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Calgary gala brings a Stampede flair to CMDA

By Shael Gelfand

More than 400 guests, wearing their finest western duds, cowboy hats and boots, packed the Carriage House Hotel and Conference Centre for the annual CMDA Gala on May 31st. This year's gala was themed Stampede with a Purpose: From Desert Roots to Prairie Boots, and it more than lived up to its billings.

Sharon Fraiman, CMDA Western Regional Director, Major Gifts and her dedicated team of volunteers took the Stampede theme to another level with chuckwagon-style gourmet grub (Kosher of course), live country music from Tyler Two Guns and his band from the Tsuut'ina Nation, fancy-dressed saloon models, a white-hatter ceremony, and even a 17-hands tall full-sized replica horse on display.

"It brought CMDA supporters and friends together," says Sharon Fraiman, adding Stampede with a Purpose provided an opportunity to raise funds, recognize special donors, and get the latest first-hand update on how CMDA efforts are saving lives and directly impacting people in Israel.

The gala's inspiring keynote speaker, Loay Alshareef, a Saudi citizen who came to live in Israel for several years talked about helping to establish a new narrative about Israel among Arabs. The historian, religious scholar and social media influencer with hundreds of thousands of followers told guests that he is "committed to truth and a better understanding among all people of the Middle East," adding, "It's time to correct the many falsehoods and untruths that Arabs have about Israel, about Israelis and about Jews."

A special thanks to Valerie Sobel, superstar CMDA volunteer and popular online social commentator who arranged and coordinated Loay's visit to Calgary and also hosted a donor evening.

CMDA recognized Premier Danielle Smith and



Over 400 guests, wearing their finest western duds packed the Carriage House Hotel and Conference Centre for the annual CMDA gala event on May 31st in Calgary.

two amazing CMDA friends and supporters, philanthropists Leonard Shapiro and Brett Wilson with Kol Hakavod Awards for their on-going efforts on behalf of CMDA. Leonard continues to be one of CMDA's most generous supporters having recently donated a second Emergency Response Vessel serving in the Sea of Galilee.

"I can't say thank-you enough to Lenny and to Brett and to all our supporters and volunteers," says Fraiman. "Together we are truly making a difference."

Emcee Don Schapira introduced many special guests including Arlene Abitan, National President, CMDA who brought greetings, and Sydney Beniziri National Director, CMDA, both from Montreal, Mayor David Tordjman who extended greetings on behalf of his city, Cote Saint Luc Quebec.

Special guests from MDA in Israel included Uri Shacham, Deputy Director and Chief of Staff, Raphael Herbst, Deputy Director, International Relations and

Haim Dagan, Executive Board Deputy Chairman and Head of Volunteering in Yarkon Region.

"Every piece of equipment donated by CMDA goes into immediate use," Shacham told guests adding that vehicles are always aging out and need replacing, "But our greatest strength remains our people, our volunteers and staff and those who support us through their generosity."

Other special guests included Eghbal Kayadan and leaders from Calgary's Iranian Diaspora community, who received a heartfelt ovation in solidarity as they held up the pre-Islamic revolution Iranian flag.

"We had an amazing team again this year and tremendous support from our volunteers and a big thanks goes out to each and every one," says Sharon.

Fraiman also has a message for loyal attendees of the annual CMDA gala. "We're going to shake things up next year. It's time to try something different so let's look forward to what lies ahead."

JCC endowment fund builds a lasting foundation in Edmonton

By Tammy Vineberg

As work advances on the Oshry | Kipnes Jewish Community Centre in Edmonton, an important element is developing behind the scenes: the growing endowment fund designed to maintain the building and its community role for years ahead.

While the new centre will provide a long-awaited hub for Edmonton's Jewish community, the endowment supports the building's core operations and long-term stability, with the potential to support additional community needs over time.

The vision for the new Oshry | Kipnes JCC is grounded in consultation and data about how the Jewish community in Edmonton is changing and what community members said they want.

According to the 2021 Census, Edmonton's Jewish population has become increasingly dispersed across the city, with growth occurring outside neighbourhoods traditionally associated with the community.

In fact, nearly half of Edmonton's Jewish population now lives outside the primary areas identified in the census, highlighting a significant geographic shift across the city and reinforcing the importance of a centrally located JCC. Through consultations and a town hall, community members emphasized the need for an inclusive, welcoming and multi-generational space.

That same thoughtful approach is now guiding how

Continued on page 16



Arliss Miller with her daughter Lisa.

Poillievre reinforces commitment to security overhaul

By Mark Cooper, LJI Reporter



Opposition Leader Pierre Poillievre.

Conservative Leader Pierre Poillievre unveiled a hardline counter-strategy to Prime Minister Mark Carney’s pledges to tackle rising antisemitism, promising a packed Calgary synagogue that a Tory government would over-haul national security and foreign policy to keep Jewish Canadians safe.

The key highlights of the proposal he said a Conservative government

would introduce should it win the next election are:

Immigration: Revamping vetting to block criminals and expel individuals tied to Hamas, Hezbollah, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) or any other recognized terrorist organizations.

Asset Seizures: Freezing and reclaiming assets found to be stolen by IRGC members living in Canada.

Foreign Policy: Building a positive diplomatic relationship with Israel.

Local Protection: Easing red tape for Jewish institutions to secure safety funding.

“We, as a Conservative government are going to reform our immigration system, to make sure that criminals, terrorists, and antisemites no longer come into our country,” said Poillievre to applause from the approximately 300 who gathered at short notice June 7 at Calgary’s Beth Tzedec Synagogue.

“We will have a real program to vet those who come here to make sure they have no prior associations whatsoever with IRGC, Hamas, Hezbollah or any of the other terrorist organizations that are rampaging across the Middle East.”

The announced measures draw a sharp contrast with the Liberal approach under Prime Minister Mark Carney, who similarly spoke to a congregation in Toronto earlier in the month outlining the government’s plan to tackle rising incidents of anti-semitism that have gripped the country since the October 7, 2023 Hamas attack in Southern Israel.

Carney outlined how antisemitism has surged to

levels not seen in the post-war period, both in Canada and throughout the world.

“The horror and shame are global. Our actions must be local,” Carney told congregants at Toronto’s Holy Blossom Temple.

“They start with clearly admitting that Canada’s civic compact is failing Jewish Canadians.

“And they extend to all Canadians recognizing that, if that covenant fails for one of our communities, it fails us all.”

While Jewish organizations in Canada appreciated the Prime Minister’s recognition of the problem, many felt it lacked concrete actions to address it and its perpetrators.

Pointing to a *Global News* report that 700 Iranian regime and IRGC associates operate in Canada, Poillievre vowed that a Conservative government would identify, deport, and freeze the assets of those “co-ordinating chaos” on Canadian streets.

“We will coordinate with all our allies, who share our objective of shutting down the IRGC, to take away the money that they have stolen from their population until such time Iran has a new and democratic regime and the money can be restored to the people of that country.”

Poillievre also said he would work to restore a fractured relationship between Canada and Israel.

“We need to state clearly...and we will never apologize for saying that Israel has the right to defend itself, to defend the Jewish State, that the Jewish

people have and are entitled to have a homeland, and that includes having a strong armed forces to protect its people.”

Poillievre also said a Conservative government would develop a security funding rebate program so Jewish institutions don’t have to wade through red tape to access funding while risks to the community grow.

“The money should simply be spent, then reimbursed by a rebate program that is free from bureaucracy so that you and your administrators, here in your places of worship, can actually focus on serving your congregants in a safe environment, rather than filling out paperwork, hiring lobbyists and consultants.”

Calgary Jewish Federation President Lisa Libin, who spoke at the event, said it was important to hear from Poillievre and leaders from all political stripes about the scourge of antisemitism and how to meaningfully address it.

“In Canada, for our community, these events are not headlines,” said Libin.

“They are reminders of a reality that Canadian Jews continue to navigate with increasing concern and frequency.

“They are also reminders of why relationships matter, why engagement matters and why it matters that leaders take the time to listen, to learn, and stand alongside our community.”

Poillievre was introduced by Calgary Heritage Member of Parliament Shuvaloy Majumdar.

Negev Gala: A night to remember



Retired IDF Lt. Col. Jonathan Conricus (right) engaged in an insightful conversation about the Middle East conflict with Postmedia Network Inc. Executive Editor Kevin Libin during the Friends of JNF Canada Calgary Negev Gala on June 9 at Beth Tzedec. The event drew nearly 300 attendees and proceeds are supporting the Tzfat Child and Family Rehabilitation Centre in northern Israel. Postmedia was recognized for its commitment to journalistic integrity in its coverage of the conflict. Photo courtesy Rum Punch Media.



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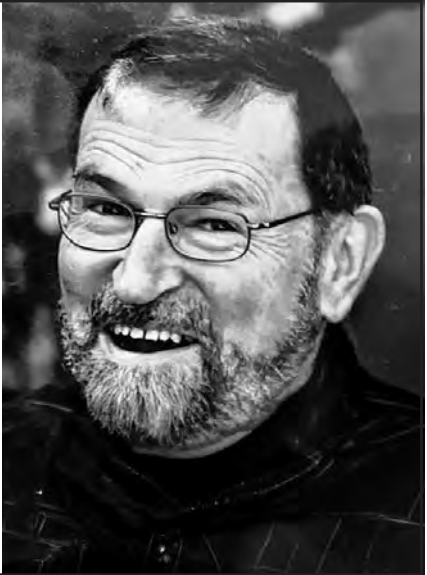
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UNVEILING NOTICE

The unveiling for
Ted Busheikin

will take place on Sunday, August 2, 2026,
at 2:00 p.m. at Erlton Cemetery, Erlton Street
and Macleod Trail S.W., Calgary.

Reception to follow at the home of
David and Jackie Busheikin,
636 Woodpark Crescent S.W., Calgary.



Surprise! Kehilat Shalom is still thriving after 13 years

By AJNews staff

As Kehilat Shalom celebrates the 13th anniversary since its inception in Calgary, members look back with joyful surprise on the success of the congregation.

According to founding member Sharon Batshaw, “When we began, there was excitement about starting a new synagogue. But we didn’t have great expectations about how long we would last. If you had told us that we’d be around 13 years later, with as many people as we have coming to services, some of us would have been shocked.”

The congregation originally attracted a handful of people who would join together on Saturday mornings at the JCC to pray, engage in Torah study of the Parasha of the week, and eat a meal together afterward. These founders sought to craft a different synagogue experience than what they had found elsewhere – to create a place of inspiration and acceptance. These early services were usually led by congregational co-founder Avy Moise, who conducted services and learnings knowledgeably.

Congregational Treasurer and Past President Bruno Kahane recalls an early landmark for the congregation: “We basically did not have a Torah. We bought one from a Sofer in New York. I traveled down there to go get it, and brought it with me to JFK Airport. The airline attendants told me I couldn’t bring the Torah aboard the airplane and it would have to go in luggage. A holy Torah in luggage? Unacceptable! The security person said the same thing. I insisted that the person who has the last say is the pilot. When they wheeled me to the gate with the Torah, the pilot comes out, and his name tag reads David. I asked him, ‘Is your name David Spevakow?’ He asked, ‘How do you know my last name?!’ David was the president of the Kelowna Jewish Association and his father lived in Calgary. When he saw it was a Torah he said, ‘Don’t worry, it’s meant to go on the plane.’ Of all the Westjet flights, that happened to be the one he was flying! It was truly basherte.”

Rabbi Leonard Cohen joined Kehilat Shalom one year later, beginning with High Holiday services in 2014 (5785). “I did not join the congregation right away,” Rabbi Leonard recalls. “While I knew most of the congregants, I wanted to ensure that their ideals and commitment could create an atmosphere of *kedusha*, holiness. I became impressed with their knowledge, dedication, and *kabbalat orkhim* - the

mitzvah of welcoming people with generosity and warmth.” Since then, Kehilat Shalom has held weekly Shabbat morning services, as well as Yom Tov and High Holiday services at the JCC.

Kehilat Shalom members pride themselves on the congregation’s high level of participation and do-it-yourself ethic. As Batshaw says, “Everyone participates at services, they’re not just sitting back. Each Shabbat, I know I’m going to do something. Everyone jumps in and does stuff.” The congregation’s Torah Ark, Bimah table covers, Torah cover and more were crafted by members of the Kehila. Members volunteer to lead prayers, serve as Gabbais (service coordinators), set up the prayer room and organize kiddush.

One important aspect of Kehilat Shalom is its flexibility to hold programs in various locations. It has held its annual Purim Megilah reading and party each year at local Calgary seniors’ residences Veni Chateau Renoir and Trinity Lodge, where Rabbi Leonard also conducts regular Friday Oneg Shabbat programs. Holidays have been celebrated at members’

houses, community halls, and even on the beach at Lake Midnapore.

To celebrate its “Bar Mitzvah” 13th anniversary, Kehilat Shalom is hosting a special Shabbat service on Saturday morning August 8. “We’re hoping to see lots of familiar faces there,” Rabbi Leonard states. Current and past members and friends of the congregation are all invited to join. The event is open to the community, though a limited number of seats are available. To register to attend Kehilat Shalom’s August 8 celebration, RSVP to info@kehilat-shalom.ca.



Kehilat Shalom is celebrating 13 years as an egalitarian congregation on August 8 at the Paperny Family JCC.

UNVEILING NOTICE

The family of
Carol and Mel Levitt z"l
invite relatives and friends
to attend the unveiling
of their monuments on

Sunday, July 26, 2026
at 11:00 am
at Erlton Cemetery in Calgary.

Reception to follow
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www.kehilat-shalom.ca

Celebrating learning, tradition and community

By Natalie Soroka

Families gathered at Edmonton Talmud Torah in June to celebrate students from Kindergarten through Grade 6. At the heart of these gatherings were milestone events; the Grade 1 Siddur Presentation, the Grade 2 Torah Ora Celebration and the Grade 6 Farewell. These special events reflected the values of *chesed* (kindness), *simcha* (joy), and *kehila* (community), creating meaningful year-end memories.

