HAPPY NEW YEAR!

Jewish Observer of Central New York

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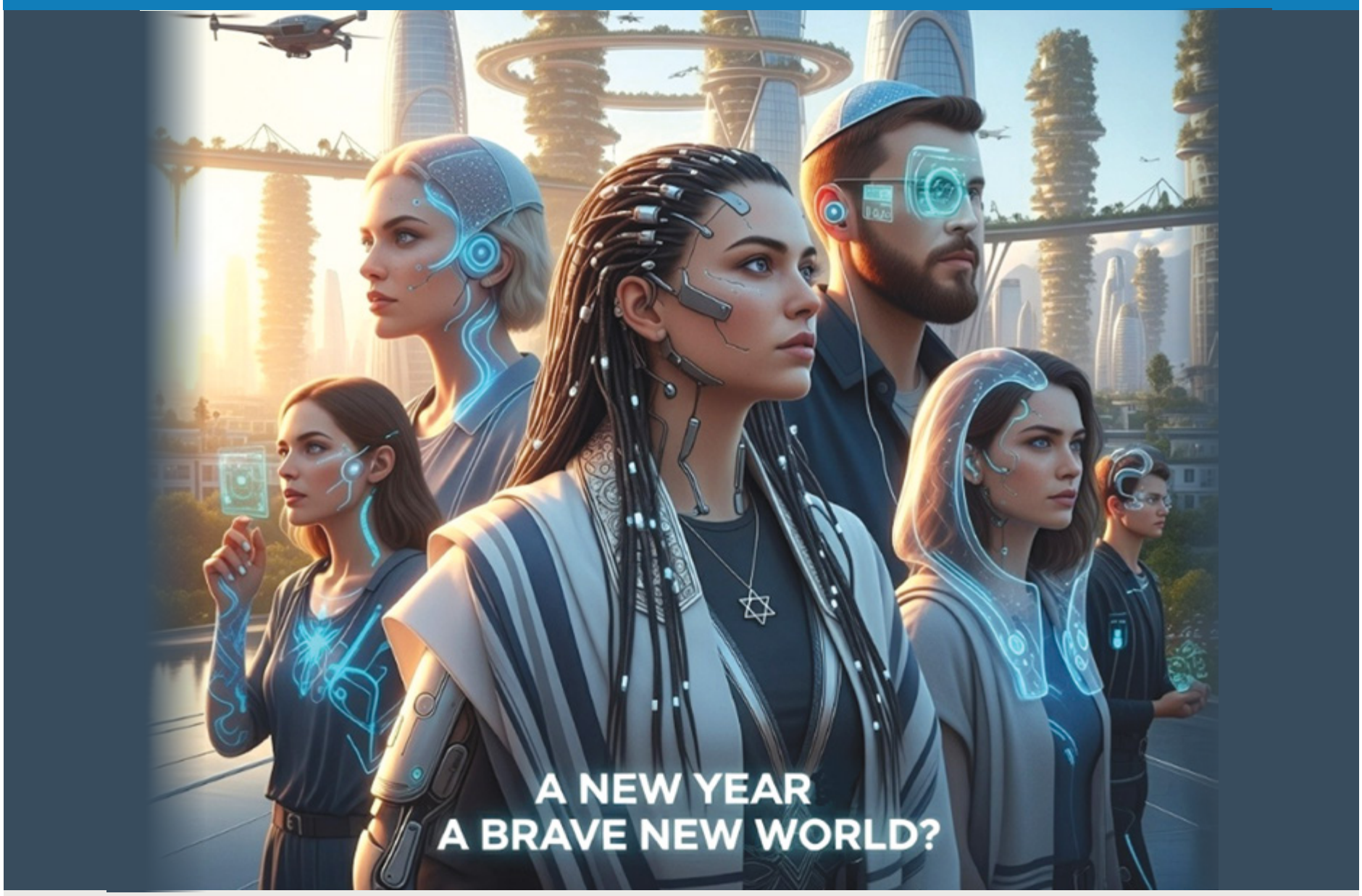
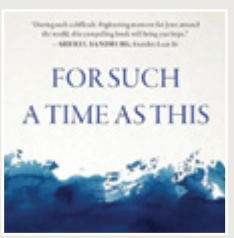




