

The Jewish VOICE

Informing and Connecting Jews in El Paso-Las Cruces

SH'VAT/ADAR 5783
February 2023

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JEWISH EL PASO
CONNECTING EL PASO-LAS CRUCES

Education and Fruit Trees



**By Rabbi Levi Greenberg
Chabad Lubavitch of El Paso**

My grandparents, Rabbi Gershon Mendel and Bassie Garelik, were newlyweds when they embarked on their life-long mission to Milan, Italy. The Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson appointed them to be his emissaries to bring the light and joy of Judaism to Italian Jewry in the winter of 1958, and they were sent off from Chabad World Headquarters with much pomp and ceremony, brimming with idealistic optimism.

Six years later the daily grind was getting to my grandmother. Upon their arrival there they established a Jewish school, and those early years were extremely challenging, to put it mildly. Things came to a head, and she shared her frustration with the Rebbe in a letter that stated amongst other things, “I feel like my soul came to this world to knock on people’s doors to recruit their children to a Jewish school and get rejected.”

The Rebbe responded with a beautiful letter of encouragement, and I’d like to share one paragraph we can all learn from.

“In the literature of Chassidus, such activities are classified and explained under two categories: “seeding” and “planting.” The difference is this: In the case of seeding, as, for example, sowing wheat, the fruits take less time to appear than in the case of planting a tree. The reason is that in the case of the former the results, though many times the original effort, are considerably smaller than in the case of planting.”

“Similarly in the efforts and activities of a human being, there are such that come under one category and/or the other. If, therefore, it sometimes takes longer for the efforts to come to fruition, this is no reason for discouragement; on the contrary, the reason may well be that it is a case of “planting,” where the ultimate results will be infinitely greater.”

Needless to say, this school is today a thriving institution and the pride and joy of the community.

On Monday, February 6 we will celebrate Tu B’Shevat, the fifteenth day of the Jewish month Shevat which is identified as the “New Year for Trees.” While this date holds the most significance and relevance regarding agriculture in the Land of Israel, it is the message we can learn

from trees that should inspire us on this day - because the Torah compares people to trees.

Contrary to a wheat field where one can throw seeds into the ground indiscriminately and expect results very soon, trees demand much attention and patience and the results can take many many years until they finally appear. But fruits are far superior to wheat kernels in so many

ways. Children demand tremendous attention and patience and it can take years of sweat, tears, and aggravation until we see the delicious results and the same is true of community.

Jewish education and community activism are a labor of love, and with the right amount of effort, patience, and belief in the cause we will see the fruits of our labor in due time.

JEWISH EL PASO CONNECTING EL PASO-LAS CRUCES

Interim Executive Director



In order to assure an eventual smooth transition and to seamlessly continue the important work of Jewish El Paso, former Jewish El Paso President and current Board member of both Jewish El Paso and The Jewish Community Foundation of El Paso, **Monika Kimball**, has graciously agreed to hold the position of Interim Director of Jewish El Paso beginning Wednesday, January 25, and continuing until a permanent replacement is in place.

- **Debra P. Kanof**
President, Jewish El Paso



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From the Editor

The Jewish Voice reserves the right to edit articles and to forgo publishing content it deems potentially offensive. The opinions expressed in this publication are those of the authors. They do not purport to reflect the opinions or views of Jewish El Paso.

JEWISH EL PASO CONNECTING EL PASO-LAS CRUCES

The Jewish VOICE

A publication of Jewish El Paso

The Jewish Voice of El Paso, published ten times a year, is dedicated to informing, educating, and uniting the Jewish community by providing news items of local, national, Israeli and international concern.

The Jewish Voice will consider for publication any materials submitted that support the mission of Jewish El Paso and have relevance and appeal our Jewish community. Articles are subject to editing at the editor’s discretion and are subject to space limitations. Letters cannot be longer than 150 words and articles must be kept to a maximum of 300 words.

Please email to thevoice@jewishelpaso.org

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NOW WE
GO FORWARD

Will you join us in the charting the path forward for our community?