The Grade 1 Siddur Presentation is a meaningful step in the students' Jewish learning journey. Receiving their first Siddur represents the beginning of a lifelong relationship with prayer, tradition, and personal spiritual growth. Families watched with pride as the children sang, recited blessings, and held their beautifully decorated Siddurim for the first time. The joy on their faces captured the essence of *simcha*, reminding everyone of the wonder that comes with learning something new and sacred.

During the Grade 2 Torah Ora Celebration, students showcased their growing understanding of Torah values and Hebrew literacy. This ceremony emphasized the light (*ora*) that Torah brings into daily life. Through songs, readings, and reflections, the students demonstrated not only academic progress but also a deepening appreciation for Jewish identity. Their enthusiasm filled the room, creating a sense of *kehila* as families, teachers, and peers joined together to celebrate their accomplishments.

The Grade 6 Farewell marked the students' transition to junior high, and their next chapter of learning and personal development. The farewell program highlighted the students' achievements, leadership, and resilience. Teachers shared memories, students offered reflections, and families applauded the growth that had taken place over the years. Invited guests Trustee Sarah Doll and MLA Lorne Dach shared supportive and uplifting messages that encouraged students as they continue along their learning journeys. The event embodied *chesed*, as expressions of gratitude, friendship, and

encouragement echoed throughout the room. It was a moment to honour not only academic success but also the character and community spirit the students cultivated during their time at Edmonton Talmud Torah.

Earlier in June, our Grade 6 class took part in a wonderful Shabbaton at Camp BB-Riback, a much-loved TT Society tradition. Twenty-two students, joined by Program Lead Moreh Ari Sniderman and dedicated parent chaperones, enjoyed a meaningful weekend filled with Judaic learning, sports, arts, and rich Shabbat experiences. Together, the Shabbaton and Farewell events beautifully capped their time at TT, leaving them with memories they will carry for years to come.

Our Early Learning Centre pre-kindergarten graduates shone at a wonderful celebration marking a year of growth. They learned Hebrew, explored Jewish traditions, and built strong friendships. Their confidence and curiosity blossomed as they now step forward proudly, ready to bring everything they have learned into Kindergarten.

After four wonderful years, staff and students said so long to Principal Darin Johnson, who is moving into a new role where he will support leadership development for Edmonton Public Schools. We are pleased to welcome Vin Stocking as the new principal for the 2026–2027 school year. Our community looks forward to continuing our strong partnership with Edmonton Public Schools and supporting Mr. Stocking as he gets to know our unique and wonderful TT community.



The Grade 2 parents perform a special song at the Talmud Torah End of Year Assembly.



Principal Darin Johnson receives a farewell thank you gift to commemorate his years at Talmud Torah.

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Mazal Tov!

Halpern Akiva Academy rocks an 80's Retro Gala Dinner

By Maxine Fischbein, LJI Reporter

It was a fun and festive evening on June 7 as the Calgary Halpern Akiva Academy held an 80's Retro Gala Dinner honouring veteran volunteers Marina and Yannai Segal for their decades of service to the school and the Jewish community at large.

The theme for the evening was apt, as the couple both moved to Calgary in the 1980's. Yannai is an Alumnus of Akiva and his and Marina's son, Adeev, became the first second-generation student at the school.

Yannai – an engineer, entrepreneur and co-founder of GeologicAI – served as school president for two terms. On the community front, he is a former president of both Calgary Jewish Federation and Congregation House of Jacob-Mikveh Israel.

Marina – who built a career in facilities and property management – served on the Akiva Academy board of directors for years, while contributing to virtually every initiative at the school. Beyond Akiva, she coordinated *Hachnasat Orchim* for HOJMI, ensuring that hospitality was extended to Jewish visitors wanting a kosher place to stay. Like Yannai, Marina also provided leadership on the HOJMI Board, serving as secretary.

Last March, the Segals added the best job description of all to their resumes with the birth of grandson Azarya Yisrael, son to Adeev and Tamar.

In honour of the young *saba* and *savta*, some 120 people got their retro on at the Gala, sporting creative costumes, wigs, and accessories that took everyone back to the future. It kept the mood light, though there were some poignant moments too as the Akiva family and the community bade farewell to the Segals as they prepared for one of the greatest mitzvot of all...Aliyah.

The annual fundraiser – held at the Carriage House Inn – marked the school's 45th anniversary. Festivities included delicious kosher eats and a lineup of heartwarming tributes, special presentations, and multi-media entertainment, stickhandled by emcee Michael Berlin.

In his D'var Torah, Rabbi Nisan Andrews set the tone with reference to the previous week's Torah reading, *Behaalotecha*, stressing the vital importance of consistency in Jewish life, as represented in Aaron the High Priest's role of lighting the menorah in the Holy Temple.

"Ensuring a Jewish future requires day-in-day-out commitment," said Rabbi Andrews who paid tribute to those who keep the fire burning at the Halpern Akiva Academy, including teachers, parents, students and volunteers. He praised the Segal family for their many contributions to the school, and Jewish life in general, over several generations.

Among the family's labours of love on behalf of Akiva Academy, Yannai's mother, Agi Romer-Segal once served as a loved and respected teacher at the school.

Special guests at the gala included Minister of Advanced Education and MLA for Calgary Fish Creek Myles McDougall and Calgary Heritage MP Shuvaloy Majumdar – both of whom offered warm greetings – and Calgary Police Service Community Resource Officer Sergeant Trent Barker Petersen.

Calgary Jewish Federation CEO Rob Nagus was on hand – literally – rocking his retro slap bracelet...all

the rage in the 1980's.

Inspired by a hilarious observation Marina Segal had shared with him, Berlin quipped that although fundraising gala honourees are typically affluent, Marina and Yannai are "unemployed, homeless... and living in Marina's parents' basement."

(It must here be clarified for the historical record that this was an unusual set of circumstances for the power couple, a temporary situation, as they prepared to depart for the Holy Land.)

Off beat and entertaining video entertainment at the gala included a parody of *The Princess Bride* directed by Berlin and featuring hilarious cameos by respected community members who proved that they are great sports.

Another video highlight was an 80's music montage in which the Marina and Yannai's four children, Adeev, Kedem, Atara, and Avital delivered clever, lighthearted and loving musical parodies about their parents' voluntarism set to the music of such retro hits as Michael Jackson's *Beat It* and Toto's *Africa*. Weird Al Yankovic, an icon of the 80's, would have been proud.

Tributes to Yannai and Marina by their parents Dr. Eliezer Segal and Agi Romer-Segal and Elena and Eugene Ragolsky, as well as friends and mentors Debbie and Nelson Halpern, were infused with humour, moving insights into the making of two super-volunteers, and heartfelt good wishes as they settle in Israel.

The gala gave attendees the opportunity to get to know Dr. Jenna Pappas, who began her new role as Akiva Principal just six weeks prior. "Everyone feels supported and valued in this community and everybody works together to make it a special place," Pappas said.

Head of Judaic Studies, Morah Hannah Andrews movingly described the many ways Marina and Yannai have supported the school and referenced a lovely piece of art that had previously been gifted to them so that it could be included in the container shipment that preceded them to their new home.

In his remarks, Yannai Segal, like Rabbi Andrews, referenced the Parsha read on the Shabbat prior to the Gala, describing how the menorah in the holy temple was lit, holding one torch to another



Marina and Yannai Segal were honoured at the 80's Retro Gala.

"until the flame rises and burns on its own in the second flame."

"That theme spoke to me as I reflected on Marina and I, and what we tried to do over these decades in the community," said Yannai. "We didn't build a school; we didn't establish a Shul. We found flames already burning for us."

Through their many years of service to the school, the shul, and the community, Yannai and Marina similarly ensured that their flames rose and sparked the torches of others, including an actively engaged group of next-generation parents. "We already see that there is an amazing group coming up as the young guns," Marina said, adding, "We are incredibly excited to see what the future holds for the Calgary Jewish community, and we will be cheering you on from Israel."

While Marina and Yannai Segal will be missed throughout the Calgary Jewish community, the overwhelming sentiment at the Gala was excitement for them as they, in Yannai's words, "...go stand under another flame...one that has burned for a few thousand years in the land that our children now call home."

For more information about the Halpern Akiva Academy, go to www.halpernakiva.ca.

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A MESSAGE FROM CEO STACEY LEAVITT-WRIGHT



This month, I've been thinking about what it means to build community in a moment that asks so much of us. Across Alberta, I continue to see people showing up—with generosity, courage, and a deep sense of responsibility for Jewish peoplehood and for our enduring connection to Israel.

As the central organization for Edmonton's Jewish community, Federation continues to strengthen relationships beyond the Jewish community, deepen connections within our own community, lead responses to urgent issues, and connect Jewish life to Israel and Jewish peoplehood.

Each of these pillars could be its own column, but I want to share a few recent examples. We continue to build trusted relationships with elected officials, civic leaders, and allies through events such as Spuds N' Suds, the annual Stampede Breakfast hosted in collaboration with Calgary Jewish Federation, the Centre for Israel and Jewish Affairs, Canadian Jewish Political Affairs Committee (CJPAC), and

Allies for a Strong Canada. At a time when Jewish communities need strong public support, these relationships—and the opportunities to strengthen them—matter deeply.

We also deepen connections through programs and events such as PJ Library Popsicles in the Park, Hillel programs, and preparations for involvement in the Edmonton Pride Festival. Beyond programming, we have launched the Community Security Initiative, a comprehensive security program that will strengthen our collective response to this need now and for years to come.

We connect local Jewish life to Israel and Jewish peoplehood by continuing to show up together. Hosting the Israel Pavilion at Heritage Festival is both an opportunity to be in community (there are still a few volunteer shifts remaining) and a meaningful way to connect visitors with the land and people. At the end of the summer, we are also preparing to welcome

two shinshinim to Edmonton, who will bring more of these connections to life through programming across the community throughout the year.

Finally, with the Oshry | Kipnes JCC preparing to open in early winter, there will be even more opportunities to build upon and foster these connections. So many of you have demonstrated your desire and support for this project by naming features in the building or contributing to the L'Chaim campaign.

Please visit ecf.ca/lchaim if you want to know more.

I have often remarked that leadership starts with "showing up," and so too does building community. Whether we are showing up with allies and partners, for one another locally, or for Israel and the Jewish people, I look forward to continuing to build, together.

Register for our upcoming events at jewishedmonton.org.

L'Chaim!

Let's bring the Oshry | Kipnes JCC

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Sunday, July 12

10:30 a.m. - 12 p.m.

Wedgewood Heights Playground
on Wedgewood Boulevard

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UJA CAMPAIGN Launch

Tuesday, September 8

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Fun, connection, and discovery.

Sunday, July 19 1 - 3 P.M.

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Located near the new Oshry | Kipnes Jewish Community Centre.

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SUNDAY, AUGUST 9
3 - 5 p.m.

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Rain or shine.
Indoor space available!

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Pie Day at CJA

By Alex Kouperman

The CJA school community came together for its annual Pie Day fundraiser in support of Magen David Adom Canada. Students had the opportunity to purchase pies and then take part in the excitement by throwing them at student council members and staff.

This year's event was the most successful Pie Day fundraiser CJA has ever held, raising an incredible \$1,700 for MDA. A new highlight this year was the participation of our kindergarten classes, who joined in the fun and helped make the afternoon even more special.

Beyond the laughter and excitement, Pie Day was also an opportunity for students to learn about the mitzvah of giving. The afternoon helped students see how coming together as a school community can make a real difference for others. Through their participation, students were able to connect fun, learning, and tzedakah in a meaningful way.



Pie Day at Calgary Jewish Academy raises funds for Canadian Magen David Adom and also teaches students about tzedakah.

A special thank you goes to the student council for helping organize and run the event, as well as to all the staff, students, parents, and families who supported Pie Day. Through their enthusiasm and generosity, the CJA community was able to make a meaningful contribution to Magen David Adom Canada.

CJA enjoys Maple Syrup and more at June breakfast event

By Maxine Fischbein

The sun was shining and spirits were high as 340 individuals gathered for *Mishpacha & Maple Syrup*, a multi-generational kosher pre-Stampede Breakfast at The Calgary Jewish Academy on Sunday, June 14.

The event brought together the school *mishpacha* (family) as well as members of the extended Jewish Calgary clan.

Highlights included good eats and entertainment by Calgary country-pop artists Megan Dawson & Flaysher. Line dancing, games and crafts helped round out the action-packed morning, which included the opportunity for kids of all ages to check out a Calgary Fire Department truck and meet first responders.

Event sponsors included the Balaban Family, Obadia Mortgages, the Grintuch Family, Barrel Oil

Corp, *Alberta Jewish News*, Joyce and Jeffrey Kerr, the Ashkin Family, the Frydberg Family, and Starbucks.

The festive gathering ran in tandem with the CJA Silent Auction, held online June 11-15. Proceeds of the fundraiser are earmarked for upgrades to the school PA system.

The energy at the pancake breakfast was great, buoyed, no doubt, by a sense of celebration at the school following a period of transition that included the hiring, last year, of veteran educator and school administrator Shelly Gelfand as Principal and experienced entrepreneur and community leader Jordan Balaban as school CEO. Notably, both these talented individuals were educated at the school, a point of pride for each.

During a recent interview with *AJNews*, Gelfand shared happy news regarding school enrollment.

Retention levels are high and total registration for the 2025-2026 school year is up, Gelfand said, news that deserves a resounding YAHOO!

“CJA is currently accepting applications for the 2026–27 school year for all grades, Nursery to Grade 9, and for our affordable licensed daycare program for three and four-year-olds,” says Dana Silver, Director of Community and Advancement.

“We’re always excited to connect with families who may be looking for early learning and childcare options.”

For more information or to register your child(ren) go to www.cja.ab.ca/admissions.

Maxine Fischbein is a Local Journalism Initiative Reporter.

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Everyone had a great time at the Mishpacha & Maple Syrup CJA Breakfast. Proceeds from the fundraiser are earmarked for upgrades to the school's PA system.



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By Maxine Fischbein, LJI Reporter

Shock and sorrow were felt throughout the Jewish community when Nessie Hollander, a long-serving and much-loved Paperny Family Calgary JCC employee, passed away on May 12, 2025, at the age of 79.