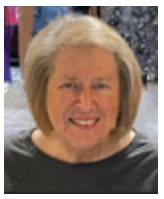
LOOK:
NEW BOOKS FOR THE NEW YEAR
(2)

INSIDE:
NEW DIRECTOR OF SECURITY
(5)

DON'T MISS:
LEADERS OF TOMORROW
(7)

January 2026

From the Editor



Barbara Davis

HAPPY 2026! AI did not write this masthead article. I did. It wasn't Claude, Gemini, ChatGPT, Copilot or Grok. But how long will that be the case? Despite the blow to my ego, I must admit that chatbots write well. Better than I in many cases. And unquestionably faster. AI would have written this masthead article in fifteen seconds. It took me a lot longer.

What prompted the theme of this issue of the *JO* and its unusual AI generated cover was an article I recently read about the Abundance 360 conference. Here's an explanation for those of you who, like me, have no clue what this conference is: "An intensive, 4-day exploration of AI and other exponential tech, increasing global abundance, biotech/longevity, and Moonshot thinking." The article explained: "The conference curated a world of coming wonders for several hundred C-Suite buccaneers who had paid up to $50,000 apiece to update their mental models and investment portfolios. One entrepreneur announced that his brain-computer interface would soon be surgically installed in primates; a venture capitalist predicted that we'd have a billion bipedal robots by 2040. There was talk of 'neuromuscular activation of biohybrid mobile bots' and of modifying humans with DNA from tardigrades, the nearly indestructible micro-animals, so that we can better withstand radiation during space travel."

I did not understand that terminology nor did I have a spare $50,000 to attend the conference. I am not a fan of science fiction, but I had to acknowledge that this was REAL. And it freaked me out. So I told Alexa (AI) to play some soothing music, decided that retail therapy would calm me down and Google maps (AI) told me the fastest way to get to the mall. I don't have a Tesla, but if I did, it would have taken me there without my active participation since it has an AI driverless system. Once at Destiny, my Apple Watch used AI to tell me when I had completed the requisite number of steps to meet my fitness goals. I opened my phone, which used facial recognition (AI) to make sure it was me before unlocking, to see what my (AI) Open Table app suggested was a good restaurant for lunch and then made the reservation for me. Clearly AI is already a big part of my life. This was consistent with another article I read with predictions for the new year. In 2026, it said, "90% of online content will be AI-generated." I'm so glad I got an AI emotional support Pandy for Chanukah. It's pretty certain that I am going to need it in the months ahead.

The start of a new calendar year seems an opportune time to consider the state of affairs of our world. An article I read (I persist in reading books and magazines printed on paper) pointed out that "thanks to such advances as antibiotics and better sanitation, our life spans have roughly doubled since 1900. Back then, the leading causes of death were pneumonia, tuberculosis, and diarrhea. Now we die of the maladies of old age—heart disease, cancer, strokes, Alzheimer's. The downside is that we go lingeringly, in ways that we and our children regret. The average American dies at 77, after 12 years of bad health. If you are old enough to buy a senior citizen ticket, you are likely to have a chronic disease, or perhaps two." Not much cause for New Year's celebration there.

But will 2026 have some positive innovations in store for us? My BFF ChatGPT told me that "In 2026, expect smarter gadgets, cleaner energy, better healthcare, and more natural ways to connect with technology." She (I think of her as female for some reason) told me that we could expect that our dining-out experiences in the new year will be cashier-less experiences featuring robotic servers, AI-driven personalization, 3D-printed dishes, and robot chefs. She also said that smart glasses will become common, AI computers and chips will get faster, batteries will charge quicker, last longer, and be safer, screens and TVs will look sharper and more realistic, quantum computers will solve problems that regular computers cannot, virtual and augmented reality will feel more natural and useful, self-driving cars, drones, and robots will handle more everyday tasks and green energy and biotech will help fight climate change and improve health. Okay, maybe there's a little cause for celebration.

