

To every volunteer who has shown up this past year, and to those who will in the months ahead: thank you. You are the steady hands and open hearts that hold our community together.

Register for our upcoming events at [jewishedmonton.org](http://jewishedmonton.org).



## Your Values. Your Legacy.

Support the Jewish causes that matter most to you in perpetuity by establishing an endowment fund with EJCCF.

Whether you are new to philanthropy or have already started planning your legacy, we can help.

Get started today and leave a lasting impact.

Contact Becky Saegert  
587-735-2992  
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## Strengthen your family's connection to Israel

Seeking host families for the 2026-27 ShinShinim program

We are looking for host families to help welcome our Shinshinim to our community. Families provide a spare bedroom, meals, and a welcoming and inclusive home. In return, they form incredible relationships that will endure for a lifetime.

Interested in learning how to become a host family?

Email Chloe at [chloes@edjfed.org](mailto:chloes@edjfed.org)

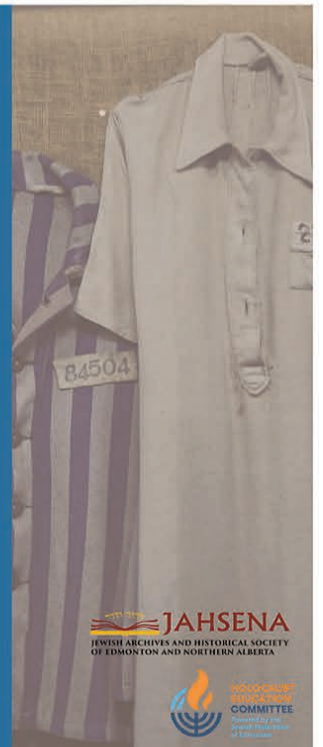


We are collecting local stories of Holocaust survivors

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](mailto:holocaustedu@edjfed.org)



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JEWISH ARCHIVES AND HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
OF EDMONTON AND NORTHERN ALBERTA



## REPORT ANTISEMITISM WHEN YOU SEE IT.

[jewishedmonton.org/reportantisemitism](http://jewishedmonton.org/reportantisemitism)



# Holding the Line: 54 the Future of Our Community

By Danielle Dolgoy

Edmonton's Jewish Family Services has long been the quiet safety net beneath our community, a warm place, a shelter in the storm. Today, that shelter needs you. The world feels more uncertain than it has in years. This uncertainty is magnified in our Jewish community as feelings of instability and unsafety take hold across our city and around the world. It feels particularly vulnerable to be Jewish now, in a way that troubles the soul and amplifies all the other challenges people face. This fear is real and valid, and not within our control. But what we can control is how we respond, how we show up with compassion, generosity, and a commitment to one another.

This year, we are inviting you to do exactly that through our 54 the Future campaign.

In Jewish tradition, 18 represents *chai, life*. A gift of \$54 is *triple chai*, a powerful symbol of sustaining life across generations. It honours where we have come from, supports the realities we face today, and helps ensure a strong, compassionate future.

It is a simple, meaningful act with lasting impact.

For many of us, \$54 a month is manageable. But for many of the individuals and families who turn to Jewish Family Services Edmonton, that same amount represents real hardship. That contrast is exactly why this campaign matters.

Because \$54 doesn't just add up. It shows up.

It means counselling for a newly widowed individual navigating grief and loss of purpose. It means a kosher food hamper for a family struggling to celebrate Passover. It means a homebound elder is not alone on Shabbat.

Monthly giving, at any amount, is one of the most powerful ways to sustain this work. It creates a steady, predictable foundation that allows the community to respond with care, consistency, and dignity.

And right now, that foundation is under strain.

Without sustained community support, JFSE cannot

guarantee the programs that our most vulnerable neighbours depend on. The gap between need and capacity is growing. We cannot afford to let it widen.

This is not abstract. It is here, in Edmonton.

Ours is a small and deeply connected community. We feel one another's challenges, and we celebrate one another's resilience. That closeness carries with it a responsibility to ensure that no one is left behind, and that those who need support can access it with dignity.

Our tradition calls us to this work. Reflecting on the words of the Haggadah we all read last month, "All who are hungry, let them come and eat." It is a statement of openness, of care, and of shared responsibility. It reminds us that a strong community is not measured only by its successes, but by how it supports those who are struggling.

Last year, through our DigniTEA gatherings, we saw what that responsibility looks like in action. In living rooms across the city, people came together to listen, to learn, and to care. Together, we increased donations tenfold, reconnected with long-time supporters, and welcomed new ones into our circle. That momentum showed what is possible. Now, we need to carry it forward. If you can give, at whatever level is manageable for you, this is your opportunity to make a meaningful difference.

Here's how you can help: Go to [jfse.org/donate](http://jfse.org/donate) and set up your monthly gift. It takes less than two minutes. Choose \$54 or any amount that reflects your capacity. Share this campaign with others who

## 54 the Future

*Because what we build today shapes who we become tomorrow.*

Every day, individuals and families in our community are navigating isolation, mental health challenges, and major life transitions.

At JFSE, we're there in the moments that matter most... with counselling, settlement support, and programs that strengthen our community.

A \$54 pledge helps ensure that no one has to face these challenges alone.

**Community Action**

Join the campaign today.  
Pledge \$54 monthly or one-time.  
Hold the line for the future.

[jfse.org](http://jfse.org)

care about building a compassionate community. Our values, *tikun olam, chesed, tzedek, and kavod*, call on us to act with generosity and purpose.

They ask us to build a community where care is not reserved for a few but extended to all who need it. Jewish Family Services Edmonton is one of the ways you and I live those values every day.

A pledge of \$54 the Future is more than a donation. It is a way to ensure that support remains available, that dignity is preserved, and that our community continues to be a place where people can turn in times of need.

In uncertain times, the most powerful thing we can do is show up for one another with generosity and care.

Help us hold the line and ensure that all who need support can find it.

*Danielle Dolgoy is Executive Director of Edmonton Jewish Family Services.*

## JFSE offers care beyond the surface

By Navleen Mann and Poornima Prasad

"It takes a lot of courage to make the call and take the first step in your healing journey," says Sarah Karesa, Counselling Program Manager at the Edmonton Healing Centre. "We want to honour that courage and meet you where you're at."

Life doesn't really come with a roadmap. Between financial pressures, responsibilities, and the inherent weight of simply trying to make it through each day, it's easy to feel overwhelmed. Nevertheless, there remains a place in the heart of Edmonton where compassion, community, and professional care come together to support anyone who may need it. The Edmonton Healing Centre (EHC) is a service provided by the city's very own Jewish Family Services (JFS), led by Executive Director Danielle Dolgoy. Serving Edmonton since the 1950s, this non-profit organization was established by social worker and activist, Ms. Clara Mintz.

In a world struggling to work through war and division, JFS with EHC dares to envision an era of economic and social justice. It aims to strengthen individuals and guide them to overcome life's challenges, doing so through its many programs that are all directed by the four core Jewish values: *Tikun Olam* (to heal the world), *Tzedek* (to be fair), *Chesed* (to care), and *Kavod* (to respect). "Our core values represent what we believe in, what we stand for, and how we approach everything we do," Karesa emphasizes via an email interview.

EHC offers a wide range of counselling services to support people at all stages of life and across all levels of need. These include counselling for individuals, couples and families, groups, and youths. Their mental health professionals are trained in highly sought-after modalities such as EMDR (Eye Movement Desensitization and Processing), ART (Accelerated Resolution Therapy), and more. While they do specialize in grief and loss, they can also support clients experiencing anxiety, depression, trauma, end-of-life and caregiving stress. Every person who reaches out is individually assessed in order to help the team

understand their unique situation.

As Karesa explains: "Everyone who reaches out for help is individually assessed for their unique needs. We offer support and resources even before counselling begins, to ensure they get the most out of their time with us."

Additionally, they offer services beyond counselling. Adjusting to a new country can be overwhelming, and their Canadian newcomer supports provide community referrals, financial assistance, stress management support, and job-hunting guidance, all with the goal of helping people build a stable lifestyle and gain confidence as they navigate their time in Canada. JFS also cares for established Jewish community members with their Jewish Family Outreach services, which include friendly check-ins, advocacy, and cultural support.

For older adults, JFS can help establish food security, reduce social isolation, and find affordable housing. They can also help with home support services like housekeeping, personal care, transportation, and companionship, thereby ensuring that seniors can retain their independence while staying connected to the outside world. JFS also has a specialized Holocaust survivor support program, which allows them to provide empathetic and culturally informed aid to Jewish survivors of Nazi oppression. This program recognizes the impact of inter-generational trauma and ensures that survivors receive care that honours both their experiences and resilience.

One of the things that truly sets JFS and EHC apart from other organizations is their commitment to accessibility. They operate on a sliding scale, guaranteeing that cost is never a barrier to receiving care. As Karesa notes, this is what makes the non-profit so unique: "I often hear us being called 'a unicorn' because we offer no and low-cost sessions, have a ripple-effect model of care, and provide additional resources beyond counselling."

JFS is proudly inclusive and happy to lend a helping hand, regardless of background, gender, sexuality, or faith. Their team reflects this diversity as well,



MacEwan Counselling Project team.

allowing clients to find a counsellor with whom they feel most secure with. Matching a counsellor to a client is determined by several factors, including personality, goals, language, and therapist experience.

Healing can be hard. For anyone feeling hesitant to seek help, JFS extends encouragement: "We are here when you need us. Our counsellors are skilled in working with reluctant and nervous clients. We go at their pace and guide them every step of the way."

If you or someone you know could benefit from these services, reach out at 780-454-1194. Compassionate and knowledgeable care is only one phone call away.

As MacEwan University students, we understand how intimidating it can feel to reach out for help, especially when life already feels heavy. During our field placement with JFS, we raised awareness of their services and had the opportunity to learn about their vision in a much deeper and more personal way. We got to experience first-hand how deeply devoted the JFS team is to be supporting all Edmontonians and communities. Every conversation we had with their staff reflected warmth, patience, and a genuine dedication to meeting people where they are. It became clear to us that JFS doesn't just provide a paid service, but they create a space where people can feel seen, respected, and supported. Compassionate and knowledgeable care is only one phone call away.