Matriarch to her family as well as her communal family, Nessie began her career at the front desk of the Calgary Jewish Centre. She was the warm and welcoming presence that made the JCC feel like home for deeply rooted Calgarians and transplants alike.

Nessie knew, first-hand, the huge importance of extending a helping hand and an open heart to others, especially newcomers. She, her husband Aubrey and their children Joel, Shelly, Mandy, and Brett, were strangers in a strange land when, in 1977, they immigrated to Canada from South Africa. Nessie and Aubrey, who had sought to settle either here or in Australia – wherever they were accepted first – were seeking a more promising future for their children.

Fortunately, they found their way to Calgary.

The move was not an easy one, especially for Nessie and Aubrey, says daughter Shelly Gelfand.

For the record, Aubrey Hollander says that he and Nessie worried more about their children than themselves during the transition, though he vividly recalls the moment that Nessie, overcome with the enormity of the move, sat down on a suitcase at Calgary’s then-tiny airport and had a good cry – a rare event in the life of a can-do woman who, more characteristically, exuded strength at every turn.

The Hollanders came to Calgary knowing only the Alperstein family, close friends from South Africa who had preceded them just six months earlier.

Nessie and Aubrey worked hard and forged relationships with new friends who also became family.

The *dor l’dor* story of Nessie, Shelly and her daughter, Dr. Jennifer Gelfand, is a heartwarming

girl-power family saga. Like Nessie, Shelly and Jennifer continue to broaden the family circle by sharing their unique gifts within the Jewish community and beyond.

True to her name – Ness means miracle in Hebrew – Nessie (née Genessa Ginsburg) accomplished astonishing things due to her forthrightness, friendliness, and fortitude, not to mention the seeming ease with which she kept numerous plates spinning.

“She was a woman in a million,” said Aubrey, who met Nessie on a blind date. It was love at first sight and they began a long-distance relationship, moving between Cape Town, Johannesburg, and Pretoria.

“Nessie had a toughness to her, for sure, but she had a sweetness too,” recalled Aubrey, who characterized his wife of 60 years as an *eshet chayil* (woman of valour) and a *Yiddishe mama*.

“She was a force,” agrees Nessie’s former colleague and friend, Rhona Shore, CEO at the Paperny Family JCC.

It was not long before Nessie was tackling increased responsibilities at the JCC. She is perhaps most fondly remembered for the role she played as coordinator of seniors’ programs.

The kitchen where the seniors’ challah-baking program flourished on Nessie’s watch was dedicated to her memory in September of 2025, citing the gift of her “...20 beautiful years of challah making and baking.”

“Her hands shaped more than just dough – they shaped tradition, connection, and love,” the plaque goes on to say.

Nessie elevated and professionalized the weekly ritual that saw seniors baking and selling delicious challah to countless community members, a labour of love that continues to this day.

“She was phenomenal, a pleasure to work with because she was such a team player,” remembers Shore, who praised Nessie’s

no-nonsense approach and how she “inspired people to act.”

Always positive and energetic, there was not much that could stop Nessie in her tracks, but her world was turned upside down with the sudden and untimely passing of the Hollanders’ beloved son Joel in 2016.

“He was her rock,” recalls Aubrey of the terrible loss. “They were extremely close.”

“Nessie was overwhelmed with such grief,” said Shore. “I didn’t know if she was ever going to be okay again. To some degree, she probably never was, but she had a strength about her that was incredible.”

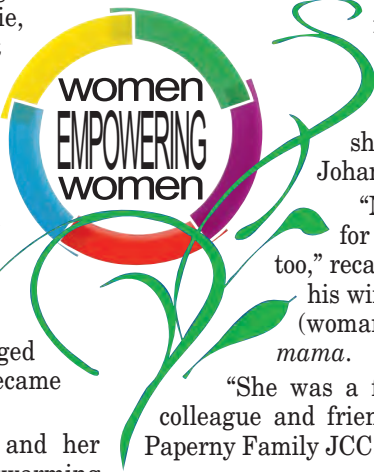
Nessie dug deep to continue being a reservoir of strength for her family and her JCC family, especially the seniors she so loved serving.

Few would have known it from her, but Hollander struggled with chronic emphysema and, toward the end of her life, a lung cancer diagnosis. About a year prior to her passing, she was stricken with COVID-19 and then weakened by long COVID.

The knock-out punches were the flu and pneumonia.

Although her health had been failing, the news of her passing came as a shock to so many in the

Continued on page 10



At the Calgary Police Service, we believe that strong, inclusive leadership is essential to building safe and thriving communities.

We are proud to stand with the Alberta Jewish News in recognizing the remarkable contributions of women in leadership who are shaping our province and inspiring the next generation.

To the women who lead with strength, integrity, and heart; thank you.



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Dor L'Dor *Cont. from page 9*

community. It was, after all, hard to imagine that a person blessed with Nessie's vitality could possibly die.

"You know, the last year of her working here, we could see that there was a real decline in her health, but she refused to talk about it or accept it," Shore said, adding that as depleted as Nessie was, she worried more about the people around her than herself.

It was hoped that Nessie's successor at the JCC, Jackie Herman, would have the opportunity to work alongside Nessie for a few months as the baton was passed.

Sadly, it proved impossible, though Nessie came through for her seniors, welcoming Herman at her home and sharing her wisdom with her. Shore was delighted when Nessie gave Herman her stamp of approval with the gracious words, "I feel good about this."

Instead of the retirement party they had planned for Nessie, her JCC family hosted the meal of consolation following her funeral. "This was her home," said Shore, "so this is what we did for her."

Nessie's spirit still guides those who worked shoulder to shoulder with her at the JCC. Shore told *AJNews* that when her staff were setting up for the annual sports dinner, the words "What would Nessie do?" were on everyone's lips. We got the job done, said Shore, who gave her staff the ultimate compliment: "Nessie would have been proud."

She would have also been proud of someone even closer to home, her daughter Shelly, who was appointed principal by the board of The Calgary Jewish Academy shortly after Nessie's passing. "Nessie would have been on cloud nine," said Aubrey Hollander, adding, "I cannot begin to express the pride I have in my daughter. She is like Nessie, through and through."

"Family is important," says Shelly Gelfand. It was the number one driving factor for my mom."

"It shows in the little things, like the texts she sent the family when someone's birthday was coming up," Shelly recalled. "And then, she was gone. We missed someone's birthday, and we were like, oh my God, mom's not here to do that anymore. Everyone's going to have to step up."

In the blink of an eye, Shelly – who bears a strong resemblance to her mom – became her family's matriarch while simultaneously stepping up to care for a couple of hundred Jewish kids in loco parentis.

A veteran Calgary Board of Education teacher and administrator with 36 – double chai – years of experience under her belt, Shelly was the ideal choice for CJA, a school that was at a crossroads, says former school chair Michelle Jacobson.

"It meant a lot to us to have someone in the community come back to us," said Jacobson, who values the calming influence Shelly has brought to the school. "It was a year of rebuilding...and she really set the foundation in place that we need to grow our school and bring it to the next level," added Jacobson. "We're really lucky to have her."

"I won't lie. It's been a challenging year," said Shelly,

reflecting on her first school year at CJA.

At the same time, she exudes optimism for the future of the school. "We are on a path forward, and we are making positive changes," said Shelly. "We want [CJA] to thrive and to flourish. Everybody needs to be part of that story."

What made Shelly follow in her mother's footsteps by embracing a Jewish leadership role? "Part of the decision was a little bit of a push from my children, to be honest," said Shelly, adding that her daughter Jennifer and son Ayden told her, "Mom, wouldn't that just be amazing if you could spend the last few years of your career in the school that we went to and the school that you went to, and make a positive impact there?"

She may have had a little nudge, but the idea was there in the back of Shelly's mind. During her career with the Calgary Board of Education, she devoted six years to creating cultural change at a school that became more welcoming, positive, and inclusive due, in large part, to her efforts.

Shelly has happy memories of her own time at what was then known as the Calgary Hebrew School. Close to 10 years of age when her family settled in Calgary, she forged friendships at the Hebrew School that continue to this day.

Other community affiliations that made her who she is include her time as a counsellor at Camp B'nai Brith (now Camp BB Riback) and her leadership in BBYO in Calgary and beyond.

Last August, on the final preparation day prior to the beginning of the 2025-2026 school year, Shelly brought her CJA staff together to learn about Shabbat. One of her primary goals was to give non-Jewish staff insight into some of the beautiful and time-honoured traditions. "I explained to the staff my connection to the challah, how my mom took that role in the Jewish community, baking with the seniors," Shelly said.

Quite a few staff members later approached her individually to share their memories of Nessie, some of them surprised and delighted to learn that she was Shelly's mother.

"She was my first point of contact when I came here from Israel," said one. "She was the first person that I spoke to at the Jewish Centre, and she always was so warm," said another.

Acknowledging the still-raw loss Shelly had endured, staff members made this promise to her: "We'll take care of you. Don't be worried, we've got your back."

The support, of course, works both ways. Shelly cannot say enough good things about the educators, administrative and support staff with whom she feels fortunate to work shoulder to shoulder. "I love the staff here. They are phenomenal.... You can see the passion that they bring to the school...how much they care for the kids."

Amid the challenges of a transformation in the making, Shelly speaks movingly about the joys that have risen to the surface thus far. "I love the kids. They keep you young, laughing and energized," she says.

Speaking of kids, Shelly is justifiably proud of her son Ayden, who previously worked as a financial analyst and is poised to begin law school this fall, and her daughter Jennifer, who earned her medical degree at the University of Alberta and is set to begin the fifth and final year of her residency in obstetrics.

Like her granny and her mother, Jennifer Gelfand speaks passionately about her own desire to give back to the community that helped raised her. It is her hope that she and her partner Reid will eventually settle down in Calgary, home to both their families.



Currently focused on interviews for a post-residency fellowship, Jennifer says that she speaks about her granny when asked about the mentors that have most influenced her.

"My granny and I...always had such a special relationship," Jennifer told *AJNews*. "She never treated me like a child...she always treated me as a young woman," added Jennifer, who, while growing up, enjoyed her Shabbat ritual with granny... breakfast at Zellers.

"Although she was my granny, I always saw her as a friend and confidante.... I always felt like she was my biggest supporter. She was such a cheerleader, believing in me and my abilities."

Jennifer says that her mother's appointment as CJA principal "...would have been, honestly, one of the highlights of granny's life...seeing my mom give back to the community the way my granny dedicated her life to the community and seeing my mom's career come full circle in a really serendipitous way."

The leadership skills of her granny and her mom are a beacon to Jennifer Gelfand, who looks forward with confidence to a fellowship in high-risk obstetrics.

She is keeping her fingers crossed that she will match in Calgary, where she one day hopes to raise children that find security and happiness in the shelter and support of family and community, as she has.

Jennifer says she always felt she took after her dad, Russell Gelfand, "very laid back and going with the flow." But as she has grown into adulthood, she believes that she increasingly emulates her mother and granny.

"I definitely find myself more and more taking after them as I find my own professional voice," says Jennifer, who adds that she is also blessed with wonderful female mentors in medicine.

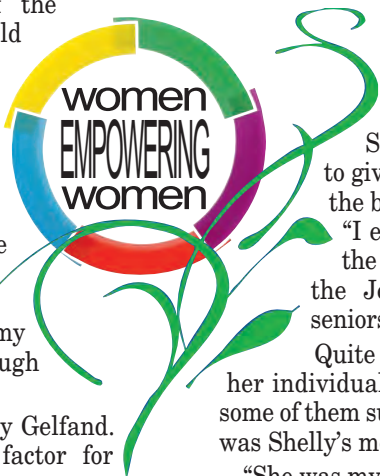
She attributes much of her success to the support she has always had from her family, including paternal grandparents Micky and Ricki Gelfand. Ricki, a proud Jewish woman who forged her own successful career as an educator in Montreal and then Calgary, is also an important role model.

Jennifer adds that her early education at CJA was salutary in many ways. "It is really important to understand our history...to take pride in our Jewish heritage," says Jennifer, things she feels she would have missed had she not attended Jewish day school.

Among other formative experiences in the Jewish community, Jennifer spent summers at Camp BB and was a leader in the BBYO movement, following in her mother's footsteps as a president of the Zahav chapter. After her undergraduate years at Western, in London, Ontario, Jennifer earned a master's degree in public health at the University of Haifa in 2017.

She loved her time there, and Israel is never far from her thoughts. "It's the best place in the world," she said.

Dr. Jennifer Gelfand knows that she has inherited a precious treasure and she plans to pay it forward, like her granny and mother before her. Her words of wisdom to other Jewish women are, thus, a chorus in three-part harmony: "Be proud of being a Jewish woman, give back to your community, and exemplify in everyday life the values that our culture and religion teach."





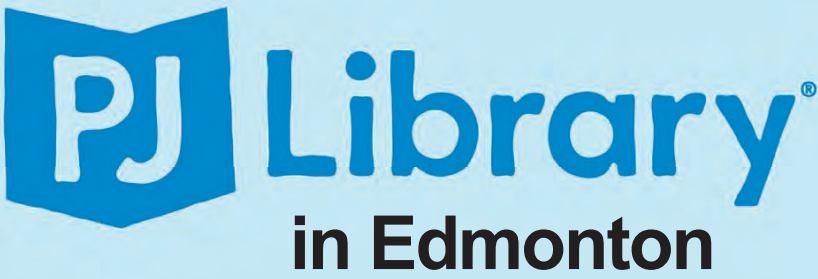
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Mira Campbell brings her joy to



PJ Library Programmer Mira Campbell, with two other Mira's and a buddy at the community Yom Ha'atzmaut celebration.

By Regan Lipes, LJI Reporter

The name Mira Campbell is probably one of the most recognized names in the Edmonton Jewish Community. Though there are countless reasons for this, the deeply positive impact Mira has had on local children and their families, trumps all others. “I spent 14 years as an Early Childhood Educator with 4-year-olds at Talmud Torah School,” explained Mira. There are still so many young Jewish Edmontonians whose first memories of school were guided by the knowing and nurturing hands of Mira. Starting out at Talmud Torah School and getting to be in Mira’s class had become a joyful right-of-passage for little ones, but she was presented with an offer she could not refuse. “In 2021 I was offered the opportunity to work with our Edmonton Jewish Federation as a PJ Library Programmer.”