The year 2026 in the Jewish world is certain to be one of change. The February issue of the *JO* will have "Post-Gaza Judaism" as its theme, but the topic is one that cannot be avoided in the first month of the year. The October 7 Hamas attack and Israel's military operations since then not only devastated lives and infrastructure but also triggered deep reflection within the global Jewish community about identity, communal responsibility, antisemitism, morality and Jewish ethics. A recent study from The Hebrew University of Jerusalem explored how the Israel–Gaza war transformed religion and spirituality among 1,200 young adult students. Researchers found that half reported changes in their religiosity and/or spirituality, with increases more common than decreases. The findings show that cultural background and direct exposure to conflict shape whether people deepen their faith, turn to spirituality, or step away from religion. Another feature of post-Gaza Judaism is intra-communal debate: profound disagreement about what Judaism requires today, what criticism of Israel entails, and what are the boundaries of acceptable dissent.

But while there is much to discuss and debate on this topic, the secular new year is more traditionally an occasion for festivity. In contrast to *Rosh HaShanah*, which asks us to reflect on our lives as we await divine judgment, January 1st is generally exuberant and carefree, reveling in the hope and promise of change. This issue of the *Observer* will emphasize that enthusiasm and anticipation, seeing the new year as a calendar reset rather than a spiritual reckoning. We rejoice in our ability to reinvent ourselves. So our pages are filled with an article and two reviews of some intriguing new Jewish books, a RAV Properties column about an innovative school business enterprise, and news about new people taking leadership roles not only today but in the future.

As we welcome 2026, may we do more than count the passing of time; may we make time count.

May this be a year of growth rooted in our deepest values, of action guided by compassion, and of courage to live with integrity. May we look ahead not only with hope, but with a renewed commitment to the values that define who we are and who we strive to become.

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MESSAGE FROM MARK SEGEL
Federation President & CEO

Happy 2026 to everyone! May the year ahead bring peace and strength to our community. May we continue to lift one another up with joy, tzedakah, and hope for the future.

The month of January is named after Janus, the Roman god of beginnings, transitions, doorways, and time. Janus is usually depicted with two faces: one looking backward and one looking forward because he symbolized both endings and new beginnings.

When I consider the fourth of my five pillars, Fundraising and Financial Assistance, I want to place it in the context of both the old and the new. Looking backward, we sadly must recognize that many of our local Jewish organizations are struggling financially, the result of declining engagement from members, increased costs of operations, as well as the challenges of fundraising.

Yet, when looking ahead, we find that Jewish communities are entering a new era of engagement shaped by global crises, evolving technology, and shifting generational needs. In the wake of October 7th, participation surged across many Jewish spaces as people sought solidarity, meaning, and connection. While much of this heightened activity has persisted, sustaining momentum among the loosely connected remains a challenge. The future of Jewish engagement will depend on how communities transform temporary spikes into lasting involvement.

We know that relationships are the cornerstone of engagement. Individuals increasingly respond to personal invitations, familiar faces, and small group settings rather than large, impersonal programs. Midlife adults are seeking more authentic Jewish experiences at the same time as younger generations remain committed to authenticity, justice, and belonging, preferring flexible and value-driven approaches to Jewish life. Meeting both groups where they are requires tailored strategies that balance tradition with relevance.

Digital tools play a critical role in how people connect to Jewish life. Podcasts, video series, online learning, and hybrid rituals allow participation regardless of geography or physical access. Digital holiday toolkits, global storytelling platforms, and Jewish media labs are making heritage accessible and creative. Yet, these tools work best when they supplement, not replace, in-person connections. Flexibility will be another defining feature of Jewish engagement in 2026. Many people want to explore Jewish life on their own terms. The challenge for organizations is to design layered programming that can welcome both casual seekers and committed participants without alienating either group.