*Navleen Mann and Poornima Prasad are MacEwan University students who completed a field placement with JFSE.*

## EJFF celebrates 30 years

The Edmonton Jewish Film Festival is back for its 30th season, from May 3-13 offering Edmonton audiences the very best in Jewish-themed films. This year audiences will enjoy in-person screenings for 6 feature films and online screenings for 3 films. The schedule is:

### Bella: Opening Night Film - May 3

When Yaki realizes who Bella is, a curly plumage and extremely valuable dove, his only inheritance, it is already too late. Yaki sets out with Bilal, his childhood friend, and their wives on a road trip across Israel and Palestine to bring Bella back. They will cross checkpoints, ruin a wedding, steal a newlyweds' car, join a reconciliation ceremony between families, and try to revive the unconscious dove, all to reach a dove beauty pageant in Jerusalem on time.

### Soul of a Nation: May 6

An unfiltered look at Israel's most perilous chapter in recent history, a period defined by internal divisions and political extremism. Drawing on insights from Nobel laureates, Muslim leaders, peace activists, and other prominent figures, the film dismantles preconceived notions about one of the world's most scrutinized countries. The screening will be followed by a pre-recorded interview with director Jonathan Jakubowicz

### Shrek: May 10

#### Mother's Day Family Screening – Free Admission

A mean lord exiles fairytale creatures to the swamp of a grumpy ogre, who must go on a quest and rescue a princess for the lord to get his land back. A beloved animated classic, Shrek delights audiences of all ages with its witty humour and heartfelt message about self-acceptance and friendship. Presented as a free family screening in partnership with Jewish Family Services Edmonton, the event includes a post film horse-drawn carriage ride at Fort Edmonton Park, making it the perfect Mother's Day outing.

### Labors of Love: May 10

Visionary leader and one of history's most influential, yet under-recognized, American-Jewish women, Henrietta Szold, founded Hadassah, established a healthcare system treating Arabs and Jews equally, and led Youth Aliyah, saving 11,000 children from the Nazis. This heartfelt documentary brings the incredible story of a woman who reshaped history through compassion and an unwavering belief in humanity.

The screening will be followed by a Q&A with director Abby Ginzberg.

### Among Neighbors: May 12

Combining magical realism and evocative hand-drawn animation with revelatory interviews and verité footage, "Among Neighbors" examines the story of a small, rural town where Jews and Polish Catholics lived side by side for centuries before World War II. The film brings the Polish response to the Holocaust to life through the last living eyewitnesses, revealing both love and betrayal as it zeroes in on one of the last living Holocaust survivors from the town, and an aging eyewitness who saw Jews murdered there – not by Nazis, but by her own Polish neighbors. This screening features a special introduction and a pre-recorded post-screening interview with producer and director Yoav Potash.

### Love, Statistically Speaking (Online)

When Reuben (Yehoram Gaon), an 80-year-old actuary who lives by statistics, loses both his wife and her insurance money at the swimming pool, he's forced into a reluctant partnership with his free-spirited granddaughter. Their bumbling investigation among eccentric pool regulars turns into a funny, heartfelt journey proving that while you can calculate almost anything, you can't predict love or family.

### Matchmaking 2: Closing Night May 13

Baruch Auerbach (Maor Schweitzer), a mature Yeshiva student who missed every opportunity to marry, is left to live in a small room in the Yeshiva where he studies and serves as the faithful assistant to the matchmaker Malki (Irit Kaplan). When Malki assigns him the task of escorting her young daughter Shira (Omer Nudelman) from the airport – he decides that it is time to get married. Baruch asks for Malki's help, but when she tries to match him with Ruth (Niv Sultan), he decides to do everything he can to thwart the matchmaking with Ruth and win Shira's heart.

Only when he realizes how much he has misinterpreted the circumstances of his life will his

heart open to the love he deserves.

### Nandauri (Online)

In a small forgotten village up the snowy mountains of Georgia, the arrival of a foreign woman disturbs the peace. Israeli Lawyer Marina seems to have escaped her suffocating traditional Georgian roots. Now she comes back to Georgia, representing Nino, who left Georgia 11 years ago, leaving her son behind and now wants him back. Determined to bring the boy back to his mother, Marina reaches Dato, Nino's brother and the child's caretaker. Despite his hostility and great anger for his abandoning sister, he agrees to help. The more time they spend together, the two strangers share a journey that will change their perspective on life. Winner of 5 Ophir Israeli Academy Awards.

### The Sea (Online)

Khaled (12), a Palestinian boy, is on his way to visit the sea for the first time in his life, but at the checkpoint, the Israeli authorities deny his entry.



'Matchmaker 2' screens on May 13, closing night of the Edmonton Jewish Film Festival.

Determined, Khaled sneaks into Israel and embarks on a dangerous journey to the sea. Meanwhile, Ribhi, his father, is trying to trace his whereabouts, putting himself at risk of being arrested and losing his job. Winner of 5 Ophir Israeli Academy Awards.

For tickets and information visit [ejff2026.eventive.org/welcome](http://ejff2026.eventive.org/welcome)

**30<sup>th</sup>**  
**EJFF**  
**Edmonton Jewish Film Festival**

# Bringing Jewish perspectives to life.

We invite you to discover, connect, and engage with us, in-person and virtually at the **30<sup>th</sup> annual Edmonton Jewish Film Festival**. Join the conversation, as we explore and reflect on stories, traditions, and history, from a wide and varied Jewish world.



Top: *The Sea* (feature); Bottom L-R: *Bella* (Opening Night feature), *Love Statistically Speaking* (feature), *Soul of a Nation* (feature)

## May 3 – 13, 2026

In-person films \$15 / Online films \$10  
\$5 for youth/students under 21/ \$70 all access pass  
Tickets and info at [ejff2026.eventive.org/welcome](http://ejff2026.eventive.org/welcome)



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 To submit a real estate listing for Residential or Commercial for Sale or Rent (house, condo, vacation home, timeshare, or short or long-term rental), visit [albertajewishnews.com/realestate](http://albertajewishnews.com/realestate) or call Dan at 780-421-7966.

HAVE YOUR AD APPEAR ON OUR MONTHLY ALBERTA REAL ESTATE LISTINGS PAGE!  
 CALL DAN AT 780-421-7966 FOR MORE INFORMATION

## Alberta Jewish News now has a new Real Estate Page

that features listings and ads from agents who want to work within and for our Jewish communities and who want to make sure that 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 are 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.

Visit our Real Estate Page online at [albertajewishnews.com/realestate/](http://albertajewishnews.com/realestate/)

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Jewish Federation of Edmonton hosted a Community Mimouna on April 12 to celebrate the diversity of Jewish culture and show appreciation to all our allies and partner organizations for their solidarity and friendship. Yasher Koach to the volunteers who organized the event. Photos by Tammy Vineberg.

## Beth Israel’s community seder was a wonderful experience

By Regan Lipes

At Beth Israel Synagogue, the annual first night Pesach Seder is a joyful tradition community wide. This year boasted marvelous attendance with large families, young couples with small children, and some singles in attendance. The Edmonton Jewish community has a long memory, and for as long as most can remember, the BI Seder has been bringing Pesach traditions and religious observance to local Jews from all shuls and the unaffiliated. For those who might opt for a less elaborate Seder at home, or forgo this significant holiday altogether, the BI Seder continues to offer tradition, and a welcoming sense of belonging.

Thanks to the efforts of Ed Yedgarov and his team of happy helpers, the evening’s meal was simply superb, with every delicacy called for by the holiday’s traditions. The Seder was led by Rabbi Guy Tal, and the Haggadah was read entirely in Hebrew by volunteers young and old. Rabbi Tal explained the significance of each step of retelling the story of how Moses led his people out of slavery, and for those in attendance less versed in the nuanced details of

Pesach, his elaborations were both enlightening and poignant.

Children darted joyfully from table to table, and the spirit of the occasion felt less like a community Seder, but a celebration shared by one big mishpucha. Children who were old enough to be able to read recited the four questions in unison, while younger ones looked on with awe and admiration. Four cups of wine added to the mirth of the festivities, while Ed and his team served up a beautiful and succulent spread. There was plenty of matzoh, and children were covered with crumbs all over their special Pesach attire as they gobbled mouthfuls of unleavened break heaped with extra charoset.

The Seder ended close to midnight, with younger babies fast asleep on their parents’ shoulders, and other little ones still running around but losing steam. Many stayed to sing “Dayenu” spiritedly, “Echad Mi Yodea” with mounting speed, and of course, “Chad Gadya”! By the time the shul’s social hall cleared out it was well after midnight. It was a chilly night, so walking home was quite cold, but with bellies full of Ed’s cooking, and hearts brimming with the light and

spiritual fulfillment of celebrating Pesach, strolling felt effortless.