As any parent knows too well, being an early childhood educator is not a job, but a calling. Mira’s career has always been and continues to be a celebration of her talents engaging with and inspiring youngsters. “I started babysitting in my neighbourhood when I was 11 years old, often earning only \$2 per hour, but I discovered a genuine passion and connection for working with children. As I explored career options in high school, an aptitude test confirmed that working with young children was a natural fit for me.” Mira, a teacher who has touched the lives of so many young people over the years found her calling early. “With the support of a meaningful reference letter from one of the families I babysat for, I completed the Early Childhood Education programme at Grant MacEwan and had a 25-year journey in a field that I love and cherish.” As they say – the rest is history!

Parents in the Jewish community are likely familiar with PJ Library because of the lovely books that arrive in the mail around key holidays and festive times of year. Locally, it is thanks to fundraising through United Jewish Appeal by the Jewish Federation of Edmonton, that there is continuous staffing for PJ Library programming. What PJ Library gives to Jewish children may start with the wonderful books they provide, but as Mira’s work can attest, it is about

supporting families as they help their children build strong Jewish identities through learning and exploring. According to PJ Library’s website: “Since Harold Grinspoon first sent Jewish books to 200 children in Western Massachusetts in 2005, PJ Library has grown to send free books to more than 230,000 subscribers throughout the United States and Canada. Today, PJ Library is an expanding global community linked by shared stories and values that spans across five continents and more than 670,000 subscribers.” Mira is a big part of bringing this vision to the next level.



She elaborated: “Building on the strong relationships I had established with the Jewish community and the families at Talmud Torah, my goal as a PJ Library Programmer was to create a welcoming environment for new families, strengthen community connections, and foster Jewish unity through engaging holiday celebrations and interactive programming.” Her name in the community was already synonymous with early childhood enrichment, so although families were heartbroken that their littlest children would not have the benefit of matriculating in her classroom, the transition was elegant and seamless.

Those older kids who once enjoyed being in Mira’s classroom, now accompany their younger siblings to PJ Library community events and are still met with a big hug and warm smile. “Thanks to the generosity of our UJA donors and the unwavering support of our Jewish Federation, PJ Library is able to provide meaningful and welcoming experiences that bring Jewish families together. From bi-weekly playtime programmes at the TT gym to holiday celebrations, Chanukah events, Moms’ Glam Brunch, Koffee and Kibbitz get together, collaborative engagements with our Jewish partners, park events in the summer, and more, these opportunities foster connection, belonging, unity and Jewish identity,” emphasized Mira. By building community networks for parents early on, Mira organizes programmes that establish

essential support systems and long-term friendships. PJ Library is famous for its mission to give free books to Jewish children from birth to the age of eight, but that is not the end of their investment in nurturing healthy and happy youngsters. “PJ Our Way provides chapter books for children aged 9-12. These books introduce Jewish values, culture, holidays, and traditions through age-appropriate stories that families can enjoy together and inspire a lifelong love of reading,” Mira explained.

The Jewish world is diverse, and for some families, the PJ Library content might be the extent of the Judaic content they give their children. For Mira, it is about cultivating supportive networks: “PJ Library programmes are an inclusive and welcoming resource for individuals and families of all backgrounds and levels of Jewish connection. Whether someone is deeply engaged in Jewish life or just beginning their journey, these programmes foster community, meaningful connections, and a supportive space where everyone is encouraged to participate and belong. This works well with Federation’s whole-community approach to welcome the youngest members of our community across the spectrum of Jewish life.” Mira’s lifelong dedication to nurturing a love of learning in the Jewish youngsters of Edmonton makes her the perfect friendly face to make everyone feel truly and sincerely welcome.

Supporting young people to take pride in their Jewish heritage is no light undertaking, as so many postsecondary students go to great efforts to conceal their Jewishness. “Over the past 5 years as a PJ programmer, I have had the privilege of building meaningful relationship with our families and witnessing firsthand the profound impact of PJ programming. Seeing families deepen their connections with one another and share in Jewish life, reinforced the impact PJ has on our community and has been a truly rewarding and fulfilling part of my role. With Federation’s continued support and new community space available in the Oshry / Kipnes JCC opening later this year in Edmonton, I have no doubt that impactful community experiences will continue to be enhanced and flourish and create a vibrant hub for Jewish life at every stage of a family’s journey.”



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A MESSAGE FROM ROB NAGUS

The past month has been one of the busiest, most meaningful, and most inspiring periods in recent memory for Calgary Jewish Federation and our entire community.

Across our city, we have seen Jewish life in all its richness and diversity. Families gathered for community celebrations and educational programs. Children and parents came together to experience the joy of Jewish life and strengthen their connections to one another and to our traditions. Community members of all ages participated in thought-provoking conversations, learned from exceptional speakers, and engaged in important discussions about the opportunities and challenges facing the Jewish people today.

Amidst all of this activity, one of the most significant initiatives underway has been the final stages of our new strategic plan. Over the past several months, we have engaged deeply with community members, stakeholders, volunteers, and partners to envision what Jewish Calgary can and should look like in the years ahead. This process has been both inspiring and energizing, and we look forward to sharing it with the community in the next few weeks.

This month also marks an important leadership transition for Calgary Jewish Federation.

As we conclude the tenure of our outgoing President, Lisa Libin, I want to express my deepest gratitude and

appreciation for her extraordinary service over the past four years. Lisa has gone above and beyond in every possible way, providing outstanding leadership during one of the most challenging and consequential periods in Canadian Jewish life.

From navigating the aftermath of the pandemic to responding to the profound impacts of October 7 and the resulting challenges facing Jewish communities across Canada, Lisa has led with strength, compassion, wisdom, and unwavering commitment. She has been a tireless advocate for our community, a trusted partner to our staff and volunteers, and a source of stability during uncertain times.

Her dedication has left an indelible mark on Calgary Jewish Federation and our community as a whole. On behalf of our Board, staff, and the entire Jewish community, I offer Lisa our heartfelt thanks for her remarkable leadership and service.

At the same time, I am thrilled to welcome our new President, Jerrad Blanchard.

Jerrad is no stranger to community leadership. He has been a tremendous member of our Board of Directors and an invaluable contributor to our strategic planning process. His passion for Jewish life, thoughtful leadership, and deep commitment to community have been evident in every role he has undertaken.

Many in our community also know Jerrad from his

exceptional tenure as President of the Paperny Family JCC, where he helped guide the organization with vision and dedication. He brings a collaborative spirit, strategic thinking, and a deep love for our community that will serve Federation extraordinarily well in the years ahead.

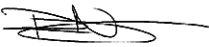
As we turn the page and begin this new chapter together, I am filled with optimism.

The past month has reminded us of what makes our community so special: our resilience, our generosity, our willingness to learn and engage, and our unwavering commitment to building a vibrant Jewish future. We continue to face challenges, but we also continue to demonstrate that when we come together, there is no limit to what we can accomplish.

With a new strategic plan nearing completion, strong volunteer leadership, dedicated professionals, and an engaged and passionate community, I firmly believe that the future of Jewish Calgary has never been brighter.

The work ahead is exciting, and I look forward to all that we will accomplish together.

B'Shalom,



Rob Nagus
CEO, Calgary Jewish Federation

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



2026
SHEM TOV
AWARDS

On June 22, Calgary Jewish Federation held its 2026 Annual General Meeting at the Paperny Family JCC, bringing together community members for an informative and meaningful evening.

Calgary Jewish Federation Board President Lisa Libin and Calgary Jewish Federation CEO Rob Nagus led the evening, which included updates from the JCC, reflections on the Finance Report, election of the Board of Directors, remarks from the CEO and President, and the presentation of the Shem Tov Awards (stay tuned for a dedicated post celebrating this year's recipients!).

The event also included recognition of outgoing Board members Daniel Bassin, Alana Devlin, and Adam Maerov for their contributions and leadership. The evening concluded with a heartfelt special surprise tribute honouring Lisa Libin for her years of dedicated service as Calgary Jewish Federation Board President.

Calgary Jewish Federation plays a vital role in strengthening and supporting Jewish life in our city. Events like the AGM help keep our community informed, connected, and engaged in the important work being done today and for the future.

Scan QR to view Shem Tov recipient list and photo album.



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...THAT’S FEDERATION

Alberta Champions unveil Field of Fame Eight at WinSport

By Maxine Fischbein, LJI Reporter

Much has been written about Calgary lawyer, philanthropist and community booster Gordon (Gordy) Hoffman in the pages of *AJNews* and its predecessor publications. Yet one of his most important civic initiatives has sometimes flown under the radar.

Among the long list of charitable and civic minded initiatives set in motion by Hoffman over many decades, he is the founder and long-serving chair of the Alberta Champions Society (ACS), established in 2003.

The organization devotes itself to recognizing the stellar contributions of notable Calgarians in every imaginable field of endeavour so that the roles they have played in Alberta history can be a rich source of inspiration to future generations.

A major initiative of ACS is the establishment, to date, of eight Fields of Fame gracing a variety of Calgary landmarks. At each, the stories and images of the Champions are shared on eye-catching stainless-steel monuments designed by Calgary architect Michael Shugarman, who was born and raised in Edmonton.

A moving program took place at Canada Olympic Park on Friday, June 19 when Field of Fame Eight was unveiled at the entrance to the WinSport Day Lodge



Gordy and Eva Hoffman at the ceremony.

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Alberta Champions Board poses at Field of Fame Eight to honour exceptional Calgarians.

in Calgary.

There, 175 individuals witnessed the posthumous honour paid to seven extraordinary individuals, each of whom contributed enormously to the fabric of civic life during their lifetimes. They are amputee, golf champion and adaptive sports advocate Gwen Davies; sports leader, coach and academic Dr. Dennis Kadatz; business and sports leader Frank King; NFL star and Alberta's sixteenth Lieutenant Governor Norman (Normie) Kwong; lawyer, sports leader, and former NHL Governor Doug Mitchell; engineer, oil and gas entrepreneur, and sports leader Bob Niven; and philanthropist, animal welfare advocate, and women's hockey supporter Joan Colleen Snyder.

Among their many extraordinary accomplishments, each of these community builders was passionate about sport and therefore it is especially fitting that their individual and collective achievements are now part of a permanent installation at WinSport.

Prior to the unveiling of Calgary's newest Field of Fame, a moving program took place, emceed by WinSport President and CEO Barry Heck.

Highlights included an opening blessing delivered by First Nations Elder Jordan Head, a rousing rendition of *O'Canada* by tenor Tony Rino, remarks by Hoffman, and greetings by Doug Hunter (Hunter Family Foundation) who described the close ties he shared with King, Niven and Kadatz, each of whom was instrumental in bringing the 1988 Winter Olympics to Calgary.

A highlight of the afternoon was the introduction of two very promising young Calgarians – Grade Six student Maeve Kelly and Grade Nine student Connie Chen – each of whom received a certificate and cash gift as this year's Alberta Champions Society Multi-Media award recipients.

Recognizing these talented young women on behalf of ACS was board member and educator Meagan Lundgren, a principal with the Calgary Board of Education.

First conceived as an essay contest, the recognition program has morphed over the years to make it more inclusive, diverse, and engaging of students, Lundgren said. The contest is open to Calgary and area students who research a Champion and bring their creativity to the task of describing that individual's unique contribution to local life.

Chen shared an excerpt from her beautifully written submission about celebrated author W. O. Mitchell, memorialized in Field of Fame Two at Harley Hotchkiss Park. The subject of Maeve Kelly's submission – in which she creatively combined prose with eye-popping art – was former Calgary alderman Mary Dover, who was among the first Canadian women to become a military officer. Dover's monument graces Field of Fame Three at Centrium Place.

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Contest entries are judged by a panel who consider, among other elements, the quality of the students' research and the talent and creativity with which they demonstrate why they are inspired by their chosen Champion and how he or she has motivated them to give back to their community.

Recognizing the tremendous amount of effort required of teachers who choose to involve their students in the multi-media contest, ACS also recognizes the educators who provide guidance and support to the award recipients.

During the ceremony at WinSport, the Champions were honoured with a pre-recorded musical salute – *The Heroes of the Game* – by local composer and musician Stan Foster.

After closing comments by ACS Executive Administrator Pat Christie, the Field of Fame Eight monuments were unveiled by family members of the late honourees. A festive champagne reception followed.

In addition to the new installation at WinSport, one can visit Fields of Fame at Jamieson Place, Harley Hotchkiss Park, Centrium Place, McDougall Centre, Heritage Park, Spruce Meadows, and Bow Valley Ranch.

Notable Jewish community members previously honoured as Alberta Champions include oil and gas entrepreneur and philanthropist Sydney Kahanoff (Field of Fame Four, McDougall Centre); and philanthropist Dr. Martha Cohen, who blazed trails in social work, post-secondary education and the arts (Field of Fame Six, Spruce Meadows).

In addition to Gordy Hoffman, members of the Jewish community who currently serve on the Alberta Champions Society board of directors include former politician and Canadian Senator Ron Ghitler and Dr. Norm Schachar, PhD, orthopedic surgeon and professor emeritus at the University of Calgary.

Past ACS board members include the late Martin Cohos, an innovative architect who designed notable Calgary landmarks; and the late Harold Milavsky, an entrepreneur, philanthropist, and Canadian tennis leader.

Gordy Hoffman instinctively knows that the best in each of us brings out the best in all of us, which motivated him to begin championing Champions some 23 years ago.

"Since then, it's taken on a life and a legacy of its own," Hoffman told *AJNews*.

"I want people to see what these giants have done and then consider what they might do," Hoffman told *AJNews*. "I want kids to remember and focus on these individuals who did so much for us. They must be forever remembered and honoured."

To find out more about the Alberta Champions Society, the giants they honour, and the ways you can support this community-building initiative, go to www.albertachampions.org.

Happy Canada Day

Hon. Adriana LaGrange,

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Choirs of the World strikes a chord across Calgary

By Jana Zalmanowitz, LJI Reporter

At a time when many Jewish communities are feeling isolated, Calgary's recent Choirs of the World event offered a welcome reminder. There are still plenty of people eager to show up, participate, and connect at a Jewish event.