The future of our Jewish community will be defined by balance: preserving tradition while embracing innovation, sustaining momentum without overextending resources, and welcoming diversity while maintaining shared identity. We need to look both backward and forward.

All of this costs money and raising funds is one of Federation's primary reasons for being. The Federation system was created in the late 19th century when dozens of small charities were competing for support in every community, leading to donor fatigue and inefficiency. The first federation, founded in Boston in 1895, offered a single annual campaign and distributed funds locally and overseas. This centralized model made it possible to raise money effectively, plan strategically, and respond quickly to crises. Over time, federations became the backbone of Jewish communal life, supporting schools, synagogues, JCCs, elder care, Israel, and global Jewry. That mission continues today. Federations remain the diaspora Jewish community's strongest vehicle for sustaining Jewish life locally and globally.

A recent article in *eJewishPhilanthropy* reported that "between heightened security needs, rising costs of living and cuts to government social services funding, North American Jewish life now comes with a heftier price tag than in years past—for individuals and communal institutions alike," and asked, "Will there always be enough philanthropists to foot the bill?" It cited the work of historian Jack Wertheimer who estimated that $13-14 billion a year was donated by Jews to Jewish causes in the early 2020s, nearly double what it was six or seven years ago. But while funding is increasing, Wertheimer noted, the number of funders isn't. "The sum of money that Jews are giving to Jewish causes has increased quite dramatically," he wrote. "The not-so-good news is that the base of donors who are contributing that sum continually is shrinking; that more and more money is being raised from fewer people."

Furthermore, the article added, "though Jewish giving has consistently outpaced that of other religious groups, most Jewish philanthropists donate a majority of their funds to nonsectarian causes." In 2020, for the first time in decades, the Pew Research Center reported that only 48% of Jews surveyed had given to a Jewish cause in the prior year, suggesting declining commitment to Jewish causes among a growing portion of the American Jewish community.

Other factors affecting the financing of our Jewish future include demographic shifts and increasing needs. The Jewish population is undergoing significant changes. The Orthodox community is growing, while the number of Jews affiliated with the Conservative and Reform movements is projected to decline. Many Jews, particularly millennials, are also becoming "Jews of no religion" and disaffiliating from major Jewish organizations. The cost of living Jewishly continues to rise and many American Jews, especially those with children, find it difficult to afford synagogue dues, Jewish schools, camps, and other aspects of Jewish life. And all Jewish organizations are facing rising costs for infrastructure, increased security threats, and expanded social service needs.

How can we effectively confront and counter these challenges? Realizable strategies include the following:

- We must expand legacy giving and planned donations, capturing the intergenerational wealth transfer, estimated to be trillions of dollars, that will occur over the next few decades.

- We must broaden and engage our donor base. We cannot just rely on the shrinking pool of large donors who have been our sustainers in the past. Future financing will require engaging a wider range of givers. We must engage younger and less-affiliated families and cultivate a culture of giving across all income levels. While major gifts are of inestimable importance, expanding the base of smaller, consistent donors can create a more sustainable model.

- We need to investigate merging or sunsetting inefficient or duplicative organizations to reallocate resources to the most effective programs.

- We need to continue to leverage government funding like the federal Nonprofit Security Grant Program to secure funding for synagogues, day schools, and community centers facing threats. We need to support innovative approaches like technology-driven education, as well as scholarships to make Jewish day schools and camps more accessible.

- Future funding requires not only new strategies but also new narratives that emphasize the importance of investing in Jewish continuity. We need to educate the Jewish community on the profound and ennobling benefits of living a Jewish life so that they shift their financial priorities toward communal support. We must do more outreach through creative programming aimed at engaging the unaffiliated, interfaith families and younger generations. We need to highlight Jewish social justice work in order to engage donors who might otherwise disaffiliate.

2026 is not a year to sit on the sidelines. We need everyone in our community to step forward, to bring energy, resources, and vision into the work of building a stronger Jewish future. Let us engage, let us innovate, and let us lead. Together, we can make 2026 a year of action, of growth, and of impact. A great way to start 2026 would be to make your generous pledge to the Federation annual campaign [https://jewishfederationcny.org/campaign-pledge/] so that our community can thrive together in the new year and forever after.