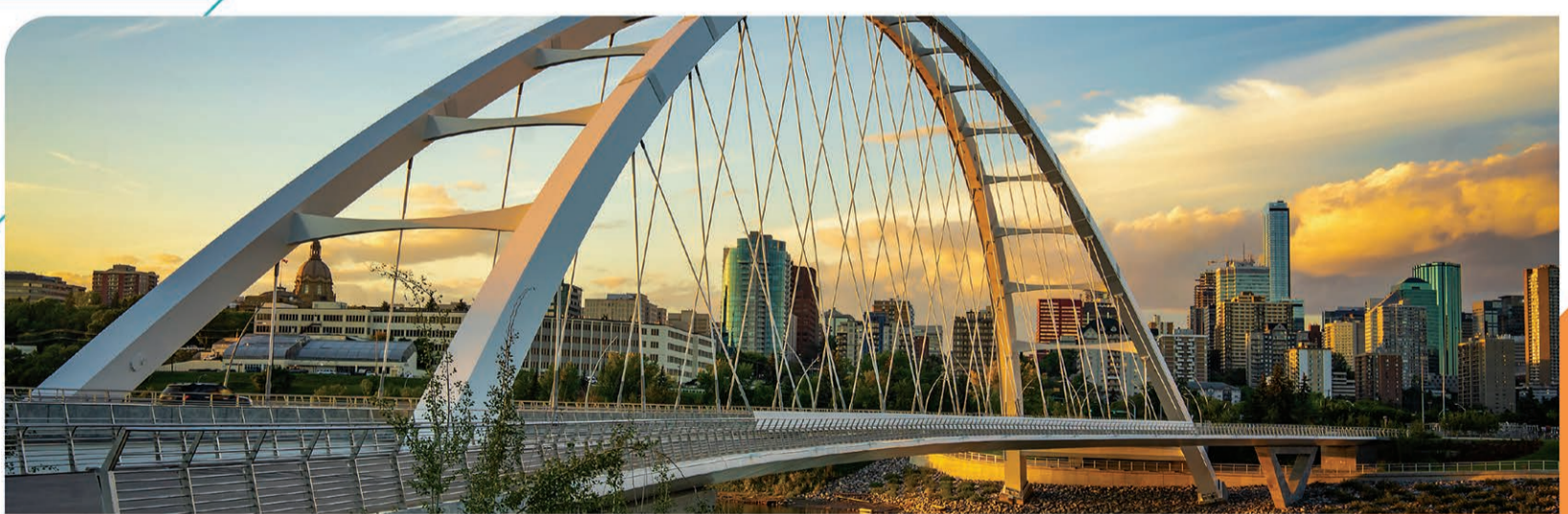
The Edmonton Jewish community should keep in mind for future years that attending one of their Seders at BI is a great option for those who may not be hosting their own Seders. Perhaps the intensity of Pesach cooking does not align with pre-holiday work schedules, in which case BI also has the answer. Orders for kosher for Pesach meals can be placed with Ed in advance. Both the BI Seder, and Ed’s pre-order catering is offered yearly, so for those who missed out this year, next year, G-d willing, can be a special full Pesach to look forward to.

The community is grateful to all the BI organizers who shared in the task of putting together such a marvelous first night Seder, especially Rabbi Tal and Manal for koshering the kitchen in preparation, Ed for hours toiling in said kitchen, and Jewish Family Services for subsidizing the attendance for anybody in the community needing help to meaningfully and memorably sharing in this year’s BI Seder.

*Regan Lipes is a Local Journalism Initiative Reporter*

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# Al Osten *Cont. from page 2*

estate planners, investment advisors, or insurance professionals to ensure they are proceeding in a way that is most beneficial for them,” Tappenden said.

“Every legacy gift is meaningful, regardless of its size. We’re looking at the bigger picture by building an endowment that can support and sustain our community organizations.”

According to Myron, some realized gifts exceed the estimates on donors’ original LOIs.

It is impossible to know what the actual value of a promised after-lifetime gift will be. The Harold Grinspoon recommends an estimate of \$25,001, says Diana Kalef, a place marker the organization has calculated based on the size of the Calgary Jewish community.

But, as Tappenden points out, according to a February 17, 2025 article in *The Globe and Mail*, “Research from Canadian charities has...shown that the average donation in a will is close to \$35,000.

“The gifts Al has given our community are transformational,” said Diana Kalef, adding that his after-lifetime support of Calgary Jewish Federation comes remarkably close to fully endowing the generous annual donation he made during his lifetime.

“I think it speaks to what the program is when we ask donors about their passions and which charities they are already supporting on a regular basis,” said Kalef.

“One thing that was amazing about Al is that he also gave to organizations he did not have a direct connection with.... I suspect he felt they were part of the fabric of the community and needed to be sustained,” Kalef said.

Osten not only gave to his synagogue – Temple B’nai Tikvah – but also to Beth Tzedec Congregation.

“There are not many people that would do something like that,” Kalef said.

But that was Al Osten. He gave with gusto, and, says Kalef, with “no strings attached.”

“I think that speaks volumes about who he was as a person,” Kalef added.

“The Life & Legacy program has been a gamechanger in this community.... It gave us a

# Commemorating Yom HaShoah in Calgary



**A somber Yom HaShoah program was held in Calgary to honour the victims and survivors of the Holocaust.**

foundation and a format and training,” said Kalef. “This culture of legacy giving didn’t exist in our community, and now, it’s become part of the vernacular. This is huge, and we want to continue expanding it.”

Toward that end, says Stuart Myron, Life & Legacy in Calgary has a goal of increasing the number of unique L&L commitments to 350 by the end of 2029.

The community is reaping great benefit from the capable and visionary work done by the JCFC since its establishment 36 years ago. Since then, successive chairs, board members, investment committee volunteers, and staff have grown the foundation.

Since 2024 alone, says Tappenden, the funds managed by the JCFC have grown from \$30 million to more than \$46 million... and counting.

“Our intent is to make sure that that we can provide as much of the earned income as possible to our fundholders’ designated charities while still ensuring that we’re a sustainable organization,” Tappenden said.

“JCFC does not distribute everything because we

want to keep pace with inflation,” said Myron.

While the organization is prudent, its goal is to get as many dollars as possible flowing into the community to support the excellent work done day in and day out by the charitable organizations donors choose to support.

“The more people have these conversations and think about how they can establish funds and build their own legacies, the more great work we can do in the community during and well after our own lifetimes,” says Tappenden.

Al Osten’s gift will keep giving. So can all of ours.

To find out more about the Jewish Community Foundation of Calgary and Life & Legacy, go to [jcfc.ca](http://jcfc.ca).

*If you missed Maxine Fischbein’s December 2025 article about Al Osten and his \$1million dollar gift to Camp BB-Riback, go to <https://albertajewish-news.com/al-osten-donates-a-game-changer-to-camp-bb-riback/>.*

*Maxine Fischbein is a Local Journalism Initiative Reporter.*

## Meet Calgary's NEW SHINSHINIM!



**ADVA**



**NOAM**

We’re excited to welcome **Adva** and **Noam**, Calgary’s new *Shinshinim* (young Israeli emissaries), who will be spending the year with our community beginning this September.


Over the coming months, we’ll introduce you to Adva and Noam – sharing their stories, passions, and experiences. From Israel to Calgary, they’ll bring energy, culture, and a special connection to the Jewish people as they connect with Jewish Calgary’s organizations and families.

Stay tuned to get to know them and follow along throughout their journey with our community this year!

## FUN FACTS About Adva & Noam


**5 FUN FACTS ABOUT ADVA**

- My favourite TV show is *Gilmore Girls*.
- I loooove sleeping!
- I am in the Scouts.
- My favourite singer is Eviatar Banai.
- I love running in my free time!



**5 FUN FACTS ABOUT NOAM**

- My favourite TV show is *How I Met Your Mother*.
- I loooove drawing!
- I am in Krembo Wings.
- My favourite band is Mashina.
- I love reading in my free time!



We are looking for four host families for Adva and Noam for approximately five months each. If you would like more information, please contact **Diana Kalef** at [dkalef@jewishcalgary.org](mailto:dkalef@jewishcalgary.org)

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

This time of year holds a unique and powerful place in our communal calendar. It is the season in which we mark what are colloquially referred to as "the Yoms," a sequence of days that call on us to remember, to mourn, and to celebrate the enduring strength of the Jewish people.

We begin with Yom HaShoah, where we pause as a community to remember the six million Jews murdered in the Holocaust and to honour the survivors who continue to share their stories with courage and resilience. Their testimony is not only a remembrance of the past. It is also a warning to the present and a responsibility for the future.

This responsibility feels especially urgent today. In the wake of tragedies such as the attack at Bondi Beach, recent events in Michigan, and shootings at synagogues as close to home as Toronto, the sense of concern for Jewish communities has intensified in ways that many of us have not experienced before.

Here in Calgary, across Canada, and around the world, we are witnessing a troubling rise in

antisemitism, alongside an alarming increase in Holocaust denial and distortion. These are not abstract fears. They are real and present dangers that demand a clear and unified response. Holocaust denial is not a matter of perspective. It is an assault on truth, memory, and human dignity.

"Never Again" must remain more than a phrase. It is a commitment to education, to vigilance, and to speaking out against hatred in all its forms. I want to acknowledge the many members of our community who continue to meet this moment with leadership and resolve. These are individuals who educate, advocate, volunteer, and stand firm in the face of rising hate.

As we move forward, we transition from remembrance to reflection and then to celebration. Yom HaShoah is followed by Yom HaZikaron, where we will gather as a community for a solemn commemoration to honour Israel's fallen soldiers and victims of terror. Almost immediately after, we mark Yom HaAtzmaut, celebrating Israel's independence

with a joyful, family-friendly event at the Paperny Family JCC. This is an opportunity for our entire community to come together in pride and connection.

This progression from mourning to celebration captures something essential about the Jewish story. We carry our past with us, we honour those we have lost, and we continue to build, to live, and to celebrate who we are.

In this season of remembrance and renewal, may we honour the past not only with reflection, but with resolve, and may we continue to stand strong and proud as a community.

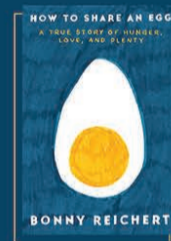
Am Yisrael Chai,

Rob Nagus  
CEO  
Calgary Jewish Federation

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HOW TO SHARE AN EGG

In Conversation with Bonny Reichert



Join us in-person for a special book talk with award-winning journalist, chef, and debut author, Bonny Reichert. She will share her deeply moving memoir: *How to Share an Egg: A True Story of Hunger, Love, and Plenty* – exploring how food, family, and the legacy of survival intertwine.

Moderated by Calgary's Danyael Halprin, journalist and children's book author of *A Magical Passover Starring the Tooth Fairy*.

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Presented in partnership with Calgary Jewish Federation's Holocaust and Human Rights: Remembrance and Education Department and Calgary Public Library. Supported by the Balaban Family, Krell Family, Viewpoint Foundation, and donors to the Calgary Public Library Foundation.