With the support of Paperny Family JCC, Jewish Family Services and powered by Calgary Jewish Federation, the Voices Adult Choir meets weekly to sing together and was the anchor for the event. Choir founder and director Karina Szulc has been bringing music to the JCC halls for almost 20 years and as a choir participant since the age of six, Szulc feels passionately about the impact of these groups. "It's beyond the music," she says. "Choirs are for people that want to connect with like-minded people."

For the last three years, the free community concert has been held at the Paperny Family JCC. When planning the event, Szulc reached out to six choirs she thought would be a good fit. The only one who declined was a children's choir that needed more time to prepare. The remaining choirs all enthusiastically accepted the invitation, prompting a last-minute venue change to Temple B'nai Tikvah to accommodate the roughly 300 performers and audience members.

The evening of June 1st was a collaborative effort. JCC Arts and Culture Manager, Yanina Rabinovitch, partnered with Szulc to organize the event. Community member Laurence Elman put his natural stage presence to use as the MC and accomplished pianist Rachel Kreyner accompanied performers. Each choir brought its own committed directors and conductors.

The lineup was diverse. Voices Adult Choir is composed mainly of seniors and sings a mix of Jewish and popular music. They delighted their audience with two Hebrew classics, *Hava Nagila* and *Zum Gali Gali*

while listeners joined in with tambourines.

By contrast, Dr. E.P. Scarlett choir is a group of teenage high school students. They sang a mix of popular and choral music, impressing the crowd with their blue satin costumes and synchronized claps.

Celebrating 50 years in Calgary, the Swiss Yodel Club Heimattreu Choir showcased a traditional folk music style rarely heard outside Switzerland. Dressed in matching uniforms, members performed with their hands in their pockets, a traditional technique that helps maintain proper posture and keeps attention on the unique sound.

Cantares Latin Choir brought another global flavour with a selection of Spanish language hits accompanied by a four-string Cuatro. As their Artistic Director and Conductor, Juan Sosa, stated, "You don't have to understand the words to appreciate the music."

Big Rock Singers out of Okotoks, a well-established 36-year-old organization known for their vibrant seasonal performances, rounded out the performance. With their denim and band t-shirt motif, their impressive number stretched across the whole stage while they sang an array of popular hits by Canadian artists. In a social media post, long-time member Dena Stewart, summed up her experience saying, "The feedback from everyone was so positive, and the gratitude was palpable."

As a final number, the Voices Adult Choir changed the lyrics to the old Russian song, "Those Were the Days" so it reflected a shared passion of the evening and took on the title "Those Choir Days." Singers from all the choirs came together to sing this final number in an impressive chorus of voices and unity.

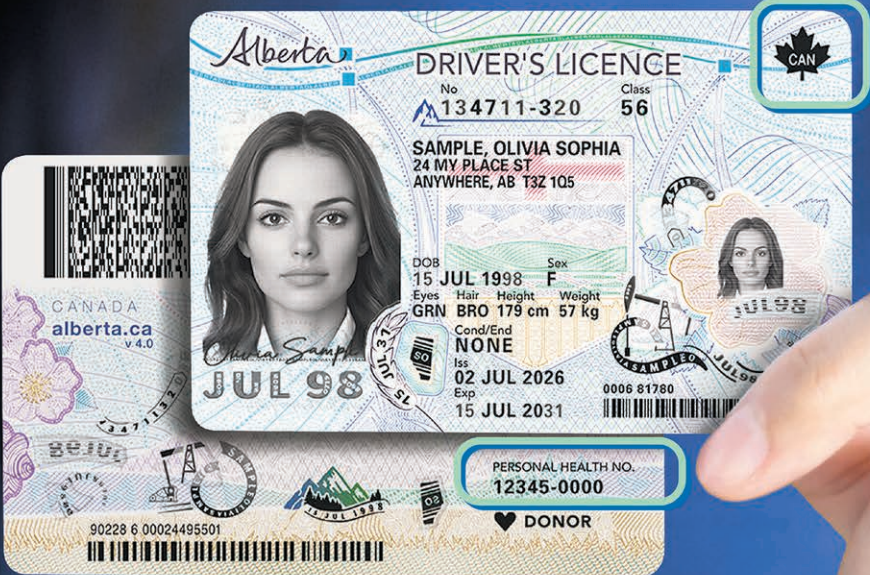


Members of the Voices Adult Choir opened the Choirs of the World concert with their rendition of "Hava Nagila."

Deb Finkleman, a retired music teacher, played piano for this final number. She and her husband, Paul, have participated in past years and this year did not disappoint. "We loved to see and hear the wide variety; the styles of choral music, the languages sung, the pageantry of the costumes, and the ages that were involved," Finkleman describes. "What a treat to share an evening of music with an audience from elementary school aged children to seniors well in their 80's!"

It's this variety that makes an event like Choirs of the World so inspiring. Szulc describes music's unifying and immersive nature, using her signature lyrical style. "Music brings people together. It lets you travel to a different place without a passport. Music is the best time machine to travel back in your memories."

Audiences enjoyed an evening free from life's usual pressures. The event was such a success that many participants asked to return. Other choirs have been in touch wanting to join next year's concert. Beyond the music, Choirs of the World offered a reassuring reminder: there are still plenty of people eager to walk through the doors of a Jewish institution, share in its programming and celebrate community together.



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Calgary mourns the passing of Alvin Libin, OBM

It is with great sadness that Calgary Jewish Federation shared news about the passing of Alvin Libin, one of Calgary's most generous philanthropists. An Alberta business titan, co-owner of the Calgary Flames and beloved father and grandfather, Libin passed away June 14 at the age of 95.

Alvin was more than a generous supporter of the Calgary Jewish community, stated Calgary Jewish Federation. "He was a visionary leader, a builder of community, and someone whose commitment to Jewish Calgary helped shape the vibrant community we know today."

"For decades, Alvin invested not only his resources, but also his heart, wisdom, and leadership. His philanthropy strengthened Jewish life in Calgary while also leaving an indelible mark on our city through his support of healthcare, education, arts and culture, and countless community initiatives."

A proud Calgarian and devoted community leader, Alvin believed in the importance of giving back and building a stronger future for others. He served as President of the Calgary Jewish Community Council and remained committed to the Jewish community throughout his life, helping build a stronger and more vibrant future for Jewish Calgary.

"Alvin will be remembered not only for his remarkable accomplishments, but for his kindness, his leadership, and the lasting impact he had on our community and our city," stated CJF leaders. "We are grateful for the many ways he strengthened our community and enriched Jewish life in Calgary. His absence will be felt by so many."

Alvin is well known for his transformational impact on heart health in Calgary. A gift of \$15 million in 2003 from Alvin and his late wife, Mona, established the Libin Cardiovascular Institute (LCI) at the University of Calgary's Cummings School of Medicine (CSM) in partnership with the

local health authority. A further \$7.5 million donation in 2022 reinforced Calgary's position as a national leader in cardiovascular medicine.

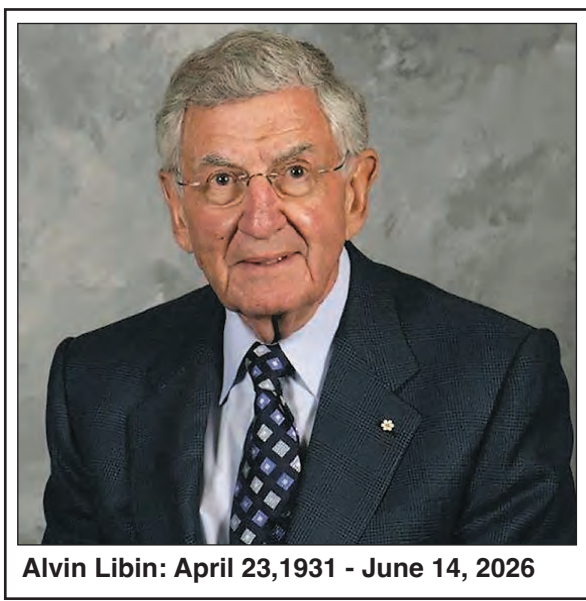
"The profound generosity of Alvin Libin and his family has benefited countless patients from across southern Alberta over the years," says Dr. Robert acting director of the LCI. "The Libin Cardiovascular Institute wouldn't exist without his philanthropic leadership and vision, which have also inspired hundreds of others to invest in our work — something that mattered deeply to him."

"While we are saddened at the passing of Dr. Alvin Libin, we celebrate a life well-lived," says Dr. Todd Anderson, dean of the CSM. "He was a remarkable Calgarian who changed the fabric of our city and whose business and philanthropic support have been truly remarkable. His founding of the Libin Cardiovascular Institute has provided a foundation for world-class research, education and patient care in our city."

Calgary Mayor Jeromy Farkas paid tribute to Alvin Libin's legacy. "Today, Calgary has lost one of our giants," he wrote on social media. "Alvin Libin helped build the city we know today. The son of immigrants who believed in the promise of this city, he built extraordinary success through hard work, vision, and determination. His story was, in many ways, Calgary's story."

"What set Alvin apart was what he chose to do with that success. He understood that the true measure of a life is not what we accumulate, but what we leave behind. His name is woven into the fabric of Calgary, through our hospitals, universities, research institutions, sports organizations, and countless community causes that have been strengthened by his leadership and generosity."

"Generations of Albertans will live longer, healthier lives because of Alvin Libin. His support helped



establish Calgary as a centre of excellence in cardiovascular care and medical research. He helped build businesses, create jobs, strengthen institutions, and support causes that enriched countless lives. There are few individuals whose impact can be measured across so many dimensions of a community, and fewer still whose influence will continue to be felt generations after they are gone.

"On behalf of all Calgarians, I extend my deepest condolences to Alvin's family, friends, and all those who were privileged to know him. Calgary is a stronger, healthier, and more prosperous city because Alvin Libin was here. His was a life of consequence, a life of service, and a life that helped define an era in our city's history. May his memory be a blessing."

JCC endowment *Cont. from page 1*

the centre will be sustained.

Understanding the role of an endowment

An endowment fund provides long-term financial stability. Contributions are invested, while the principal is maintained, and the income generated helps support operations year after year in accordance with established federal guidelines.

This approach reflects lessons learned from the past. The previous JCC became increasingly expensive to operate, and this model is intended to help cover core costs over time and reduce long-term financial pressure on the community.

For the Oshry | Kipnes JCC, this means maintaining the building, helping keep the space accessible and allowing the centre to continue responding to the community's needs well into the future.

Arliss Miller launched the endowment with a \$1 million gift, establishing an important foundation as the fundraising continues to build it to the level required for long-term sustainability.

Families step forward to invest in the centre's future

For Adam Romanovsky and his family, contributing to the JCC endowment is a deeply personal decision rooted in their commitment to the community and

its future.

"As soon as I heard about the JCC, the first thing I thought we should give and participate and ensure that we did our part to make it a successful endeavor," Adam says.

His father, Ram Romanovsky, shares that sense of responsibility.

"It may sound corny, but I felt honoured that I could participate. It's an honour that I could put some money towards the JCC. It made me feel good," he says. "I wanted my kids to know I believed in JCC. I want my grandchildren to know that their Zaidie and Bubbe believed in the JCC. It was our time to give, and we were at that stage where we could give."

That perspective is shaped by lived experience. Growing up in Edmonton, Adam saw firsthand what a central gathering space could mean.

"I remember my dad building the playground when I was in preschool there. We went there on the weekends, and that's where I'd go with my mom. She would meet people for coffee or snack at the cafe, and we could run around and play," he says. "It was the central gathering and meeting point."

Now, as a parent, he wants to provide that same experience for his own children.

"I think back to all the times that I used it and all the memories that I have. I want that for my kids and my family," he says.

Today, his family lives close to the future Oshry |

Kipnes Jewish Community Centre, highlighting the building's role as an everyday gathering place.

"The response from our community has been inspiring," says Stacey Leavitt-Wright, CEO of the Jewish Federation of Edmonton and the Oshry | Kipnes JCC. "Donors are stepping forward because they understand that opportunities like this come only once in a generation. Together, we are creating more than a building—we are investing in a lasting foundation for Jewish connection, belonging and community life in Edmonton for decades to come."

Community support continues to build the JCC's future

The Oshry | Kipnes JCC endowment reflects a broader understanding: building a space is only the beginning.

Maintaining it and continuing to serve a growing and geographically dispersed community requires long-term planning and shared commitment.

It is an investment not only in a building, but in the future of Jewish life in Edmonton, one shaped by data, informed by community input and strengthened by donors who see beyond today.

Community support continues to build the JCC's future, with individuals and families across Edmonton contributing to the endowment. Make your gift today at ecf.ca/lchaim or contact Becky Saegert at bsaegert@edjfed.org to explore giving opportunities.

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AJP enhances Judaic learning for Edmonton students

By Regan Lipes, LJI Reporter

The Ancillary Judaic Program, lovingly referred to by parents and youngsters as AJP, is a valuable resource for those with school-aged children in Edmonton looking to augment and enhance Judaic religious learning. As the academic calendar year winds to a close, afterschool enrichment for the coming year may not be foremost on everyone’s minds, but for those wishing to supplement their children’s Jewish education in a deeper way, AJP is the perfect solution.

Rabbi Guy Tal described this vision noting: “We aim to provide a supplementary Jewish education that expands our students’ knowledge of Judaism, Hebrew, traditions, customs, Torah stories, and more. Although we are an Orthodox organization, it is important to me to emphasize that the program is intended for the entire community. We focus on foundational concepts in Judaism that are important for every Jewish person to know, regardless of whether they are practically observant of all the commandments.”

For the past five years, AJP has operated four days a week after dismissal at Talmud Torah School. Students from Kindergarten to Grade 6 have the opportunity to elevate their Judaic learning from the school day with religiously rooted and spiritually nourishing lessons. Educator Yitzchak Borenstein described his role stating thoughtfully: “As a teacher, I focus on covering the material in a summarized but experiential way. It is important to me that students are interested, and I try to stimulate this by adding graphical riddles, stories, and presentations.”