JEWISH EL PASO
CONNECTING EL PASO-LAS CRUCES

Lions of Judah: Strong Women. Powerful Voices. Big Impact.

By **Martha Eisenberg**

What an empowering, dynamic group of strong like-minded women ... 1,200 of us coming together to attend the International Lion of Judah Conference celebrating their 50th anniversary. All of us gathering together in unity for the welfare of our respective Jewish communities as well as the state of Israel.

We were fortunate to hear from dynamic, diverse, inspiring speakers ... all who are prominent in their respective fields ... each

with a strong message to share. Each day offered incredible speakers ... A few of the speakers we got to hear from:

Gabby Giffords (former United States Representative)

Katie Couric (American Journalist)

Marlee Matlin (Deaf Actress)

Lacey Schwartz Delgado (second lady of New York)

Jenny Mollen Biggs (Actress)

The conference offered a great selection of breakout sessions that the attendees got to pick and choose from... below are a few:

The power of women in our Jewish community

Current event topics with top foreign correspondents bringing their keen insights into the changing global landscape

Impact on Israel & the Jewish community and how JFNA (Jewish Federations of North America) makes a difference

The marked rise in antisemitism and hate crimes

Diversity of the American Jewish Family

JFNA and our local Federation, Jewish El Paso, are truly stepping

up to meet the challenges our communities are facing, striving to keep us safe. Continually offering educational, inspiring programs as well as social gatherings to provide a happy cohesive community.

JFNA is making an impact on the world ... Wendy Lanski, Janet Wechter, Mona Goldberg, Robin Furman and myself were very fortunate to attend this amazing conference.

Lion of Judah Conference (ILOJC) – December 11-13, 2022- Phoenix Arizona

More Takeaways From Our Lions

Robin Furman

There were so many great take aways from the Lion Conference! Most importantly, I got so much out of my multigenerational giving session. We talked about how to plant the seeds in your family for giving and then how to prolong your gifts for many generations in the future. I can't wait to go over and tell our family what we have given to over the year and their ideas and research for family giving to their specific interests.

Mona Goldberg

I was very privileged to be able to attend the ILOJC 100th anniversary in Phoenix, December 2022. The speakers were extremely informative, and it was amazing to see so many Jewish women in one room committed to the continuing volunteerism of the Jewish community. I had never really thought about how much involvement it takes from so many to ensure the well-being of our youth and world communities.

I am amazed by how many JFNA organizations that are available to support people. Some of which are, The Jewish Fertility Foundation of Atlanta, J screen genetic testing, Live Secure, Be Well - for mental health, One Table, and many others. I also could not believe how dependent JFNA is upon the financial reality of the amount of money raised through 17,000 women.

In one of the breakout groups regarding Anti Semitism, I learned how bad it is in so many communities. Living in El Paso, we are very lucky that Anti Semitism is not as prevalent as in other areas of the United States and World.

Wendy Lanski

I think we have the opportunity to engage others, other organizations even - to inform, partner and promote. I see the following opportunities - JCRC work with other groups. Our schools have helped non -Jews become more knowledgeable advocates - question - could we be doing more with other



organizations / groups? I know we also have opportunities in our city with being advocates and help with resources for mental health. Lastly, one of the things I learned was that programming might be needed for those in the empty nester stage of life. How do we keep those in that group engaged and feel like they still fit in? That JFed is relevant and offers something to them too. The other thing they suggested was multi-generational opportunities for the whole family. I think we've done a better job at this lately. Basically they told us people are living longer. JFed needs to offer things in every stage of life, no matter what that stage is or what that age is.

Just some thoughts. I enjoyed

going and hearing what others are doing well!

Janet Wechter

El Paso was represented by five special women at The International Lion of Judah Conference in Phoenix, celebrating 50 years of extraordinary impact. We were among 1,200 women and 80 Jewish Federations spanning five countries and representing 18,000 Lions of Judah. Lions are involved in so many different social services whether it is feeding the hungry, serving the hygienic needs of girls and women, mental illness among teens and college kids, and other health issues we face. Lions roar loudly and show up where needed.