SHARAKA The New Middle East: Voices of the Abraham Accords

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  - Fatema Al Harbi (Bahrain)

Join us for a powerful and timely conversation with young leaders from Sharaka, a groundbreaking initiative fostering understanding and partnership between Arabs and Israelis. These changemakers, who grew up in antisemitic societies, are now using their voices to challenge hate, promote coexistence, and explore the transformative potential of the Abraham Accords. Hear their personal stories of change, including their experiences visiting Israel, engaging in Holocaust education, and building bridges across a rapidly evolving Middle East.

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This program is made possible thanks to a generous grant from Jewish Community Foundation of Calgary.



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UJA 2025

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

# Dr. Kathleen Moncrieff is set to become Calgary's first Mohelet

By Maxine Fischbein, LJI Reporter

History is about to be made in Alberta as Calgary physician Kathleen Moncrieff becomes the first woman to perform circumcisions in this province as a trained and certified Mohelet (a woman trained in *Brit Milah*, the ritual circumcision of Jewish baby boys).

Moncrieff is one of 14 doctors set to graduate from the Union for Reform Judaism's Brit Milah Program, also referred to as the Bris Program, and plans to hang out her shingle within the next couple of months.

Dr. Moncrieff earned her medical degree from the University of Calgary in 2014 following an earlier career as an astrophysicist.

She was attracted to medicine because it allowed her to combine her love of science with her love for spending time with people.

In addition to practicing as a GP, Moncrieff instructs medical students in the same teaching clinic where she did her residency in family medicine.

Dr. Moncrieff is similarly enthusiastic about educating patients.

"There is a lot of health education involved in being a doctor. Some of my favourite moments with patients

are when they have a question about something," said Dr. Moncrieff, who adds that she especially loves those moments when she sees her patients' "eyes light up" after they have learned something important about their own bodies.

A General Practitioner who enjoys performing surgical procedures, Moncrieff is thrilled that she will have the privilege of performing Brit Milah, thus engaging in a surgical procedure for happy reasons, something she says is a rare privilege for most physicians.

She and her Mohel/et cohort – most of whom are American– hail from a variety of medical specialties. There are pediatricians, OBGYNs, urologists, and pathologists who share at least two things in common. As required by the Brit Milah Program, all are proficient in performing neonatal circumcisions and each, says Moncrieff, shares a passion for using their medical skill to perform a time-honoured Jewish mitzvah.

"Everybody's come to it from a place of, 'Yes, I have these medical skills, and it would be cool if I could do something Jewish with them'," Moncrieff told *AJNews*.

Doing Jewish is relatively new to Moncrieff, a graduate of Temple B'nai Tikvah's conversion class just a couple of years ago.

Having grown up Mormon, though not part of a Mormon extended family, Moncrieff describes both sides of her family as "a bunch of Christians or former Christians who 'tend to be very supportive of people finding where they belong religiously.'"

Moncrieff, who began her post-secondary education at Brigham Young University in Utah, left Mormonism some 15 years ago.

"I explored a few other versions of Christianity on the way out and then just kind of landed on nothing," recalled Moncrieff who had an interest in Judaism, having known Jewish people including a couple of relatives by marriage.

"It didn't really occur to me that conversion was something I could do, or something I would want to do," said Moncrieff, adding that the COVID-19 pandemic changed everything.

With regular routines disrupted due to the contagion, Moncrieff had the opportunity to do a great deal of reading.

A book she had previously read during her medical residency –



Dr. Kathleen Moncrieff will soon be Calgary's first Mohelet.

at the advice of a hospital chaplain – was Rabbi Harold Kushner's *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*. While rereading Kushner's classic, Moncrieff realized she wanted to learn a whole lot more about Judaism.

Moncrieff thought about taking Temple B'nai Tikvah's Introduction to Judaism class but learned that, out of an abundance of caution, the Temple had opted to deliver the program online during the pandemic. Because she was already feeling "Zoomed out," Dr. Moncrieff put her aspiration on hold, but jumped in with both feet when Rabbi Mark Glickman resumed in-person classes.

"I remember walking into the library on the first day of the class, and I had no idea what to expect," recalled Moncrieff, adding, "It immediately felt like home to me in a way that I didn't understand then and don't even really understand now."

Knowing she had found her spiritual fit, Moncrieff converted and subsequently became active at Temple. She currently serves on its board of directors and its social committee.

Although Dr. Moncrieff did not want to embrace the lifestyle of a surgeon, she enjoys doing surgical procedures and looks forward to participating in a *mitzvah* she describes as a joyous intersection between her professional and spiritual lives.

"I sought out every opportunity in my training to learn how to do those things that would be in my scope of practice as a GP, including circumcision," said Moncrieff, who cannot wait to perform Brit Milah, something she describes as "profound and sacred."

"It is one of the oldest mitzvahs that we have been continuously practising for thousands of years," said Moncrieff, adding that it is a privilege to be there with a family during "one of their baby's earliest Jewish moments."

Already skilled and confident in performing infant circumcision – a prerequisite for those entering the Brit Milah Program – Moncrieff says the 10 mandatory Zoom sessions provided by learned scholars gave her a deeper appreciation of the history and meaning of Brit Milah dating back to the covenant God made with Abraham.

"God would be our God, and we would continue to be God's people," explains Moncrieff, adding that when you perform Brit Milah, "...you reenact that moment... making that family part of that promise."

*Continued on page 21*



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Our own Lenny Shapiro is once again making a life-saving impact by donating a second, even larger rescue boat to the people of Israel. This vital vessel will be deployed on the Sea of Galilee (Kinneret), serving as a lifeline and safeguarding countless lives.

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# Chai Life presents *The Last Yiddish Speaker* May 20 – June 7

By Irena Karshenbaum

The February 2024 production of *Fiddler on the Roof* presented at Calgary's La Cité des Rocheuses, a theatre in the Francophone community, by The Painted Fish Performing Arts Society, a local community theatre company, proved to be more than entertainment. The popular musical, based on short stories by Yiddish writer, Sholem Aleichem, was performed to packed audiences, and served as a catalyst for the revival of Jewish community theatre in the city.

At the time of the production, Tracy Smith, who played Yenta, spoke to many of her fellow actors, some of whom were part of the Jewish community, and discovered there was interest in reviving Jewish community theatre in Calgary. It wasn't long after that Smith, together with Laura Shuler, who was the other actor performing as Yenta, and actor, Ari Cohen, founded Chai Life Productions, Calgary's first Jewish community theatre company since Beth Israel Players was forced to cease operations in 1986 due to a lack of performance space in the Jewish community, after having entertained audiences for fifteen years.

Beth Israel Players was co-founded by Zelda Dean, along with the late Donna Riback and Rivka Schechter, who now lives in Texas. Dean directed and acted in many of its productions and has a long history with numerous of the Chai Life Productions' key players. Shuler produced and performed in many Beth Israel plays, along with Dorothy Hanson, a singer and actor who is currently serving on the Chai Life board, and Dean herself was Smith's nursery school teacher.

These long relationships helped fuel the quick rise of the theatre company. In March of 2025, Chai Life secured theatre space in the Jewish community, at Temple B'nai Tikvah, and by the end of the same year, staged sold-out performances of *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat*, a musical by Andrew Lloyd Webber with lyrics by Tim Rice, based on the Biblical figure, Joseph.

Just six months later, Chai Life is planning its next play, *The Last Yiddish Speaker*, written by New-York-State-based playwright, Deborah Zoe Laufer.

*The Last Yiddish Speaker* was chosen by the emerging theatre company, as Smith explains because, "We agreed that this was a good show and a timely show to do in light of the state of affairs around the world, not only in the Jewish community, but in others experiencing similar issues of racism, hate or marginalization. Because this is a Jewish story about the last Yiddish speaker it can be relatable to other cultures and peoples."

Set in a fictional town in New York State in May of 2029, eight years after the January 6 insurrection, the play tells the story, as Shuler explains, "Of a father [Paul, played by Ari Cohen] and a daughter [who goes

by Mary, but is actually hiding her Jewish identity as her name is Sarah, played by Galya Wornovitsky] who live under a nationalistic regime that prohibits them from practicing their religion, and cultural beliefs. They are confronted with a moral and existential dilemma when the one-thousand-year-old aunt Chava [who is "the last Yiddish speaker," played by Reva Faber] knocks on their door. To hide her or not to hide her? That is the question."

Shuler continues, "This play in the micro sense represents the purpose for our theatre's existence. Understanding the human condition is shared by all, whether you are Jewish, or you are not."

Reva Faber states that this is a very serious story, but laughs at how she got the part having never acted before, "Am I *meshugenah*, or what?"

After Faber saw *Joseph*, and thought it was "so well done," she was approached by Ari Cohen who suggested she audition for the play because it requires a Yiddish speaker, "And I speak Yiddish." She continues, "I did it just for fun, and I never thought that I would ever be chosen for the part. When I got a call-back after my audition, I had to ask what a call-back was."

Faber, who is turning 82 in April, used the latest technology, AI, to prepare herself for the initial audition. "I am a budding actress at age 82!" Faber exclaims, and at the same time admits, "It's challenging, but I am enjoying it. I am worrying that I will not remember the lines and worrying that I will not present the lines the way the director will want me to present them. I had to learn the lines very quickly because I am working full-time right now."

Faber explains why the play is important, "I do feel the Yiddish language should be preserved and there are so few people speaking it. This language has so much *tam*, one word has so much deeper meaning."

With themes that resonate with audiences, the play has travelled through many cities across North America in just two years since it has been written. Performances have been staged in Los Angeles, Houston and Philadelphia, among others across the U.S., with Calgary being the second Canadian location where it arrived via Victoria, when *The Last Yiddish Speaker* was staged in June of 2025 by Zelda Dean's production company, Bema Productions.

Even though Dean is based in Victoria, at 84, she continues her involvement with Jewish



Chai Life Productions presents *The Last Yiddish Speaker* in Calgary starting May 20.

community theatre in Calgary by directing the play remotely, which Smith, who is serving as the company's artistic director maintaining its creative vision, explains, is done through a virtual meeting that Dean watches on her computer while the cast performs in-person on stage.