Admittedly, one might think it would be a challenge to keep young people motivated to learn after the school bell rings, but AJP kids are excited for their Judaic classes because of teachers like Yitzchak. “It depends on the curriculum of the day...I’ve developed a method of teaching in a way that adds interest and helps deal with their fatigue and burnout,” admitted Yitzchak. “We study as usual with a worksheet, but every now and then I add a story, game, presentation or pictures related to the topic to increase interest. I also try to make the worksheet part easier and more interesting.” The results are real, and parents like Aliya Spigelman have expressed how impressed they are with the *diverei torah* their children share at the dinner table.

Parents considering enrolling in AJP for the 2026/2027 school year should not be discouraged if they worry their child’s Judaic knowledge may not be enough yet to deliver a *dvar torah*. Rabbi Tal explained that all students may have different levels of knowledge but share their desire to learn more. “The material we study is designed to be suitable for all levels of knowledge. It is not an issue when children with varying backgrounds and levels of prior knowledge join the group.”

In his role, Yitzchak sees a diversity of backgrounds as an opportunity to evolve his teaching approach. “Sometimes there’s no choice – when the differences in levels are really big, you have to prepare different lessons and work with them separately.” It is this individualized approach to engaging students which ensures the kids sincerely look forward to their AJP studies and want to be actively involved in their own learning. Like Yitzchak, teachers for all the AJP groups K to 6 get to know their students and find the best strategies for addressing their unique learning styles and needs.

The holidays play a big part in structuring the curriculum, but these lessons are always accompanied by ample servings of fun. During Chanukah, a special painting programme was held for the AJP kids, giving them a chance to socialize, talk about the Festival of Lights with their teachers and friends in a more free-flow manner, and express their artistic talents with glow-in-the-dark paint. AJP works to ignite a love of learning in students while guiding them as they connect with Judaism.

AJP is so much more than an afterschool religious education program – it is a community. This past March, AJP organizers put together a youth Shabbaton for the AJP children. “We are always pleasantly surprised by how active, engaged, and enthusiastic the children are during the Shabbatonim. It’s wonderful to see them outside of a formal educational setting, and it’s especially nice to see children who do not typically attend synagogue on a regular basis,” explained Rabbi Tal. “Above all, the atmosphere – created by the activities, the meals, the songs, and the games – is incredibly enjoyable and



The Ancillary Judaic Program (AJP) is an after school program that augments and enhances Judaic learning for students in Edmonton. Photo supplied.

uplifting.”

Yitzchak also offered his observations, commenting: “As a parent, I think the songs we taught, as well as the experience of playing and being together, connected the little ones to the shul and Shabbat in a positive way. It leaves an impression and memories that last long beyond Shabbat itself.”

Parents who are interested in signing their little ones up for AJP can select from different programming for each day. Monday through Thursday, every afternoon of the week targets a different set of learning goals, and families are able to enroll their children in as many tracks of study as they wish. Different teachers are dedicated to age-appropriate learning levels, but this certainly does not mean that the content is watered down for younger groups. Children work on weekly Parashot readings and even engage their families in their learning by bringing home fun quizzes to complete together. Some parents are surprised, and even amazed, by their children’s breadth of knowledge. AJP helps Jewish youngsters launch their learning to new heights, and the results are noticeable.

The AJP team is always striving to find new and meaningful ways of inspiring the children. Yitzchak commented about possible directions he might like to explore in his teaching, saying: “I would be happy to see an increase in the number of students, and to have more time to teach additional important and interesting content such as *Nevi'im* (prophets).” There are big ideas brewing and so much potential for building strong Judaic literacy in a new generation.

“I would love to see a follow-up program for children who graduate from elementary school and move on to public schools in the city,” added Rabbi Tal. “It is precisely at this age, when they leave the Jewish “bubble,” that it is vital to provide them with ongoing support, connection, and the opportunity to continue learning and deepening their knowledge.”

The end-of-year AJP celebration was bitter-sweet for kids, parents, and teachers. Everyone enjoyed an amazing afternoon together at Galaxyland, making wonderful memories. For the younger children it was all fun and smiles till they realized they would need to wait till September for their next AJP class, and for older kids it was an emotional moment to wish graduating grade six students well as they prepare to move on to junior high. This special field trip was a successful coordinated undertaking with volunteer drivers, chaperones, and organizers.

AJP parents and students are excited for another year of lively and enlightening enrichment for the 2026/2027 academic year. The AJP organizational and teaching team, as well as their Board of Directors, deserve an effusive and heartfelt *Kol HaKavod!* With so much to gain, AJP is an exceptional option for afterschool programming – it is an investment in learning to feed the mind and also to nurture the soul. Parents are encouraged to reach out to info@kadimaacademy.com with any questions they might have.



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Calgary author turns childhood fascination to literary triumph about the remarkable Hannah Senesh

By Mark Cooper

Long before he was a bestselling author, Douglas Century sat in a 1970s Calgary elementary school classroom learning Yiddish and listening to the vivid details of the Holocaust.

He didn't know it then as a young student at the former I.L. Peretz Yiddish School in Altadore, but while the horrors of the Shoah would haunt him for much of his life, they also sparked a lifelong devotion to the memory of Hannah Senesh.

Decades later, that childhood fascination culminated in his new novel, *Crash of the Heavens*. The intense creative journey – centred on one of the modern state of Israel's most prominent early heroines – moved Century back and forth between profound inspiration and emotional devastation.

Researching and writing the book – a finalist for this year's National Jewish Book Award – meant bouncing between retracing the footsteps of a remarkably brave young woman, and falling into a darkness while documenting the brutal torture she endured.

The anguish did not lift when Century typed the final sentence of this riveting piece of narrative non-fiction. At his agent's urging, he had purposely avoided writing a traditional Holocaust book, framing it instead as a World War II rescue yarn.

Still, in the process of researching it, there was no escaping the historical tragedy of the Shoah.

So when he emerged from the intensity of the subject matter – the first book in over 30 years about the young headstrong Zionist who gave her life at 23 during the war's only military rescue mission of Europe's Jews – he looked around at modern-day North America and found that same ancient hatred waiting for him online and across university campuses.

"It took a lot out of me," said the youthful 61-year-old born and raised Calgarian, whose parents built a home in Chinook Park in the early 1960s, soon after moving to Canada from the U.S. with Century's two older brothers.

"You just listen to what people did (to the Jews). And it puts you in a dark place for so long. So one of the hardest things was coming out of this darkness. Because it's so sad.

"At the same time, I'm coming out of this I'm seeing people accusing Zionists of being Nazis. It just gave me such a depressed view of the world.

"So coming out of that and feeling like it's happening again..."

Century, who recently moved back permanently to Calgary from New York City with his own 23-year-old daughter Lena, has made his way out of the post-writing funk he was in.

Seeing the book launched, hearing from people he touched by it, and focusing his next work, he admits, was a big part of that.

He's also stopped "doom scrolling" social media platforms full of antisemitic sentiment.

Childhood lessons spark lifelong literary devotion

Growing up, his only exposure to antisemitism came from history lessons. Starting at eight years old, his principal – a Holocaust survivor – believed the class of six young children studying in a Yiddish school should be aware of these historical tragedies.

"They didn't shelter us back then about the Shoah," he said.

"Learning how gruesome it really was, at a young age, it still scars me. I would have nightmares all the time about running and hiding from the Nazis."

While he wonders whether the material was age appropriate, he credits his early education for sparking his interest in writing about Senesh.

"I heard this story about a girl who had not talked under torture, parachuted in, wouldn't give up her codes, wouldn't betray her people, sentenced to death, wouldn't beg for a pardon, wouldn't even wear a blindfold and went to her death at age 23.

"That was an amazing story to hear when you are eight years old but it was also terrifying."

From Calgary Classrooms to New York Columns

It would be more than 50 years later before he finally wrote *Crash of the Heavens*.

Writing came naturally to Century. While an honours student at Henry Wise Wood High School, one of his short stories won second prize in an esteemed national student writing competition.

"I had a teacher, who said to me, you're a talented writer, pursue this."

His father, J.R. Century, a prominent Calgary petroleum geologist, also strongly encouraged each of his three boys to pursue something culturally.

Writing was a way for young Douglas to get out of taking piano lessons and was seen as an appropriate endeavour by his Dad.

Recognizing that fitting in at school required balancing his academic pursuits with something more popular, Century played varsity soccer. He even managed to steal exams and feed them to the school jocks, maintaining a charade that his top grades didn't just come to him naturally.

Century, in fact, was one of Alberta's finest high school students, even scoring 100 per cent on his English 30 final, writing a short story to answer the test questions.

The same creative method worked again to get him admitted to the Ivy League. This time, he gained acceptance into Princeton University's English/Creative Writing program by submitting an original novella.

After a brief couple of years back home after graduation, reading geological maps to help his Dad find oil, he was lured to New York by a writing professor.

It was then he began monetizing his writing, doing book reviews for the *Village Voice*, *New York Newsday* among others.

He'd then transition to writing hundreds of mostly celebrity columns for the *New York Times*. He has also written for *Rolling Stone*, *Billboard*, *The Globe and Mail* and *The Guardian*.

In 1998 he was introduced to his agent Sloan Harris, who continues to represent him, and his first non-fiction narrative *Street Kingdom* was released.



Douglas Century with his new book, "Crash of the Heavens: The Remarkable Story of Hannah Senesh."

The book followed the friendship he had with a 270-pound rapper in a Brooklyn street gang.

His first book exploring Jewish themes was 2006's *Barney Ross: The Life of a Jewish Fighter*, a biography of the decorated World War II hero and world champion boxer.

A Modern Tribute Rekindles a Deep Obsession

It wasn't until 15 years later that he would be overcome by the urge to write about Senesh.

The idea he had for a number of years was solidified when in 2021 he saw a news story highlighting IDF paratroopers and NATO paratroopers recreating Senesh's jump into Europe on what would have been her 100th birthday. The recreation was called *Crash of the Heavens*.

"It just dovetailed into my own obsession with her already."

After an enthusiastic reception from his agent, and with an expedited book advance, he made his way to Israel, spending much of the summer of 2023 interviewing relatives and retracing Hannah's footsteps.

He'd walk through the ancient ruins of Caesarea where she wrote many of her poems, sometimes sitting and meditating on the same rocks she would sit on. There he would wonder about the emotion she would have felt as one of the pioneers helping to re-establish the ancient Jewish homeland into the modern state of Israel.

"I can't write about something unless I feel like I know it. So I get utterly obsessed...Once I get onto something, I get tunnel vision. I almost have to go in all of these little rabbit holes and know everything that I can. And that kind of becomes fun."

In this case, it was also incredibly stressful. "I said to myself 'Oh my God, this woman is a legend.'"

"There's been plays, her poems are known around the world. There are 22 editions of her poems.

"And I was just like 'I can't get anything wrong!'"

What he found out during his time in Israel is there were few who knew more about her than him. Senesh's nephew David, who ironically spent nearly a decade in Calgary, told him, 'I never knew my aunt. You probably know more about her than I do.'

"So I came back realizing 'I know it'. And when I left I thought I needed to learn more and more and more and more."

Sadly, Century says young Israelis know little about Senesh and the other paratroopers on the mission, something that gave him even more purpose to tell the story well.

To do that, hours were spent researching Hannah's

Continued on page 19



Hannah Senesh in the ruins of the Roman capital of Judea, Caesarea (Courtesy *Crash of the Heavens*).

By Jenna Pappas

As we conclude the 2025–2026 school year, I find myself reflecting on what an incredible first few months it has been as the new Principal at Halpern Akiva Academy.

Stepping in to lead a Jewish day school has come with a significant learning curve. While I have spent more than 20 years working in bilingual schools around the world and feel very much at home in multilingual learning environments, I have greatly appreciated the opportunity to deepen my understanding of Jewish education, traditions, and culture. Over the past few months, our students have often been my teachers, sharing their knowledge, traditions, Hebrew language, and enthusiasm for Jewish learning.

This school year for our students has been filled with learning, growth, celebration, and community. One of the things that has impressed me most is how naturally our students move between Hebrew and English learning environments while developing strong academic skills and



a deep connection to their Jewish identity. Whether in the classroom, on field trips, through holiday celebrations, or in daily interactions with one another, our students have demonstrated curiosity, kindness, and resilience. As we look ahead to September 2026, we are excited to begin implementing an inquiry framework in



Principal Jenna Pappas with a group of Halpern Akiva Academy students during recess.

Kindergarten through Grade 2. This initiative reflects our commitment to creating meaningful learning experiences grounded in Judaic values and Hebrew language. In the 2027–2028 school year, we will expand the framework into Grades 3–5.

Implementing an inquiry framework within a bilingual school presents unique opportunities and challenges. In bilingual education, every minute of the school day counts. Students are learning in two languages while engaging in a rich academic program, requiring a rigorous and intentional approach to teaching and learning. Through inquiry we ensure that learning is purposeful, internationally minded,

and firmly grounded in Judaic values. By creating meaningful connections across disciplines, students will deepen their understanding of the world around them while strengthening their Jewish identity and maintaining excellence in both General and Judaic education.

As a school, we remain committed to welcoming Jewish families from across Calgary and providing excellence in General, Hebrew, and Judaic education while instilling a love of Torah. We are excited about the future and look forward to building on the many successes of the history of Halpern Akiva Academy.

Douglas Century

Cont. from page 18

papers, diaries, that fortuitously had just been donated by Senesh’s family and digitized at the National Library of Israel.

He also spent many research hours at the Military Museums of Calgary, which houses one of North America’s largest non-governmental military archives.

Because the book’s central subjects were women (Hannah and her mother) Century used his own mother Marcia, and daughter Lena as crucial sounding boards.

Current Events Shape a Powerful Historical Tale

However, no research could have prepared him for the turn his book would need to take after the October 7, 2023 Hamas attacks in Southern Israel. Century felt a chilling modern resonance.

“And then suddenly ... I’m trying to fit this book into the narrative of today.

“I had to show the *raison d’être* of a young Zionist, which I didn’t plan to,” he said.

To ensure the maps in his book were not co-opted by political propaganda, he explicitly used the term ‘British Mandatory Palestine’ to preserve the historical context of a Jewish homeland. Any map also had to say ‘Eretz Israel.’