I was surprised to learn about Katie Couric's connection to the Jewish people, how her mom hid her Jewish roots and Katie wondering at the age of 10 what her mom was doing with a menorah in their home. At the conference, Katie joined the Lions of Judah returning to her roots. We all know who Marlee Matlin is, but did you know she is Jewish and a Lion of Judah. She inspired us with her story about surviving abuse and prejudice in every aspect of her life. She credits her Rabbi who was determined for Marlee to her celebrate her Bat Mitzvah which gave her the confidence to pursue her dreams like acting.

The Jewish community needs us more than ever with mental illness spiraling among teens and young adults not to mention the parents not having the skills to handle it. The numbers are staggering with 40% of teens who disclose they are struggling with life and are "persistently sad or hopeless" while 1 out of 5 have contemplated suicide. We all see what social media is doing to our psyche and how so many gage their likability and importance to social media. The Jewish Federations of North America are doing something about it and we need empowered women to join together here in El Paso and Las Cruces to join this fight by bringing this program JFNA and other local Federations are doing called BeWell.

There was beautiful music played throughout the conference including, The Shul Sisters, the first female cantorial trio in the US celebrated the power and voices of the Lions of Judah with a special concert.

For myself, I got to reconnect with a few people I had gotten to know during Federation FRD Missions, and the conference was a reminder of why we need all women to stand up, make their voices heard and help those who cannot help themselves. And it was so nice to travel with other leaders in El Paso who roar! Mona, Martha, Robin, Wendy, and I hope you will use your voice, your influence, your power to make a difference in people's lives.

FACES & PLACES

Families discover Jewish Summer Camps at the Camp Fair



Celebrating Tu B'Shvat at The J

Tu B'Shvat is one of our students' favorite holidays. It's an opportunity to appreciate the many things trees give us - and to think about what more we can do for them. The children will learn about fruits and nuts that come from trees but also marvel at the shade and shelter they provide for so many animals and for us too.

The children will celebrate in so many ways. They'll eat the seven species of Israel and learn the blessings, too, plant our garden and, of course, care for the trees that bring beauty, shade, and so much more to our spaces every day.



Opening Space to Write Experiences

By *Selfa A. Chew-Meléndez*.

Dr. Anadeli Bencomo, Dean of the College of Liberal Art at the University of Texas at El Paso, is proud to announce the recipients of the Aaron and Sylvia Wechter Family Excellence Fund for the cycle 2022-2023. Chavah Schwartz and Natalia Soriano Moreno presented that are clearly deserving of this honor.

Chavah Schwartz is already making important contributions to the field of Jewish Studies. She has been teaching Introduction to Judaism since 2015 for the Religious Studies program. Chavah was awarded the Wechter Fund so she can re-establish the Jewish Studies program at the

University of Texas at El Paso. The program was paused after its former director, Dr. Ezra Cappell, accepted a position at the College of Charleston in 2018. Chavah will coordinate the program starting in the Fall 2023 with the aim to re-establish the minor in Jewish Studies at UTEP. In addition, she will use the Wechter fund to complete her dissertation and attain a doctoral degree in Philosophy and Religion at the University of North Texas. As she stated in her proposal, her work seeks to “capture a sense of community that has been overlooked in much recent ethical thought and practice, and it presents Judaism as a topic worthy of academic study within the field of contemporary ecology

and environmentalism.” She looks forward to present the results of her research to a diverse audience in El Paso.

Natalia Soriano Moreno, is a Creative Writing student working towards the completion of the MFA program at UTEP. She is receiving the Aaron and Sylvia Wechter Family Excellence Fund, to conduct seven creative writing workshops “that promote the writing of testimonial texts” that reflect the diverse experiences of the El Paso Jewish communities. According to Natalia, “the idea is to open a space in which the participants can write their experiences” building a collective story that will preserve the uniqueness of each person’s

testimony.” Natalia’s project includes the creation of a digital literary journal which will link the creative testimonies to a map of El Paso “in which the memories of each participant will be located to think about the relationship between memory and territory.” As is the case of Chavah Schwartz, Natalia Soriano Moreno will present the results of the workshops with the community in at least one event, open to the public.