Shuler, at 75, is the lead co-producer of the play, along with Dorothy Hanson and Scott Ellsworth. Shuler concludes, "Like Beth Israel Players, we welcome total community involvement, not just Jewish involvement. You don't have to be Jewish to be part of this theatre."

*The Last Yiddish Speaker* will be presented at Temple B'nai Tikvah on May 20, 24, 30, 31, June 6 and 7, 2026. Tickets can be purchased at [www.chailifeccc.ca/](http://www.chailifeccc.ca/).

Irena Karshenbaum is a Local Journalism Initiative Reporter. She writes in Calgary: [irenakarshenbaum.com](http://irenakarshenbaum.com)



The cast of *The Last Yiddish Speaker*: Jonathan Top, Ari Cohen, Galya Wornovitsky and Reva Faber.

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Over 200 music lovers gathered on April 12 to enjoy a joyful and uplifting performance by vocalist Omer Shaif. Funds raised from the event will be used to upgrade the Temple B'nai Tikvah air exchange and ventilation system. A breath of Broadway for a breath of fresh air at TBT.

# Omer Shaif – a breath of Broadway in Calgary

By Karen Abrams

Omer Shaif was not only a breath of Broadway, but also a breath of fresh air! At a time of deep unrest in the world, economic uncertainty, and winter's still tight grip on our city, Omer's performance at Temple B'nai Tikvah on Sunday evening,

April 12th, brought joy, laughter, hope, and enthusiasm to the very receptive 200+ audience. Two attendees shared their thoughts. Sabine Ryder commented, "I didn't know what to expect, but seeing the joy and connection the music invited was so uplifting!!!" Riki Heilik said, "Omer brought so much warmth, energy, and the magic of Broadway to the room." His repertoire included songs from Broadway musicals that have a Jewish connection, whether it be the composer, lyricist, performer, producer, or director.

His powerful, melodic voice entertained us with medleys from *Fiddler on the Roof*, *West Side Story*, *Les Misérables*, *La Cage aux Folles*, and even *Mama Mia*, thanks to a persistent Jewish producer who finally convinced ABBA to "okay" a musical based on their

music. The list goes on...To our surprise and delight, he found a Jewish connection to Elvis! (Elvis's maternal grandmother) and sang *It's Now or Never!* He even included a song from an Israeli musical that he had performed in both English and Hebrew as a final exam for his studies in musical theatre in New York.

Most touching was a nod of appreciation to the evening's executive producer, the late and most beloved Al Osten, when he sang The Rover Boys' '50s hit, *Graduation Day*. He even included the Rover Boys' voices in the background as part of the track!

Thank you to co-chairs Roz Oppenheim, Debbie Baylin and their team for bringing Omer to Calgary and for coordinating the sumptuous dessert reception after the show. The social hall was transformed so beautifully into a Broadway show reception with the lights, feathers and top hats!

Omer Shaif, we all thank you for your talent and the fun you brought to our community for this special night! As Rabbi Glickman summed it up, "What a great pair of pipes Omer has! His talent is



Omer Shaif dazzled the audience!

phenomenal! We sang, we clapped, and had a great evening sharing in the music he brought us." We hope he comes back soon!

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# Edmonton's 2026 matzah shortage shows the true meaning of community

By Jana Zalmanowitz, LJI Reporter

While brainstorming with the editors of *Alberta Jewish News* (AJN) before last month's Passover edition, perhaps in an effort to overcome troubled feelings of international news, I joked about the "hard-hitting" local stories I could cover in Calgary. In an equally facetious tone, the editor noted the biggest news out of Edmonton was a local matzah shortage.

"Trust me. I've heard," I told her. "From multiple sources."

Turns out AJN had been fielding calls from desperate northern prairie Jews preparing for the seders.

While so much of the world operates on a very short news cycle, the beauty of a monthly publication like AJN is it gives you the opportunity to not just know what's happening in Jewish Alberta, but to savour the stories. Really mull them over. It's unlikely I'll get to cover any monthly breaking news, but you can count on me to mull it over.

A matzah shortage was unheard of when I grew up. I'm a product of 1980's Edmonton and the granddaughter of a kosher butcher. For my dad's family, preparing Zal's Kosher Market for Passover was equivalent to dressing the window at Macy's in Herald Square for Christmas. A major cultural event, taken seriously.

Over the years, both Edmonton and Calgary have seen fluctuations in the availability of Kosher goods. Local kosher butchers in the Alberta prairies may as well be sitting in an exhibit beside the Little Synagogue on the Prairie in Heritage Park. An ode to kashrut of the past.

Demand for kosher products now relies on good communication and relationships between grocery chains and the Jewish community. This year, we witnessed what happens when circumstances lead to a breakdown in this delicate and unofficial chain of supply and demand.

Speculation is that it began with Edmonton's long-time kosher partner, Andy's IGA, closing its doors in 2024 when Andy retired. L'OCA Quality Market stepped into the location with a promise to continue carrying kosher products. When it closed in mid-March, customers were left to count on Brook's No Frills who had recently expanded their kosher section but were not equipped to be the only provider in the city. Callingwood Safeway has also dabbled in kosher goods for many years, but again, it's not used to the heavy lifting of being a major kosher hub.

I first heard of the shortage from my mom who received a text from her neighbour. "Do you have any extra matzah? We're cooking for Passover and can't find any." My parents were out of town but, in true neighbourly fashion, she invited them to let themselves into the house and take a couple boxes. It's a simple vignette in my parents' lives and a

testament to the perks of having nice Jewish neighbours.

The next time the mention of shortage arose was with my brother during a phone call. "Are you ready for Pesach?" I asked him, mostly out of childhood nostalgia and only partially to hear the answer.

"I couldn't find any matzah," he told me. He then launched into a tale of his search through Edmonton's south side No Frills, the city's current best bet. He spotted a few boxes in someone's cart and asked where she had found them, hoping to be pointed in the right direction.

She responded with something to the effect of, "There are none left and I'm not sharing mine."

Don't worry. He managed to track down a pack of five and overbought for his family of two. (He has extra in case anyone needs, he assured me.)

I next heard about it from my dad who, true to his upbringing, preps for Pesach as a fundamental aspect to his version of spring cleaning. This year, it involved disguising a trip to see his grandchildren as a suspected cover for the opportunity to scour the shelves of all kosher-supporting grocers in Calgary. "There's no matzah left in Edmonton so I should pick some up here," he told me as he unveiled his trunk of Manishevitz products.

A phone call with my uncle in Edmonton later that week revealed he was harbouring four unopened boxes of matzah in his basement. He told me if I hear of anyone looking, to let them know they can count on him.

The day before the first seder I took a trip to Glenmore Landing Safeway for a last-minute item. Their kosher aisle at this time of year is a scene reminiscent of the pre-war shtetls of Eastern Europe. Of course, I ran into a fellow Edmontonian transplant. While we caught up, he revealed the purpose of his last-minute grocery shop. "You know," he said, "There's no matzah in Edmonton." I'm aware I told him, mulling over this theme. After his sister considered ordering matzah on Amazon for a substantial mark-up, he came through. We joked about loading up with the abundance available in front of us and establishing an underground matzah economy moving north on the QE2. We didn't do it but he was generous in stocking up in case he encountered any



Archival photo: L-R The author's grandfather, Norman Zalmanowitz, and great uncles, Jack Woodrow and Feivel Zalmanowitz, owners of one of Edmonton's historical matzah outposts, Zal's Kosher Market, in the 1960s.

others in need.

Another honourable matzah shortage mention came from a text I received from a friend in Edmonton showing me a beautiful photo of her Passover table. "Good thing we have friends coming in from Calgary because they're bringing the matzah," she added.

I've been told this has happened in Calgary before. It's hard to keep track of demand and maintain the right supply. Populations fluctuate. Adherence to kashrut changes. Businesses come and go. What can we learn from the great Edmonton matzah shortage of 2026?

While I linger over the matzah deficit, now old news by the standards of a 24-hour cycle, I realize it was never really about matzah. It was about texts sent without hesitation, doors unlocked for neighbours, and trunks quietly filled in another city "just in case." In a place where we don't always have abundance, we've learned to rely on something else: each other.

We are commanded to love our neighbour as ourselves (Ve'ahavta l'rei'akha kamokha), but in Alberta's Jewish communities, that commandment doesn't live in scripture alone. It lives in small actions taken every day by its members.

This year it was matzah. Next year it may be Hanukkah candles. Either way, we already know how the story ends in our small communities. Someone will have extra, and someone will share.

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# Rabbi Ilana Krygier Lapidès: A life of saying yes

By Jana Zalmanowitz

April brings feelings of the post-Passover springtime bloom. For one prominent member of the Calgary Jewish community, this new beginning is holding an even deeper meaning. For Rabbi Ilana Krygier Lapidès, it will mark the beginning of a new chapter, her first outside of Calgary, as The Rocky Mountain Rabbi relocates to Victoria.

You are likely familiar with Rabbi Ilana's name. The "rabbi" label is a relatively recent addition when you consider her long history within Jewish Calgary as a student, educator, professional and leader.

Born a first generation Canadian, Rabbi Ilana describes herself as part of Calgary's "post-war tribe." Her father was a child Holocaust survivor and her mother was born outside a DP camp in Germany to Auschwitz survivors. She recalls a cascade effect of how her family and others came to Calgary, forming a close-knit community of survivors and descendants who leaned on one another while rebuilding what had been lost. She grew up surrounded by a chosen family of "aunts" and "uncles".

Her early education took place at I.L. Peretz, which later unified with the Calgary Hebrew school to become the Calgary Jewish Academy. While her parents were not traditionally religious, she describes them as Yiddishists and developed an early love for the language.

"My parents used to speak Yiddish at home and at first my sister and I wouldn't understand," she remembers. "But we ended up learning too quickly so they had to switch to Polish."

After grade 6, Rabbi Ilana made the uncommon move to continue at the Hebrew school, driven by her passion for Jewish learning. She deepened her Yiddish proficiency through private evening lessons twice a week.

By high school, her leadership instincts were already emerging. At Wisewood High School, she remained deeply involved in Jewish life through BBYO.