While he initially felt the rug had been pulled out

from under him, the parallels in the book, and the historical context it provides to the modern day antisemitism and anti-Zionism make his work even more important.

The enthusiastic reception to *Crash of the Heavens* adds to a growing list of awards and accolades for the accomplished author, who has penned five solo works and more than a dozen that he has either co-authored or ghost written. Two have become *New York Times* bestsellers and another was published in 23 languages.

Reflecting on this book, Century said: “I think I really did my research, I humanized Hannah and some of the others in a way that I hadn’t seen,” he said, noting his work to bring to life the other paratroopers on the mission, as well as never-before seen photographs and poetry.

“The idea of dying for a cause... It was very clear to me that there was a sense of honour.

“But also Hannah could be extremely difficult and obstinate and wouldn’t listen to reason sometimes.

“I feel that she’s (now) a three-dimensional character.”

Sitting in a Calgary Marda Loop coffee shop just minutes from where his Yiddish school once was, Century – who still speaks semi-fluent Yiddish – reflects further on how much his Alberta childhood shaped his career and his latest work.

“The germ of this entire book happened a few blocks from here at this old Peretz school.



The final photo of Hannah Senesh ever taken in British Mandatory Palestine/Eretz Israel (Courtesy Crash of the Heavens).

“So I credit Calgary a lot with the kind of Jewish experience I had. It gave me a real grounding in the depth of not just the superficial Jewish culture.”

For Century, returning to Calgary brings his journey full circle – not just back to the city of his youth, but back to the very streets where the extraordinary legacy of Hannah Senesh first captured his mind.

Mark Cooper is a Local Journalism Initiative Reporter.

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ALBERTA RECOVERY MODEL

Alberta

Opening doors for new Israelis starts with us

By Jana Zalmanowitz, LJI Reporter

For many Israelis arriving in Calgary, the greatest challenges begin after the paperwork is complete. Navigating schools, transportation, and community life can be overwhelming without local guidance. Finding work and establishing long-term roots in Canada can be equally challenging. Recognizing that gap, Calgary resident Miri Renert and a small network of volunteers have stepped in hoping to help new Israeli families not just settle, but thrive.

Renert knows what it's like to be a newcomer. She was born in Israel and immigrated with her parents to Calgary at the age of 9. She spent 10 years in the city until life took her to other places like England and back to Israel. She had been back in Calgary for a few years when she realized her experiences put her in a unique position to help others.

"After October 7th, there was the influx of Israelis coming to Canada because of the open work permit that the government granted," Renert explains. The difficulty was that these work permits were taking time to be processed. Many found themselves arriving in Alberta into a waiting period, living off their savings and with no ability to sign their children up for school. Renert started small, with practical help.

"Knowledge is power," she explains. "Why do you need to go through this learning curve of everything from getting an Alberta driver's license, to where do I buy Bamba in Calgary?"

Renert had seen these challenges before, as well as possible solutions. In the 1970s, Israel experienced an influx of Soviet Jewry. "My parents opened up their hearts, and their home and helped them get settled in Israel," she explains.

Emulating a modern-day version of this hospitality, Renert began connecting with newcomers through online groups and eventually opened her home for Shabbat dinners.

There are resources in our community and people want to help but Renert identified that there is a gap in connecting the two. What began as one person's effort to answer practical questions has grown into a grassroots network of volunteers helping families access information about transportation, schools, community programs, social connections, and employment resources.

Renert's assistance often starts before newcomers even land in Calgary. She has become well-versed in offering video calls providing information they will need to get started and also a supportive ear.



Amongst the information she provides, are referrals to formal Jewish community infrastructure in Calgary. These include Jewish family services, and the Jewish day schools. Through these avenues, Israelis new to the city can get connected with practical support like public transportation passes, JCC memberships or school scholarships.

In an effort to more efficiently distribute information and connect people, Renert and three other Israeli volunteers have established a Whatsapp Community dedicated to information sharing amongst Israelis in Calgary. The community acknowledges the diverse needs amongst the Israeli community, offering different subgroups they can join based on their interest. They include a group for mothers, trips and events, real estate, education and even a marketplace.

While helpful, Renert acknowledges that there are needs that go beyond the here and now into ensuring a successful future. "The foremost needs of the Israeli community in Calgary are primarily finding work and then transitioning from Open Work Permit status to permanent resident status," Renert emphasizes. Israelis coming to Canada have valuable skills and want to build a life. This goal depends on finding employment and then finding a way to stay beyond their three-year work permit to continue that life.

Again, volunteers have stepped up, helping newcomers network in a place where they don't have connections to rely on. Renert describes groups dedicated to finding work. One group collects resumes and helps distribute them to appropriate connections within the local Jewish community. Another helps Alberta's nursing shortage by linking incoming nurses and other healthcare workers with those in the healthcare system.

Even with these connections, there are needs that arise before newcomers can even think about entering the workforce. Some would benefit from individual tutoring in English or French to increase the language proficiency for the workplace but there are no supports within the Jewish community to meet this need.

Employers are also looking for something that is almost impossible for a newcomer: Canadian experience. Renert notes that volunteer work is an ideal place to gain experience while also improving language skills and benefitting the local Jewish community. "Bring in these beautiful people," she encourages, "with their knowledge, and their desire to volunteer."

A tangible suggestion that she shares with some others committed to the cause, is to have a community volunteer coordinator. She envisions this as a central place to gather the names of different Jewish organizations and volunteer roles within them,



Miri Renert

streamlining the process of connecting need with opportunity.

She stresses that the need extends beyond initial settlement assistance and requires sustained community involvement and networking. Much of this work is being carried out by a small group of volunteers, many of whom are balancing full-time jobs and family responsibilities. As the number of newcomers grows, so does the need for additional community support in both professional and volunteer capacities.

While she would like to see all new Israelis thrive in Calgary, Renert also has a broader hope. "What resonates with me is the fact that I grew up in Calgary, as an Israeli," she says, "and there has always been a sense of two communities here." In times where antisemitism is on the rise, we cannot afford to be divided. "Our strength is in our numbers and in our unity and these Israelis have so much to give to enrich our community," Renert says.

One thing that all Jewish Calgarians share is that at some point, they were a newcomer to the city. Many have stories of those who helped them build their lives in Alberta, away from familiar language, culture and people. Renert emphasizes that while welcoming newcomers socially is important, helping them build professional networks may be the single most valuable way community members can support their long-term success in Calgary. After all, communities are built not only through welcoming newcomers, but through opening doors for them.

For more information on how to get involved and become part of this supportive network helping Israeli members of our community, contact albertajewishnews@gmail.com.



Edmonton Talmud Torah wraps up the year with celebrations



Edmonton Talmud Torah Students wrapped up the school year with a full slate of celebrations, from the Grade 1 Siddur and Grade 2 Torah Ora milestones to the Grade 6 Farewell, wishing Principal Darin Johnson well on his next journey, and a variety of last-day activities.

Honouring Dr. Melanie Carina Schmoll

By Regan Lipes, LJI Reporter

This year, the City of Calgary recognized seven exceptional short-listed nominees as contenders for their International Achievement Award. Since 1994, this local civic recognition is bestowed upon an exceptional contributor to the vibrance, vitality, and richness of Calgary’s global image. Dr. Melanie Carina Schmoll, a longtime friend and ally of Alberta’s Jewish communities was among these seven incredible trailblazers. “I felt like being nominated was already a win,” Dr. Schmoll told the *Alberta Jewish News* in an interview direct from her German home-base in Hamburg. “Being nominated is a validation of the work I’m dedicated to, and I’m just incredibly honoured to have this recognition.”

Dr. Schmoll considers Calgary her second home and spends a considerable amount of time there engaging with the local Jewish and academic communities. “Calgary feels like home in so many ways because the University of Calgary is where I’m affiliated academically and professionally. As a scholar, my work is such a crucial part of who I am, and Calgary is at the centre of this.”

In May of 2025, Dr. Schmoll spoke at the University of Calgary as part of a seminar “Teaching the Holocaust in Turbulent Times,” and was the keynote lecturer in commemoration of Kristallnacht later in November delivering a talk titled: “Night of Broken Glass: A Reminder, a Warning, a Lesson.” In 2025 she was also a guest speaker in Edmonton, at the University of Alberta’s Wirth Institute for Austrian and Central European Studies in conjunction with their Jewish Studies Week programming and she visited MacEwan University in 2026 to talk about her book *Hatred of Jews: A Failure of Holocaust Education?* to mark International Holocaust Remembrance Day.

“Education must address the hatred of Jews in its respective function in a historical longitudinal section, and the different forms must be explained. The personal approach should be taken but also the recognition of hatred of Jews as a social power

relationship as a social and structural phenomenon. Just as hatred of Jews was not the only reason for the mass murder of the Holocaust, Holocaust education cannot be the only way to combat hatred of Jews. There is no mono casualty in either realm” (Schmoll 184).

Dr. Schmoll has devoted her career to investigating how educators in Canada, Germany, and Israel pass along knowledge in an impactful way from generation to generation. For her, this has always been a labour of love, and one that connects to her own negotiation of cultural inheritance as a German. In a 2025 interview with *AJNews*, Dr. Schmoll explained that her current work began to take form after she was entrusted with teaching children at a Hamburg-based Jewish school about the Holocaust. She recalled the dissonance she felt as a German teacher, instructing Jewish youth who had been listening to the testimonies of survival from grandparents for most of their lives.

“This is not an award specific to the Jewish community or Holocaust studies,” explained Dr. Schmoll. “I think that’s what also makes it so meaningful, because it means the City of Calgary sees what is being done to further impactful education. I think it shows that they understand the value in addressing how we as educators and communities approach topics surrounding hatred of Jews.” Dr. Schmoll’s observation is quite accurate, as the other six nominees she shared the short list with were from wildly diverse backgrounds.

Dr. Schmoll’s book speaks to contemporary learners who understand that there have been deficits in their Holocaust education either because of a lack of instructor training, or ineffective pedagogical approaches. *Hatred of Jews: A Failure of Holocaust Education?* was showcased as the theoretical foundation for a recent presentation at MacEwan University’s annual Student Research Day on April 23. Undergraduate researcher, Tamara Tower, found Dr. Schmoll’s examination of contemporary Holocaust education as a potential contributor to antisemitism so moving that she used this methodology to analyze how literature can factor into new pedagogical undertakings in a capstone project titled: *Healing and*



Education Through Holocaust Literature: How Storytelling Heals and Helps Bridge the Gap in Holocaust Education. Tower’s scholarly examination was also presented at Mount Royal University’s inaugural Canadian Undergraduate Research Excellence Conference in May, further illustrating that Dr. Schmoll’s work is becoming a staple of discussions of Holocaust education across Alberta.

Dr. Schmoll tuned in for the official award ceremony from Germany on June 17 and although she was not this year’s recipient, securing a spot on the City of Calgary’s short-list was already a victory in her eyes. Prior to the official announcement she noted: “I really do already feel like a winner just because I was selected for their short-list. There are so many nominees in this category each year, and I know that just being part of this elite group is a huge honour all on its own.”

Dr. Schmoll’s recognition as a short-list candidate for the 2026 City of Calgary’s International Achievement Award is not just a feather in her own scholarly cap, but an indication that even outside of the Jewish and academic communities, discussions around antisemitism and responsible Holocaust education are beginning to take centre stage. The Jewish communities of Alberta send Dr. Schmoll a hearty Mazel Tov on her short-list nomination, and hope that she will be a successful recipient of this honour in the future as her work continues to inspire and catalyze change for Alberta’s students and educators.



On drag, Jewish identity, and finding joy through authenticity

By David Sklar, LJI Reporter

For Ashley Kravetsky, identity has never fit neatly into one category: Nurse, drag performer, queer advocate, and Jewish community leader. The Edmonton-based activist has spent years learning how to embrace every part of herself while helping others feel seen along the way.

Speaking on the *Chai There* podcast, Kravetsky reflected on the unexpected journey that brought her deeper into both the queer and Jewish communities, and how drag performance ultimately became the space where those identities came together.

Kravetsky began performing drag nearly seven years ago while attending nursing school, originally searching for a creative outlet through makeup artistry. What started as charity performances quickly grew into something more meaningful. But for Kravetsky, drag was never simply entertainment, it became a vehicle for self-discovery.

Raised in Stony Plain, Alberta, Kravetsky described growing up feeling visibly different. As the daughter of a Salvadoran mother and Jewish father, she often felt caught between identities. Because Judaism traditionally follows the maternal line, she said she struggled for years with imposter syndrome, even after formally converting and celebrating her bat mitzvah.

“I always kind of felt like I wasn’t enough,” she said, explaining that for much of her life she felt disconnected from the Jewish community.

Ironically, it was through drag that she found her way back. Building performances around Jewish humour, Jewish artists, and openly embracing her heritage pushed

her to reconnect with Judaism in a more authentic way.

“To be able to see someone proudly and loudly being a Jew in the queer community was not something you saw very often,” she said.

That sense of belonging shifted dramatically after October 7. Kravetsky said she began seeing people within queer spaces, communities she had long worked alongside, adopting rhetoric that felt alienating and, at times, harmful toward Jewish people. Attempts to engage in honest conversations were often met with hostility rather than dialogue.

“It wasn’t that people disagreed with me,” she said. “It was that suddenly there was no room for conversation.”

In response, Kravetsky began focusing less on reactive advocacy and more on what she calls Jewish empowerment, creating joyful, affirming spaces where queer Jewish people can feel fully accepted. Through work with the Edmonton Jewish Federation’s LGBTQ+ committee and trips connecting with queer Jewish leaders internationally, she has found new purpose in helping others feel less alone.

Her philosophy is simple: visibility matters.

“I have closeted so much of myself in so many different ways that I wasn’t going to allow that to happen again,” she said. “Being loud and proud about who I am has brought me the most joy.”

For Kravetsky, advocacy begins not with conflict, but with connection, creating communities where people can show up fully as themselves and know they belong.

Listen to the Chai There! Podcast episode with Ashley Kravetsky at www.chaithere.ca.

from the

Sources

by Eliezer Segal

Drama Queen

November 1670 was a momentous month in the life of the Paris theatrical world. It marked the openings of ambitious productions by two of France’s foremost dramatists, Pierre Corneille and Jean Racine. Both plays dealt with the same historical subject: the Roman emperor Titus and his doomed relationship with his Jewish consort Berenice. Corneille at the time was an established “grand old man” of the French theatre, whereas Racine at age 31 was a rising star.