The College of Liberal Arts at the University of Texas at El Paso appreciates the support provided by the Aaron and Sylvia Wechter Family Excellence Fund to the academic and creative work of Chavah Schwartz and Natalia Soriano Moreno.

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Peer Guide Training

by Ellen Goodman

The El Paso Holocaust Museum sent an invitation to my Mitzvah corp class (sixth seventh and eighth grade classes) at the religious school at Temple Mount Sinai. The invitation offered these middle school children a path to becoming a Holocaust Museum ambassador. The Holocaust Museum has a special exhibit called Let Me Be Myself – The Life Story of Anne Frank. It shows the story of Anne Frank from her birth in 1929 up to her death in the Bergen Belsen concentration camp in 1945. The exhibition also includes stories of young people today: their perseverance through struggles and challenges; The ongoing impact of prejudice, exclusion & discrimination on youth today; and how we can all respond to current injustices. This training was led by two people who work at the Anne Frank Center in South Carolina.

This two-day training guided our students on how to convey the content of the exhibit, what questions to ask and how to moderate discussions. Each student will be provided with materials which they can use when giving personal one on one tours of a special exhibit or doing outreach presentations at their school. Students received volunteer hours for the two days of the training, weekend peer guided tours, and will also receive hours for their outreach presentations.

This was a year to bring in Holocaust education to this class of middle schoolers, and what a great way to begin. There were 11 students from our combined Temple Mount Sinai/Bnai Zion Mitzvah corp class, and five other students from the community. They all took time out of their weekend to come and learn from experienced trainers about Anne Frank's story. For the next month, until 15 February, they will be scheduled to give tours to their peers, or other teenagers who are interested. The activities and projects that these trainers gave to our kids, were really impressive; how they were able to give step-by-step information about the exhibit and to allow the kids to research what they individually found interesting.

I would like to thank Jewish El Paso with their sponsoring grant to bring in the exhibition which also included all the training. I would also like to thank Jamie Flores and Mary Lou Rocha for putting together this wonderful program for our Jewish community's.



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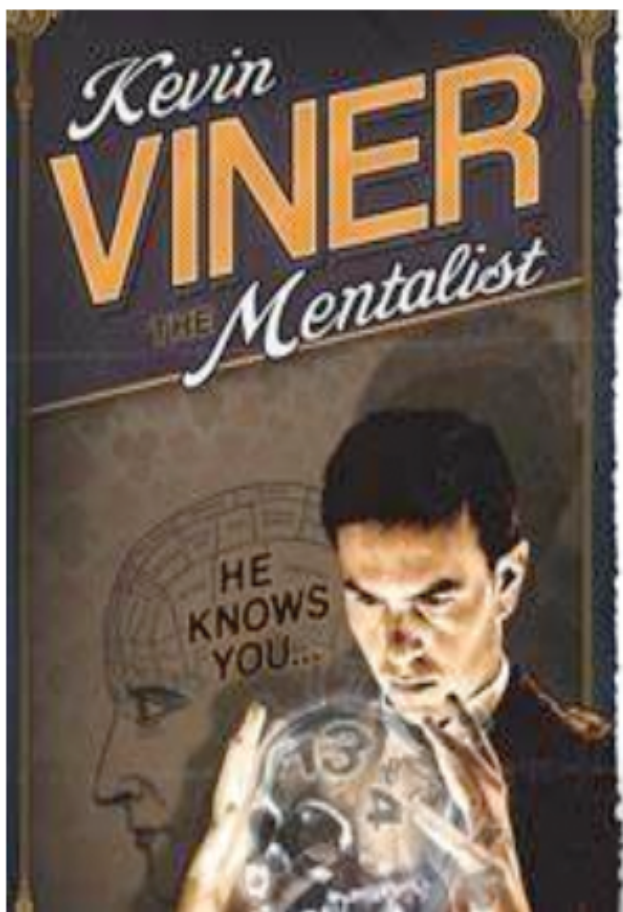
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