"By the time I was in grade 10, I was on the regional board," she says. "I ran conventions, I planned programs. It really was the making of me as a Jewish leader."

That trajectory continued into university in Edmonton, where she became president of Hillel and served on the board of the Canadian Jewish Congress. It was also a time of growing activism. She witnessed the introduction of Holocaust education symposiums and the national response to the high-profile charges against Holocaust denier James Keegstra, a case that would ultimately uphold Canada's hate speech laws at the Supreme Court.

She joined the Soviet Jewry Freedom Caravan, travelling across Canada to raise awareness and advocate for Soviet Jews. "It was an interesting time

to be a young student," she says, perhaps understatedly. Among the many stories from that period is one involving being escorted off the grounds of Vancouver Expo by the KGB.

Her path back to Calgary and into Jewish professional life wasn't planned. "After I graduated I didn't know what I wanted to do with myself, she says. "I thought maybe I'd be a high school English teacher."

Instead, she took a job in the baby room at the JCC daycare. One opportunity quickly led to another: assistant director of Camp Noar, then youth programming, then teaching at the Calgary Jewish Academy, where she eventually became the school's full-time Yiddish teacher after completing formal studies in Tel Aviv.

"Basically my whole career was people asking me if I wanted to do something and me saying yes," she says, revealing her true skill resides in knowing when and how to seize an opportunity.

That openness shaped a career that spanned the full spectrum of community life. She worked in youth programming, Holocaust education for Jewish Federation for over a decade, BBYO leadership, and senior programming at the JCC.

"I worked with people who were two all the way up to 102," she says.

Percolating in the background was an idea Rabbi Ilana held onto for a long time. "I always wanted to be a rabbi," she explains. "The first time I met a woman rabbi, was in my early 20s, and it just blew my mind."

She had even looked into this idea during one of her professional pivots. At the time, becoming a rabbi would have required relocation to the United States, something that wasn't possible. She had a young family, and after the loss of her sister, held the responsibility of being her parents' only surviving child. "I wasn't going anywhere," she says, and she put the idea on the backburner.

Twenty years later, the world was grappling with the COVID pandemic. Rabbi Ilana seized an opportunity. While the world went online, so did rabbinical schools. After completion of the course, she was ordained through the Jewish Spiritual Leaders Institute out of New York.

Ordination opened new doors. She became the Jewish community Chaplain through Jewish Family Services. "It's such an honor to be able to be with people at the most difficult time of their lives and bring them some comfort. That's a beautiful experience for me," she recalls.

Beth Tzedek soon brought her on to teach Bar Mitzvah lessons. As with past positions, the role quickly expanded into also running family services, eventually an assistant rabbi position.

Becoming a congregational rabbi was never part of Rabbi Ilana's plan. After becoming ordained, she started building her company and reputation as a life cycle events rabbi, the Rocky Mountain Rabbi. "I wanted to cater to folks who felt disenfranchised or unaffiliated," she including those from the LGBTQ+ communities or families with neurodivergent children.

In many ways, Rabbi Ilana's journey reads like a map of Jewish Calgary.



Rabbi Ilana, pictured with her husband David, is leaving Calgary to start a new chapter in Victoria.

Her decades of involvement across institutions reflect not only her adaptability, but her deep commitment to the community that shaped her, and that she, in turn, helped shape.

Calgary's community is warm, but its weather is cold. "We knew we didn't want to grow old in Calgary," she says with a smile. "The cold is starting to get to us."

With their children living elsewhere, and fewer ties keeping them rooted in the city, she and her husband David saw an opportunity. Victoria, home to their daughter and a milder climate, became the next destination. It was decided, the Rocky Mountain Rabbi would take up residence on the other side of the range.

The move doesn't mean Rabbi Ilana will be slowing down her Jewish contributions. Think of it more as redistributing. "Not everybody lives near a shul school," she says. "I want to create environments for them to feel connected to their Judaism."

The word she returns to when describing her departure is "bittersweet." After a lifetime of shared experiences, relationships, and community-building, Calgary remains deeply embedded in who she is.

"I think Jewish Calgary is incredibly special," she emphasizes. "We're so lucky in Calgary because we have made it a priority to have *Shalom Bayit* (peace in the home) and we are aware that we are too small to be divisive."

Her message to the community is simple, but resonant. "The only advice I have is to not take it for granted. It doesn't happen automatically. It takes time, work and a generosity of spirit."

For decades, Rabbi Ilana has modelled that generosity of spirit. As members of the Jewish community, friends, neighbours, former students and colleagues, many touched by her will continue to carry on her example. She is sure to bloom where she is planted next. And whenever she returns for a visit, Calgary hopes to make the Rocky Mountain Rabbi proud.

*Jana Zalmanowitz is a Local Journalism Initiative Reporter.*

## Yom HaShoah in Edmonton



A moving Yom HaShoah program was held in Edmonton that included poignant readings, songs and a candle lighting service to honour the victims and survivors of the Holocaust. Photo by Tammy Vineberg.



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# Federal NDP elects new leader Avi Lewis

(AJNews) – Last month, Avi Lewis was elected as leader of the National New Democratic Party.

Alberta NDP leader Naheed Nenshi was quick to distance the Federal NDPs from the Alberta NDPs. He reminded Albertans that they are “not aligned” and that membership in the Federal Party is not required by the Alberta party. The energy policy of the Federal Party in no way reflects that of the Provincial Party, emphasized Nenshi.

Lewis, a filmmaker and former journalist, campaigned on principles that have energized the global left, including affordability, public ownership, work empowerment, climate action, ending fossil fuel infrastructure approvals and building public housing units. He does not currently have a seat in Parliament and has stated that he is no rush to secure one; instead he is prioritizing the rebuilding of the Federal NDP Party, which currently holds only six seats in the House of Commons.

Lewis comes from an impressive line of progressive political leaders. His grandfather, David Lewis, was one of the founding members of the New Democrats and its leader in the 1970s. His father, Stephen Lewis, led the party in Ontario. His great-grandfather, Moishe Lewis, was an outspoken member of the socialist Jewish Labour Bund in Eastern Europe and immigrated to Canada in 1921.

He hopes to rebuild a party that suffered its worst losses in history during the 2025 federal election.

Lewis is a self-described anti-Zionist.

“When Israel commits a genocide in Gaza, we call it by its name, and we do everything in our power to bring it to an end,” Lewis said in his acceptance speech on March 29.

In a debate with other candidates in January, he described himself as an “anti-Zionist Jewish person” seeking to “unlearn and unpack the Zionist myths that most Canadian Jews were brought up with.”

Lewis is married to Naomi Klein, a prominent author and critic of Israel.

The Centre for Israel and Jewish Affairs (CIJA) along with other advocacy groups acknowledges that the war in the Middle East is a tragedy but it refutes the allegation that Israel is committing genocide.

Its material states “Genocide is an internationally recognized crime where acts are committed with the intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial, or religious group. Ethnic cleansing is the purposeful policy designed by one ethnic or religious group to remove by violent and terror-inspiring means the civilian population of another ethnic or religious group from certain geographic areas.”

CIJA continues: “Israel’s wars have been of self-defense, in accordance with international law. Furthermore, during wars or other military operations, Israel does not target civilians and targets military assets (armed combatants, rocket launchers, terrorist headquarters, and other such infrastructure). That any Palestinian civilians are killed during these operations is a tragedy, but, as the intent is not to kill civilians but to target terrorism, it by no measure constitutes genocide or ethnic cleansing.”

CIJA said it acknowledged Lewis’ victory “with a deep sense of sadness.”

“This weekend’s convention was a stark reminder of how far the party has drifted from its roots as the voice

## Chai Sticks wins the coveted 2026 Alberta Cup



**Congratulations to the Chai Shticks, winners of the 2026 Alberta Cup! Proceeds from the tournament will support the construction of bomb shelters and protected spaces all over Israel. For more information visit: [friendsofjnfca.org/sheltercampaign/](https://friendsofjnfca.org/sheltercampaign/) Friends of JNF Canada - Alberta Region Executive Director Jay Cairns expressed appreciation to everyone who participated in the tournament. He said, "Thank you to Dan Moser, Colin Muscat, Mario Morin, and Sam Oshry for your help. Special thanks to timekeeper Ben Kondor for your attention to detail and Solly Singer for your help with the score sheets. And thank you to all the players and their families."**

of Canada’s working class and trade union movement. Canadian Jews helped build that movement. Today, many are made to feel they no longer belong in it.

“At a time when antisemitism has reached a crisis, the NDP has become a hostile place for the vast majority of Jewish Canadians who want to fight for progressive values. 94 per cent of Jewish Canadians support the existence of the State of Israel yet have been pushed out.

“Avi Lewis is himself Jewish, and we respect his family’s history in this party. But Jewish identity is not a shield against accountability. When a leader declares that Zionism is inseparable from ethnic cleansing, he is not engaging in legitimate policy critique. He is telling Jewish Canadians that a core part of their identity is illegitimate. That is exclusion.

“On the eve of this convention, rabbis from across our community issued a clear call. They warned that Jewish

members feel increasingly alienated, that antizionism is being used as a cover for antisemitism, and that NDP spaces are becoming unsafe for Jewish and all Canadians with mainstream views.

“We have said before and repeat now that criticism of Israeli government policy is legitimate. But there is a line between criticism and the systematic delegitimization of Jewish identity. That line has been crossed repeatedly. Today, it was crossed again, without ambiguity.

“We will hold Avi Lewis, as we hold every public leader, accountable. But we will not pretend today is anything other than what it is. A painful rupture, decades in the making, with dangerous implications for our community and all Canadians.”

*This article was prepared with files from JTA.*

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MMSI

## Muslim-Jewish *Cont. from page 1*

explains that the group felt a deep responsibility to ensure this wasn't another "cold peace."

Brynien noted that while the signing of the accords was a significant milestone, past treaties with Egypt and Jordan proved that formal agreements alone do not guarantee lasting peace. Because those previous arrangements functioned primarily as security pacts between governments, they lacked meaningful interaction between citizens. Sharaka's goal is to move beyond these historical "cold" peace agreements by fostering the genuine human connections necessary for a warm, enduring partnership.