Both dramas were based on the same historical foundation as recorded by ancient historians.

Berenice and her brother Agrippa were among the last survivors of the Judean royal line, great-grandchildren of Herod the Great. The chroniclers wrote of her irresistible beauty which opened doors of both romantic and political opportunity.

Dio Cassius wrote that at the height of her influence Berenice came to Rome with Agrippa who was awarded the rank of praetor. Meanwhile she dwelt in the imperial palace with the emperor Titus. “She expected to marry him and was already behaving in every respect as if she were his wife; but when he perceived that the Romans were displeased with the situation, he dismissed her.”

Although Jewish readers will naturally be most intrigued by the ironic circumstance of an affair between a Jewish woman and the heathen emperor who destroyed Jerusalem and its holy temple, this aspect of the story was not emphasized either by ancient historians or modern dramatists. Evidently, what made Berenice unacceptable as Titus’s queen was not her Jewish identity, but the mere fact that she was a foreigner.

Corneille’s play, though based loosely on historical facts, has the ambiance of a domestic soap opera involving an eternal, er, quadrangle. Titus was slated by his father Vespasian to marry Domitia, though he was in love with queen Berenice of Judea. However, Titus’s younger brother Domitian and Domitia shared a mutual passion. Since a marriage between Titus and a foreign monarch was forbidden under Roman law and unacceptable to public opinion, the characters spend their stage time vacillating between faithfulness

to their romantic inclinations and obedience to their patriotic duties. In the end, they arrange matters such that Domitian marries Domitia, Berenice leaves Rome and Titus remains without an empress. (If you are not impressed by this convoluted plot, you are in the same boat as Voltaire who rated it as “détestable,” one of the worst plays in the history of the French theatre.)

Jean Racine’s story-line is much simpler. There is no rival couple to Berenice and Titus, only a single, very sympathetic figure: Antiochus IV of Commagene, an ally of the Romans who had assisted Vespasian in his Judean campaign. I am not aware of any actual historical mention of his involvement with Berenice. Racine portrays him as a man who for many years nursed a powerful passion for her, but kept it to himself, acting as her platonic best friend and advisor.

The story is set shortly after the death of Vespasian. Titus quickly comes to realize that his marriage to a Judean queen is no longer an option on account of laws that have their roots in Rome’s transitions from monarchy to republic and empire. When his advisors suggest that the craven senate can easily be intimidated to abolish the problematic law (as they had routinely done for tyrants like Caligula and Nero), Titus objects that the will of the Roman populace would never tolerate it.

This contrasts with Corneille’s portrayal of Berenice, who actively chooses, as an assertion of her regal pride and “gloire,” to withdraw rather than compromise her dignity by marrying a man whose commitment to her is less than certain.

Much of Racine’s dialogue dwells on the paradox of how the world’s most powerful political and military leader is denied the simple romantic pleasure that is permitted to commoners. Berenice argues that Titus should abdicate his imperial position to follow his heart, but he chooses to uphold his duty and dismiss her. This would seem to present a perfect opportunity for Antiochus to step in and marry the jilted lady on the rebound, but as a loyal ally he is reluctant to take advantage of the situation.

Both plays depict Berenice as a woman impelled by her emotions, pitted against the inflexible realities of

law and politics. Historians have generally favoured the opposite characterization, regarding her as a shrewd and opportunistic strategist motivated by a single-minded aspiration to become empress of Rome.

In all this, her status as a Jew is difficult to estimate. I know of only one place in Corneille’s script where Domitius speaks of Titus’s grounds for gratitude to Berenice “for having extended his victory over my homeland, having ransacked and destroyed it eagerly, and overturned the altar of the god I served.”

Both French playwrights built their dramas on what they found in Suetonius’s and Plutarch’s biographies of Titus. They might have seen matters quite differently if they had consulted other sources, especially Josephus Flavius. From him we learn how seriously Berenice took her Judaism. As a young girl she entered three marriages of political and economic convenience to Jewish husbands. For the last of these, to Polemo King of Cilicia, she demanded that he adopt the Jewish religion and undergo circumcision.

Josephus tells us that prior to the outbreak of the rebellion Berenice was present in Jerusalem to fulfill a pious “nazirite” vow in thanksgiving for surviving an illness. She was determined to intervene with the Roman governor Gessius Florus who had been provoking the Jews with cruel abuses. Although her vow required her to shave her hair, the queen humbled herself by walking barefoot to the palace to present her petition. She was unsuccessful at this as she was in her subsequent efforts to dissuade the Jewish populace from rebellion.

All this places the Jewish queen in a very different light, as it does her problematic relationship with the destroyer of Jerusalem.

It might sound better in French – but hardly more accurate.

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

Roving Rabbis visit Northern Alberta and Canada’s Far North

Chabad Lubavitch of Alberta, led by Rabbi Menachem and Rebbetzin Rochel Matusof, is expanding its annual Roving Rabbis Program this summer with a renewed focus on Northern Alberta and Canada’s Far North.

From June 28 to July 2, Rabbis Avremy Matusof of Calgary and Shloimy Stern of Brooklyn, both 23, traveled throughout Northern Alberta, visiting communities including Grande Prairie, Fort McMurray, and Barrhead. Stay tuned for additional locations in the weeks to come.

The Roving Rabbis meet with Jewish residents wherever they are – whether at a community gathering, in a workplace, or during a personal visit – offering assistance, encouragement, and opportunities to strengthen Jewish life.

“Whether at community gatherings or in one-on-one meetings with local Jewish residents, we’re here to support in any way we can,” said Rabbi Shloimy Stern. “We’re here for people of all ages, and we bring tefillin, mezuzot, Shabbat candle kits, Jewish books, learning

materials, and fun activity packages for kids.”

For Rabbi Avremy Matusof, the journey is especially meaningful.

“Having been born and raised in Calgary before studying abroad, it is a privilege to return home and serve Jews throughout my home province,” he said. “Every visit is an opportunity to strengthen connections and help people feel seen, supported, and more connected to their Jewish identity and community.”

This summer also marks the 85th anniversary of the arrival of the Lubavitcher Rebbe in North America in 1941. The Roving Rabbis Program is among the first of the many outreach initiatives he established shortly thereafter, and it has since grown into a worldwide effort that has touched millions of souls.

This year, more than 500 young rabbis and senior rabbinical students will visit over 1,000 cities around the world, bringing Jewish learning, encouragement, and practical resources to communities of every size.

Anyone wishing to connect with the Roving Rabbis,



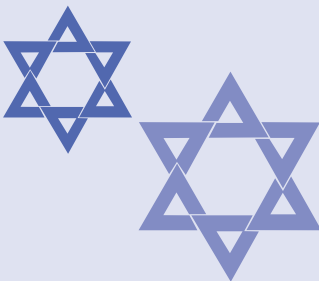
or who knows someone who can benefit from this program, is warmly invited to reach out or pass along their contact information – email: RovingRabbis@ChabadAlberta.org or call 587-575-1408.



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Dr. Lewis Kay promoted to Order of Canada Companion

By Emma Paidra, Canadian Jewish News

At least five Jewish Canadians were among the 61 people appointed to the Order of Canada and announced by Governor General Louise Arbour on June 26. Included amongst those honoured is a molecular biophysicist with strong roots in Alberta — whose father is also a member of the Order of Canada — and another is an expert in gynecological oncology.

Since its founding in 1967, close to 8,800 people have been appointed or promoted within the Order. The award “recognizes people across all sectors of society who have made extraordinary and sustained contributions to our nation.”

Dr. Lewis Kay has strong roots in Alberta, having grown up in Edmonton, attended Talmud Torah School, Camp BB-Riback and Beth Shalom congregation. A University of Toronto professor and SickKids senior scientist, he was first appointed to the Order in 2016. With the most recent round of appointments, he was promoted to the title of “Companion,” the highest level within the Order of Canada. To date, roughly 500 Canadians have been awarded this title.

Kay’s father, Cyril Kay, was also appointed to the Order of Canada in 1995. “To be able to have that commonality with somebody who had a big impact on you is a real joy,” says Kay. “There is no doubt that winning awards in isolation is not nearly as much fun as being able to share them with other people.” Not only are both father and son members of the Order of Canada, but they also share a professional field, as Cyril Kay is a biochemist.

Passing on a passion for biochemistry to younger generations is important to Kay, who occasionally shows high school students on school trips around his lab to discuss his field of study. “When I get up in front of a crowd of kids and I’m able to excite them, I’ll ask ‘When you come to university, would you like to take a course with me?’” he says. “When they put up their hands and say ‘Yeah,’ that’s the best feeling.”

“We all like to get patted on the backs, but I think that just doing what I do and getting satisfaction from it is important,” Kay told *The C/JN*. “When I see a nice result or an experiment that worked, that’s very meaningful.”

Dr. Allan Covens has also been appointed as a Member to the Order of Canada. As a gynecologic oncologist at the University of Toronto and the Sunnybrook Health Sciences Centre, Covens’ work has advanced the standard of care for cervical cancer. Covens also serves as the chief examiner for the International Gynecological Cancer Society.

“I feel honoured, and at the same time a little humbled by the distinction,” says Covens. “This just represents a nice recognition for what I would call a career-long dedication to management of cervical cancer, along with fertility preserving procedures.”

International work has been a major component of Covens’ career, as he has been travelling to Kenya annually since 2012 to provide training to surgical fellows. “The international work really magnifies everything. If I can train 10 or 20 fellows who go out into practice and each treat 100,000 women over their careers, you can see the pyramidal effect,” says Covens. “I hope my mentorship will have a concrete impact on women’s health, potentially even across the globe.”

Covens reflects on how his ancestors, who immigrated to Canada from Europe, would react to his appointment to the Order of Canada. “If my grandparents realized that the government of Canada was handing this type of distinction to their grandson, I think they would be very proud.”

Dr. Trevor Hurwitz, based in Vancouver, has also been appointed as a Member to the Order of Canada. Hurwitz, who is considered the founder of neuropsychiatry in British Columbia, is a clinical professor of psychiatry at the University of British Columbia. He created the first neuropsychiatric programs in his province, and his work has advanced the treatment of complex brain disorders.

“Receiving the Order of Canada is an immense honour and a source of great pride,” Hurwitz told *The C/JN* via email. “At the same time, it fills me with a profound sense of gratitude, knowing that such recognition could only have come through the extraordinary support and confidence of the

community with whom I have had the privilege of working over many years.”

Award-winning film producer Niv Fichman, Toronto-based founder of Rhombus Media, was named as an Officer to the Order of Canada. Fichman has “shaped Canadian cinema for nearly five decades,” a news release from the Governor General’s office stated. He has produced acclaimed films like *The Red Violin* and *Enemy*. His film *BlackBerry*, broke records after being nominated for 17 Canadian Screen Awards, winning 14, including best motion picture.

Lorne Segal, a Vancouver-based businessman and philanthropist, has also been named as a Member to the Order of Canada. In addition to his work in real estate development, Segal promotes awareness of mental health, helping to raise over \$15 million for the



Father and son: Dr. Cyril Kay and Dr. Lewis Kay

Coast Mental Health Foundation. “His combined impact reflects a lifelong legacy of principled enterprise and meaningful civic contribution,” reads his contribution description.

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From Alberta to Israel: Dr. Brian Berkowitz is using science to change lives

By David Sklar, LJI Reporter

For Dr. Brian Berkowitz, science has always been about asking difficult questions and refusing to accept conventional wisdom. The Edmonton-born scientist, now based at the Weizmann Institute of Science, has built an international career by challenging assumptions and applying scientific thinking in unexpected ways.



Dr. Brian Berkowitz

rebel, always asking why, always dissatisfied with the way things were,” he said, explaining that true scientific progress often requires challenging accepted thinking.

That philosophy shaped his early career studying groundwater systems, where he developed a reputation for breakthrough research by rethinking how contaminants move underground. He credits part of that approach to lessons from his father, a respected Canadian chemist who taught him that real advances come from questioning even the most established experts.

Speaking on the *Chai There* podcast, Berkowitz reflected on his journey from Alberta to Israel, where decades of research in hydrology, the study of water movement and groundwater systems, eventually led him into groundbreaking biomedical innovation.

After leaving Edmonton in 1982, Berkowitz said life in Israel encouraged the mindset he had always embraced. “I was always a

But one of the biggest turning points in Berkowitz’s career came through a deeply personal experience. Several years ago, his son developed a severe kidney blockage that doctors believed would require removing the kidney. Refusing to accept that outcome, Berkowitz immersed himself in the field of urology, studying the problem and applying his expertise in fluid dynamics to search for alternatives.

After months of research and collaboration with doctors, he helped develop an experimental procedure that ultimately saved his son’s kidney. The experience opened an entirely new avenue of research. “I made my son three promises,” Berkowitz said. “That he wouldn’t lose his kidney, that I’d develop a painless ureteral stent, and that I’d figure out where kidney stones come from.”

That same cross-disciplinary thinking eventually led Berkowitz to lymphedema, a chronic condition caused by damage to the lymphatic system that results in painful fluid buildup in the limbs. Current treatments often rely on uncomfortable compression garments and repeated massage therapy, with limited long-term success.

Drawing on decades of hydrology research, Berkowitz and his team have developed a prototype “bionic lymph node,” a small implant designed to remove excess fluid and restore balance inside the body. The technology, now being advanced through his startup company Sub Q Bionics, could eventually improve the lives of millions worldwide.

For Berkowitz, the future of innovation depends on curiosity and collaboration. “There’s so much we don’t understand,” he said. “I love learning new things, so I feel I’m just getting started.”

Visit chaithere.ca to listen to his conversation with Chai There podcast hosts David Sklar and Addie Borhaven.

Chagigat HaTorah celebration at CJA



Grade 2 students at CJA proudly celebrated their Chagigat HaTorah this month, marking a meaningful milestone in their Jewish learning journey. This special celebration was generously sponsored by the Jack ו'ר and Alice ו'ר Adler Torah Learning Fund.

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