D'VAR TORAH

New Beginnings

by Rabbi Evan Shore,
Shaarei Torah Orthodox Congregation of Syracuse

A new year brings with it fresh opportunities, renewed vision, and the hope for growth. The holiday of *Tu b'Shevat*, the second best-known Jewish new year, is fast approaching. Beyond its ritual observances, I have always seen the 15th of Shevat as a celebration of renewal and new beginnings. Additionally, as the new secular year begins, many people seek to start off on the right foot by making resolutions or testing new endeavors. As the dark days of winter fade, the first glimpse of snowdrops or crocuses breaking through the snow fills me with hope. It reminds me how deeply we, as human beings, need to look forward to longer, brighter days after the early nights of winter.

This is not by chance, but by design. At the conclusion of each day of the six days of Creation, the Torah states, "It was evening, and it was morning." Light always follows darkness. In doing so, the Torah establishes not only the pattern of time, but also the unfolding of Jewish history and of our individual lives.

As the French writer Jean-Baptiste Alphonse Karr observed, "The more things change, the more they remain the same." Our yearly cycle is circular in nature; the holidays we observe this year are the same ones we celebrated in years past. Yet how we approach these moments can make all the difference. When we open ourselves to new experiences, genuine growth and change can take place. "Been there, done that" is the old way of thinking. This year, try something new!

With the arrival of warmer weather and the awareness that spring is not far behind, a renewed sense of optimism begins to bloom within us. It reminds us to add a little more "spring" to our step and to embrace the season's promise of growth and renewal.

Still, we must remember that genuine growth takes time. Our society often measures success by the speed of progress, but nature teaches a different lesson. Since Tu B'Shevat centers on trees and the natural world, it reminds us that transformation does not occur overnight. From the germination of a seed to the blossoming of a tree that eventually bears fruit, the process is slow, often over years. Yet at every stage, something new and meaningful is taking place a quiet, steady unfolding of life and potential.

Rabbi Menachem Lehrfield, in an article on Aish.com, writes: "We consistently overestimate what we can accomplish in a day while underestimating what we can achieve in a lifetime." When faced with new beginnings, many of us impede our own success with unrealistic expectations, thus hindering meaningful progress.

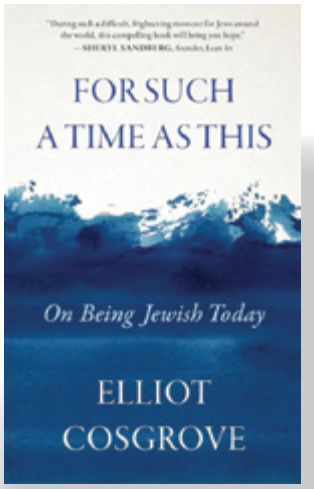
Even though Hashem created the world thousands of years ago, He continues to renew it each and every day. In our morning prayers we recite: "He renews daily, perpetually, the work of Creation."

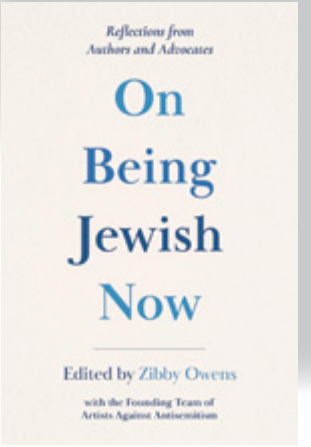
How powerful that is. I often remind my students at the Syracuse Hebrew Day School that everything Hashem does is intentional and meant for us to notice, to learn from, and to mirror in our own lives. It is as if Hashem greets each day as something entirely new. How much more, then, should we embrace the days, weeks, and months ahead with that same spirit of renewal and fresh purpose.