"These young leaders really wanted to make sure this people-to-people aspect of peace wasn't lost," said Brynien, noting how much the organization's work has helped expose the commonalities between Jews and Muslims.

"Everyone in the region – Jews or Muslims – are at their core very similar.

"We eat very similar foods. The languages are similar, family values. All these things. We really are the same people.

"Everything is just so similar, yet we're taught these people are the other side, or so different."

### Mandate to hate drove passion to visit Israel, Auschwitz

For Alharbi, the mandate to hate was the very thing that drove her toward peace activism. When her teachers insisted on animosity toward Jews, she sought refuge in her mother's wisdom, who taught her that such blind hatred had no place in their home.

This childhood realization transformed into a lifelong mission. Once she was old enough to research and read independently, she began deconstructing the propaganda she had been fed, ultimately fueling a desire to visit Israel and witness the "real" Middle East firsthand.

One of the first contacted to join Sharaka, she would be the first non-governmental youth from Bahrain to ever visit Israel.

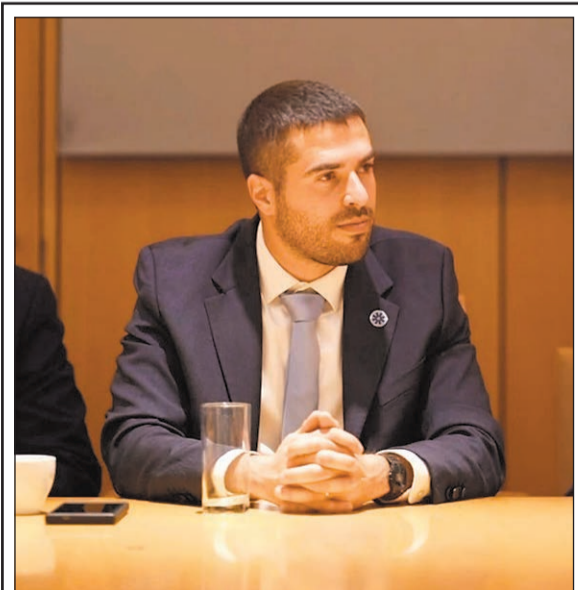
"I'm used to travelling but going to Israel, everyone kept telling me 'be careful, don't trust the Jews' but I wanted to go, no matter what. It was a once-in-a-lifetime experience."

Walking the streets wearing her hijab, she was shocked by the warmly curious reception she received when Israeli strangers came up to her to ask about her background.

"I love this about Israelis. They don't have the shyness of approaching people.

"The first stranger I met, when I answered him he said 'Welcome, we've been waiting to have peace with Arabs for a long time.'

"That story happened with everyone I met. Everybody was so happy seeing us there. I couldn't



Noam Meirov will be part of the Sharaka delegation visiting Calgary next month.



A Sharaka delegation at the 2025 March of the Living included participants from Morocco, Bahrain, Pakistan, Afghanistan and other countries. Photo supplied.

imagine ... They're Jews. They're supposed to hate us," she remembers thinking.

"That experience shocked me and changed my whole perspective. I found purpose because of that trip.

"Because they filled me with so much love, the Israelis and the Jews, I wanted to be the person that takes that message to my own people, to the Muslims and Arabs, because I'm one of their own. I wanted to be the bridge between Jews and Muslims."

### Elation turns to heartbreak

Her elation was short-lived, turning into heartbreak. While Bahrain's laws shielded her from physical harm, the digital world offered no such sanctuary. Following her media appearances in Israel, she became the eye of a digital storm – a vicious hate campaign against her.

"They called me a traitor," she recalls. "They said, 'If I find you, I'll kill you.' They told me I had betrayed all Muslims." It was everything you can imagine, and worse, she said.

The initial weight of the threats nearly broke her, but the depression eventually gave way to a hardened resolve. Instead of silencing her, the venom became her catalyst. "They fuel me," she says.

She walked away from her government career to give her life over to activism. In 2022, she stood at the gates of Auschwitz-Birkenau with a 50-person Sharaka delegation of Muslims and Jews, staring at a history her teachers had once dismissed as a myth. She has returned twice since, bringing new people to see the horrors of the past. "Every time is harder than the last," she says.

"We want people to fight extremism and hate through learning about the Holocaust."

### An October 7 resolution

Noam Meirov, a 30-year-old Israeli member of Sharaka, lost many family members in the Holocaust. He also lost close friends in the Hamas attacks of October 7, 2023.

Rather than lashing out in anger, he joined Sharaka to help build new friendships across the region.

"Being involved in Sharaka is my October 7 resolution because I came to the conclusion that it's not just about winning the war, but the question is: What vision will we have post war?" said Meirov, now Sharaka's managing director.

"On October 7 itself, I felt on that day that the war Hamas is raging against Israel is a war to cancel the Abraham Accords. So I felt the only real revenge would be the expansion of the Abraham Accords."

He explained that Sharaka thrives on a simple

foundation: respecting each other's often similar traditions while gaining a clearer view of the region's deep-rooted frictions. They aren't trying to solve every conflict overnight – some issues are purposefully set aside – but the focus remains on keeping the conversation respectful. As he put it, "What has changed now, is we can sit at the same table and have a conversation."

Similar to Alharbi, Meirov's visit to the UAE was an eye-opener. He discovered that the Gulf states and Israel share a deep commitment to hospitality and a mutual drive for technological sophistication.

### Extremism in the West concerning

With the positive progress happening as a result of the Abraham Accords, Meirov, Alharbi and Brynien are all disturbed by the division they are seeing in Europe and the hatred and polarization taking place on North American streets and campuses.

It is one of the reasons the organization has been so focused on missions to the United States and now Canada, said Brynien.

She noted the importance of having voices from Gulf states highlight a striking reality: the level of extremism and cultural intolerance currently seen in the West often exceeds what is experienced in their own countries.

"Unfortunately, the rhetoric that we see about the Middle East is way more intense in college campuses than even in Bahrain or Morocco or the UAE," she said.

Nagus, of the Calgary Jewish Federation, agrees that interfaith dialogue is at its lowest point in the West in his 20 years of working in the Jewish space in Canada.

"It's been a really challenging time for the Jewish community's interfaith work and I think there are best practices that Sharaka can bring to learn from their work with all these different people throughout the Middle East," Nagus said.

"The Sharaka model provides hope for the North American Jewish community at a time when interfaith relations are really frayed and difficult."

While the itinerary for the Sharaka delegation – which also includes a Moroccan representative – is still being finalized, it will feature a major interfaith event at a local church on May 17 in coordination with the Federation. The visit will also include youth and school programs, along with opportunities to engage with policymakers and political allies.

The Federation will share further details with the community as the schedule is confirmed.

# Holocaust survivor Ann Dancyger inspires CJA staff and students

Calgary Jewish Academy Grade 6-9 students recently had the profound privilege of welcoming a very special guest: Holocaust survivor Ann Dancyger. In an intimate and moving session, Ann shared the powerful story of her and her mother's survival, offering a deeply personal account of resilience, courage, and unwavering hope in the face of unimaginable hardship.

Students were taken on a journey through her life's most harrowing and miraculous moments, from a narrow escape from execution to her family's long, arduous path to finding safety and a new beginning in Canada. Her message emphasized the strength of the human spirit and the critical importance of never staying silent in the face of injustice, a lesson that left a lasting impact on everyone in the room.

This visit served as a powerful bridge between history and the current curriculum at our school. The presentation tied directly into our Jewish Social Studies (JSS) unit focused on the experiences of families during the Holocaust. By hearing a first-hand

account, students were able to move beyond the dates and facts in their textbooks, forming a deep, empathetic connection to the material.

Seeing the faces and hearing the voices of those who lived through this era allowed our students to connect their heritage with the historical narrative of the Jewish people. It transformed their academic study into a personal mission of remembrance.

As one of the last generations with the opportunity to hear directly from Holocaust survivors, our students now carry a sacred responsibility to bear witness. By listening and learning, they ensure that these



**Ann Dancyger and Dahlia Libin spent some very special and impactful time with CJA students from grades 6 through 9. Mrs. Dancyger described her journey from the horrors of the Holocaust to finding safety and a new beginning in Canada.**

stories are not lost to time. This experience reinforced the CJA commitment to ensuring that history is never forgotten and that the voices of the past continue to guide the leaders of the future.

## Dr. Kathleen Moncrieff

*Cont. from page 14*

Throughout the Bris Program, participants are guided through the spiritual and religious aspects of circumcision and the practicalities of performing a surgical procedure in a non-surgical environment.

From learning about how to manage a surgical procedure in someone's home or synagogue to helping family members feel comfortable, there are myriad details to master, Moncrieff says.

These days, adds Moncrieff, many parents are unsure about circumcision, a medical procedure that has become increasingly controversial in some countries around the globe.

"I don't have children," said Moncrieff. "If I were to have a baby boy, and having seen what I've seen as a physician, I would have them circumcised even if I wasn't Jewish."

"While it's not common, it's not super rare for someone to need it done when they're older, and I've seen bad cases. I would personally want to prevent that," Moncrieff added.

The Bris program provides an excellent grounding in how to help ensure that already stressed young parents are comfortable with the ceremony, especially those who are converts to Judaism and need guidance on "...how to include non-Jewish family members and interfaith families in appropriate ways," Moncrieff says.

It may well be reassuring to some members of the community – especially mothers – to put the mitzvah of *Brit Milah* in the hands of a Mohelet, says Rabbi Glickman, who recommended the Bris Program to Dr. Moncrieff and has provided mentorship and support to her throughout her studies.

"My hope is that having a woman perform the procedure will bring added comfort and reassurance to some of the mothers who might otherwise be more uncomfortable with this," Rabbi Glickman said.

"I am excited that Kathleen is doing this through the Reform movement and, particularly, in our congregation.... I think this will resonate also with a broad band of Conservative Jews," said Rabbi Glickman. "This adds to the diversity of people who are performing this ritual and that is of great value."