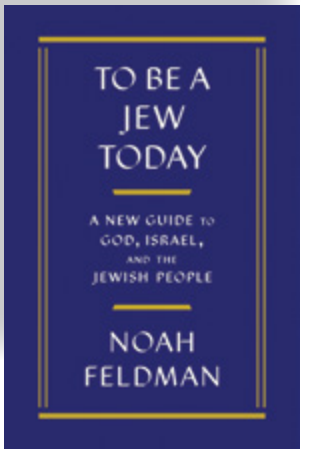
PEOPLE OF THE BOOK

New Books of Jewish Interest in 2026

Surveys suggest that, as a group, American Jews read more books than the average American and many report a particular interest in books with Jewish themes. For 2026, the "People of the Book" will have many new titles to choose from.







Rabbi Elliot Cosgrove of the Park Avenue Synagogue is admired for his intellectual depth, moral clarity, and his ability to provide guidance to the Jewish community during times of division and crisis. The title of his latest book is ***For Such a Time as This: On Being Jewish Today***. His message is that "Judaism is far more than a religion. Unlike other faiths, we have no catechism. Some define their Judaism religiously and culturally, yet others as a global and historic peoplehood. A little confusing to the outsider—perhaps, but it is also our secret strength." [Reviewed in the December *JO.*]

His New York City nearby neighbor, **Rabbi Angela Buchdahl**, of Central Synagogue on Lexington Avenue, has also written a book, ***Heart of a Stranger: An Unlikely Rabbi's Story of Faith, Identity, and Belonging***. She describes her journey as the first Asian American to be ordained as a rabbi, from feeling like an outsider to becoming one of the most admired religious leaders in the world. [To be reviewed in the February *JO.*]

Many of the books to be published in 2026 also explore what it means to be Jewish. ***On Being Jewish Now: Reflections from Authors and Advocates*** by Zibby Owens was composed, she says, because "Writing — and reading — is how so many of us process and make sense of the world…This is about healing. About coping and connecting. In the only way I know how." In ***To Be a Jew Today: A New Guide to God, Israel, and the Jewish People***, **Noah Feldman** says he wants to suggest that "it's possible to characterize Jewishness in the way the Bible explains the meaning of the name Israel, to strive, struggle and content with God."

Other newly or soon-to-be published books deal with Judaism in diverse and contemporary terms.

Non-Fiction:

Being Jewish After the Destruction of Gaza: A Reckoning **by Peter Beinart**. A controversial current-affairs book about Jewish identity and Israel in a changing world.

Edmond de Rothschild: Finding Zion **by James McAuley**. A biography of Zionist Edmond de Rothschild.

Together in Manzanar: The True Story of a Japanese Jewish Family in an American Concentration Camp **by Tracy Slate**. An interned Japanese-Jewish family struggles with identity, prejudice, and loyalty.

Smashing the Tablets: Radical Retellings of the Hebrew Bible **edited by Sara Lippmann and Seth Rogoff**. An anthology of contemporary writers radically re-reading, reimagining, and "smashing" biblical narratives to open new possibilities for interpretation

Fiction:

Queen Esther **by John Irving**. A historical novel by a famous author featuring a Jewish orphan from Vienna grappling with identity and antisemitism, set in Maine and Israel.

***Fagin the Thief* by Allison Epstein**. A re-imagining of Fagin's life from the shadows of Dickensian London, exploring what freedom means when being a Jew is worse than being a thief.

Mrs. Lilienblum's Cloud Factory by Iddo Gefen. A surreal tale of a tech-startup that turns desert sand into rain clouds, and the dislocated family tied to it in the Israeli desert's startup culture.

Autocorrect by Etgar Keret. A collection of short witty stories that traverse alternate realities, domestic absurdities, and existential terrors.

***My Childhood in Pieces: A Stand-Up Comedy, a Skokie Elegy* by Edward Hirsch**. A memoir in dark-comic fragments about a middle-class Jewish family in Chicago/Suburban Skokie

***Happy New Years* by Maya Arad**. An epistolary novel in which an Israeli immigrant writes Rosh Hashanah letters from America, masking disappointments while navigating identity, exile, gender, and generational change.

***We Would Never* by Tova Mirvis**. A family drama probing how far one will go to protect family, and how the boundaries of love and betrayal can blur in a custody fight gone awry.

***Laughing in Yiddish* by Jamie Wendt**. A poetry collection that uses dark humor, Jewish-diaspora memory, and formal experimentation to map one family's journey from Russia to Chicago.

***Body: My Life in Parts* by Nina B. Lichtenstein**. A memoir-in-essays structured around body parts, exploring how physical form, memory, identity, and aging intersect in an ex-pat Norwegian Lutheran turned American "Viking Jewess."

***Hunting in America* by Tehila Hakimi**. An Israeli woman relocating to the U.S. is drawn into the ritual of hunting as a metaphor for assimilation, identity, and the violence embedded in cultural change.

***Bethlehem Road* by Judy Labensohn**. A collection of twelve stories about immigrants and exiles on one iconic Jerusalem street, capturing the complexities of arrival, displacement, and identity.

As a Jew: Reclaiming Our Story from Those Who Blame, Shame, and Try to Erase Us, by Sarah Hurwitz

Reviewed by Angela Locke

Sarah Hurwitz called her first book, *Here All Along*, a "love letter to Judaism." She asks herself how she missed "4000 years of crowdsourced wisdom from millions of my ancestors about what it means to be human?" *Here All Along* paid homage to, embraced, and returned to that wisdom.

Her second book, *As a Jew,* is more a polemic, an *apologia* in the old sense of the word, a scathing but informed defense of Judaism, Jews, and Israel. Why us? Hurwitz asks. Why the Jews? Why are we the first and last recipients of blame, hatred, obfuscation, and erasure?

Hurwitz delves into history and elucidates the many-pronged answer, one that spans eras, theologies, politics, and cultures. From centuries BCE to the destruction of the Second Temple; from the influence of the Jew-hating Romans on the writing and interpretation of the New Testament to the spreading hatred of Jews in early Christian communities; from the persecution of the Jews that infected Eastern and Western Europe to the Soviet oppression of the early 20th century; from the nearly nonstop attacks on the State of Israel since 1948 to the Zionism = Racism, and accusations of colonialism and genocide of our present day, Hurwitz illustrates how the many faces of antisemitism can be reduced to a belief in Jewish "power, depravity, and conspiracy."

She begins innocuously enough. Have we as children, and our children and theirs, grown up believing in the "*Judeo-Christian* idea—that the two are so similar the only thing separating them is a hyphen?" They go to Sunday school/we go to Hebrew school; they celebrate Christmas and Easter/we celebrate Hanukkah and Passover; they build churches/we build synagogues. But the Torah, Hurwitz says, is the story of who we are and why we exist. And in its historical context, it is "one long protest directed at the powerful empires of its time, Egypt and Mesopotamia." Revolutionaries, then? Jews standing up to oppression, Jews as *Am Kadosh*, a people set apart by covenant and purpose.

Catapulting ahead to the death of Jesus and the resulting growth of Christianity, Jews went from being discredited to being condemned. Between the second and fifth centuries, prominent Christian theologians preached *Adversos Judaeos* homilies, labelling Jews depraved, their very souls inhabited by demons. From here, it's nonstop, though in some "gentler" regimes, Jews were subjugated and taxed, not murdered. Christians in Europe couldn't contain their hatred. There were the Crusades, the blood libel, the charges of deicide, the expulsion of Jews from every country in Western Europe. Though at first Eastern Europe seemed safer, the same tropes followed Jews in wave after wave of pogroms. We know the twentieth century denouement of Jew-hatred. We are sorry witnesses to the rabid twenty-first century attacks on all of us, from our children to our grandparents.

What's the point of this trek through history? Don't we have enough books about the Jews as scapegoats? And what (if we aren't exhausted yet) of Israel? Hurwitz devotes two chapters to a fair examination of Israel's history (spoiler alert: Israel didn't begin because of the Holocaust. For some, it's recycled material, but Hurwitz's personal take on the history brings new meaning to it.