Business is likely to be bris(k) for Moncrieff who

looks forward to teaming up with Rabbi Glickman and other clergy willing to team up with a Mohelet.

Once she is certified by the URJ, Dr. Moncrieff can perform all the ritual aspects of *Brit Milah*, as well as the circumcision itself.

Moncrieff told *AJNews* that she can play a vital role when it comes to serving unaffiliated families.

"There are going to be some liberal Jewish families who maybe aren't at a point where they want to get involved with a synagogue yet," said Moncrieff, adding that her ability to fly solo means that she can also be of help on those rare occasions when congregational Rabbis are unavailable.

Moncrieff has already felt the support of her *Brit Milah* Program classmates and looks forward to her membership in NOAM (the National Organization of American Mohalim), established in 1988 by the *Brit Milah* Board of Reform Judaism to provide continuing education and support to their Mohalim.

Dr. Moncrieff can also find advice and support from a NOAM member a little closer to home.

Former Edmontonian Dr. Ariel Isackson, who moved to Victoria, BC in September, graduated from the URJ *Bris* Program in 2022. During an interview with *AJNews* last month, Isackson, who was born and raised in Edmonton, was delighted to hear that Alberta will soon welcome Dr. Moncrieff as its most recently minted Mohelet.

Like Moncrieff, Isackson is a family doctor who performs minor surgical procedures. He earned his medical degree in Debrecen, Hungary in 2016, later reaching out to Ottawa physician Dr. Lisa Rosenkrantz – a skilled and busy Mohelet – on the advice of an Ontario colleague who had studied circumcision with her. Dr. Isackson trained with

Rosencrantz prior to enrolling in the *Bris* Program.

Rabbi Glickman has partnered with Isackson for *Brit Milah* and officiated when he married his wife, Chelsea.

Isackson told *AJNews* that he would be happy to be a resource to Dr. Moncrieff, and it sounds like he has good tips (pun so intended!) to share.

Exuding gratitude for the honour of serving as a Mohel, Isackson says he receives many interesting calls and has had the honour of helping a diversity of community members including gay couples who have adopted children or gone the surrogate route.

He hopes to continue plying his trade as a Mohel in BC while also traveling back to Edmonton occasionally to perform *Brit Milah*, a labour of love he refers to as "really rewarding."

Isackson estimates that he has performed *Brit Milah* 30 times in Edmonton, sometimes at the request of parents with whom he grew up, occasions that have been particularly special for him.

"I welcome new mohels to the Alberta community with open arms. There's a huge need," Dr. Isackson said, adding that he encourages physicians to consider enrollment in the *Bris* Program to develop the necessary ritual skills.

"To be able to guide families in this tradition and ritual, and for it to be done in a safe and medically guided way that balances both medicine and our traditions, is a very beautiful thing," Isackson said.

For more information about the URJ *Brit Milah* Program, go to [brisprogram.org/](http://brisprogram.org/)

Contact Dr. Kathleen Moncrieff at [drkm.mohelet@gmail.com](mailto:drkm.mohelet@gmail.com).

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— We Stand in Solidarity with Israel —

### This month's update from Edmonton Talmud Torah



Passover came to life in the Talmud Torah Early Learning and Out of School Care programs! Children set a Seder, made their own matzah and matzah pizza, sampled traditional foods, crossed the Red Sea, designed their own Afikoman bags and placemats, and much more. There was plenty of singing and enthusiastic charoset reviews!

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# from the Sources

by Eliezer Segal

## Being there

Our generation has it easy when it comes to understanding the geography of the Bible. Many of the place names in the Hebrew scriptures still bear their original names. In cases of doubt, it is easy to open up a printed atlas or consult Google Maps.

This was not true for Jews during the medieval era. Few of them had first-hand familiarity with the contours of the holy land, whether in their own time or as it had been in the days of ancient Israel. Most scholars had to infer the geographical realities from careful study of the information contained in the scriptures.

Some place names were easier than others to identify, since they appeared in narratives that described their locations or surroundings. However, in some other cases, the texts only provided long lists of names – as in the detailed catalogues of towns and sites that make up the tribal borders enumerated in the book of Joshua.

Take for example the case of Rachel's Tomb. Every modern traveler to Israel will be familiar with the vaulted structure that stands on the road extending south from Jerusalem towards Bethlehem in what became the territory of Judah. That elaborate building was in fact constructed by the Muslims in the fifteenth century, though the site had been a focus of pilgrimage for Jews and Christians since ancient times.

This identification corresponds with the narrative in Genesis according to which the matriarch "was buried on the way to Ephrath, which is Bethlehem." (The domains of the respective tribes were delineated by Joshua well after Jacob's time.) The book of Ruth also states that Elimelech, Naomi's husband, hailed from "Bethlehem Judah."

However, other biblical texts suggest different locations for Rachel's grave. Thus, in 1 Samuel, in the story about Samuel's choosing Saul as Israel's first monarch, he instructs Saul, who is searching for his father's lost animals: "thou shalt find two men by Rachel's grave in the border of Benjamin at Zelzah." The territory of Benjamin is to the north of Judah; and evidently the two met in nearby Ramah which lies in

that region. This is a considerable distance from Judean Bethlehem.

The rabbis of the midrash engaged in an ongoing dispute over which location of Rachel's tomb is the true or primary one, the southern option in Judah or the northern option in Benjamin. Indeed, they report that the apparent contradiction was a favourite debating point for heretics who wanted to discredit the Jewish tradition.

Medieval Jewish exegetes in the diaspora did not have a very clear picture of the realities of geography or of the distances involved. Many of them inferred from the texts that the tomb could be situated both near Bethlehem and in the domain of Benjamin.

Regarding Jacob's expression of regret to Rachel's son Joseph for the fact that his mother could not be brought to burial in the family tomb in Hebron, Rashi has the patriarch saying "I did not carry her even the short distance to Bethlehem to bring her into the land." The implication was that Rachel's burial place lay outside the borders of the holy land.

Rabbi Moses Nahmanides [Ramban] initially sided with Rashi in the Torah commentary that he composed in Catalonia. However he changed his position (on this and other questions) after his immigration to the holy land in 1267. As regards Rachel's grave he wrote: "...This is what I wrote initially, but now that I have merited to come to Jerusalem, praise to God the good and beneficent! I have seen with my own eyes that the distance between Rachel's burial place and Bethlehem is not even one mile."

The desire for physical familiarity with the contours of the holy land is most evident in the career of Rabbi Isaac Estori ha-Parhi. Unlike the numerous tourists – Jewish, Christian and Muslim – who chronicled their brief visits to the standard pilgrimage sites, this native of Provence was determined to acquire a tangible experience of life on ancestral Jewish soil, especially in relation to the observance of precepts that were to be observed there, and the determining of the land's halakhic borders. He was proficient in Hebrew, Latin and Arabic. Parhi's magnum opus *Kaftor va-Ferah*

("Knob and Flower") is based on seven years (1315-1322) of exploring sites that were far off the beaten track. He established his residence in Beit Shean in the Galilee, which was a thriving economic centre under Ottoman rule, after deciding that the community in Jerusalem was too quarrelsome and inhospitable to enlightened thinkers like himself.

We find a similar pattern with respect to another biblical instance of two localities bearing the same name. A Mount Hor (*Hor Hahar*) stands to the south of the land of Israel, bordering on Edom, and is well known as the place where Moses's brother Aaron died. Another Mount Hor, mentioned more frequently, is designated as the northwestern border. Rashi and the other traditional commentators agreed that these were two different places; however it was difficult to identify the northern Mount Hor, an identification that was relevant for implementing the laws that are in force in the holy land. Rashi suggested that the peculiar double name *Hor Hahar* [= "Mount Mountain"] referred to its two-scoop shape. The talmudic tradition equated it with a certain Mount Amanus; and eminent commentators tried their hands at identifying it with various known mountains in the region.

"I toiled at great length until I succeeded with much difficulty in locating it, thank God," concludes Estori. He provides meticulous listings of Arab villages in the region, along with detailed accounts of the topography and flora. Only one hill fit all the criteria for the identification. He could not have made his decision without first-hand experience of the terrain.

In our days of speedy travel options, when it is possible to visit many of those sites without undue toil or difficulty, there is a lot to learn and enjoy from booking a flight to Israel and walking along those ancient paths.

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

### Update from Calgary Halpern Akiva Academy



Preparing for Pesach is always a busy and joyful time for staff and students at Halpern Akiva Academy.



## New Canadian Hadassah-WIZO Award in Jewish Studies

CHW (Canadian Hadassah-WIZO) is pleased to announce the establishment of a new annual award in Jewish Studies at the University of Alberta.

This scholarship will be granted each year to a student(s) with satisfactory academic standing who are enrolled in any year of an undergraduate degree program. Recipients will be selected based on academic achievement in at least one course related to Jewish history, religion, music, or culture. Preference will be given to students who demonstrate meaningful engagement in co-curricular activities that support or promote Jewish Studies at the University of Alberta.

CHW's vision is to create lasting impact for at-risk women and children in Israel and Canada. By supporting local scholarship initiatives such as this, CHW reinforces its commitment to education as a powerful tool for strengthening individuals, fostering resilience, and building vibrant, connected communities.

At a time when Jewish identity and community connection are more important than ever, investing in Jewish Studies is both timely and essential. Academic programs in Jewish Studies preserve and explore the richness of Jewish history and provide students with the knowledge and confidence to engage proudly in their identity. These programs create spaces for dialogue, understanding, and community-building on campus, helping to combat isolation and antisemitism while fostering a strong sense of belonging.

Through this award, CHW aims to empower future leaders, educators, and advocates who will contribute meaningfully to Jewish communities in Canada and beyond.

Lisa Colt-Kotler, CHW CEO, expressed, "At CHW, we believe that education is one of the most powerful ways to shape identity, inspire leadership, and strengthen community. By investing in students pursuing Jewish Studies, we are helping to nurture a generation that is proud of its heritage and equipped to carry it forward. This award reflects our commitment not only to academic excellence, but to the continuity and vitality of Jewish life in Canada."



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