This is not a simplistic book. It's dense and intimate. The ultimate and perhaps ironic result of Hurwitz asking deep questions and facing difficult answers is her final inspiration to "live proudly, gratefully, and joyfully—as a Jew."

Antisemitism, An American Tradition by Pamela S. Nadell

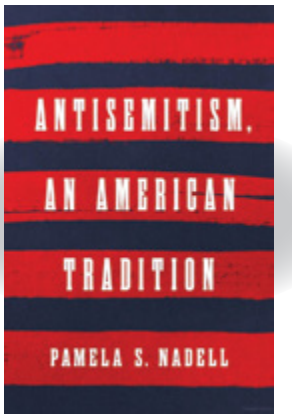
Reviewed by Eileen M. Angelini

Having attended a livestream of Pamela Nadell's October 12, 2025 webinar at the Institute for the Study of Contemporary Antisemitism at Indiana University Bloomington, I was extremely motivated to read her most recent book, *Antisemitism, An American Tradition*. Nadell is an engaging speaker who presents her research in a well-reasoned and thoughtful manner. The same can be said about her book in which she details the history of antisemitism in America and how this history continues to impact the lives of American Jews.

Across an introduction ("Antisemitism Becomes an American Tradition") and seven chapters ("Blasphemers and Enemies: Colonial America"; "Anti-Jewish Prejudice: The Young Republic"; "A Misfortune to Be a Jew: From Civil War to a New Century"; "An Uncomfortable Place for Jews: 1900-1933"; "'A Poison, Virulent and Dreadful': Depression and World War II"; "No Age is Golden: From the End of World War II to a New Century"; and, "A New Litany: Charlottesville, Pittsburgh, Poway, Jersey City, Monsey, October 7," Nadell traces the trajectory of the deeply embedded antisemitism that exists today in the United States.

When Jews first arrived in New Amsterdam in 1654, Peter Stuyvesant did his best to deport them. Although Stuyvesant failed in his attempts, Nadell stresses that it was at this point that negative stereotypes born in the Old World were transplanted to the New World. She provides examples of how American Jews were prevented from holding public office, obtaining financial credit, or being hired for a job. Moreover, she explains that American universities set quotas on how many Jews could be admitted. Most importantly, she demonstrates how this deep-rooted antisemitism has led to attacks on the Jewish people as well as on their synagogues and cemeteries.

While providing a close analysis of the history of antisemitism in the United States, Nadell probes into recent manifestations (Charlottesville, VA and Pittsburgh's Tree of Life). Very telling is her analysis of 2000 presidential candidate Al Gore's choice of Senator Joseph Lieberman as his running mate. She writes: "His candidacy revealed the warmth of American support for the man and the Jewish people. Even as many Jews believed that antisemitism 'remained an inescapable fact of life,' this campaign confirmed how much, in many sectors of American life, it had waned."



Still, it had not been pushed to the margins everywhere. Immediately after Lieberman's nomination, antisemitism burst out in the online sphere. Internet chat rooms and message boards saw tens of thousands of slurs posted about Lieberman and Jews. Not only were they, as expected, rampant on white supremacists' platforms, they also spiked in mainstream political forums.

But responses to the defamation revealed that many had little tolerance for antisemitism. America Online (AOL) deleted vicious posts and prepared to suspend accounts of those violating its conduct code. After the NAACP's Dallas branch president said on a Gospel radio show that since Jews primarily care about money, "partnership" with them at such a high level were "very suspicious," the national president suspended him. The branch head resigned. Asked if he would apologize, he was evasive. He said that he "misspoke." Instead of referring to Jews and Jewish people, he should have commented "specifically" on Lieberman. This was hardly an apology.

In today's age of Artificial Intelligence, misinformation, and misunderstandings that flame the fires of antisemitism in all its forms, Nadell's *Antisemitism, An American Tradition* is essential reading for all. She makes a clear case for how antisemitism in the United States is not new but is part of America's legacy.

New Director of Community Security

The Jewish Federation of Central New York has announced the appointment of William "Bill" Bronner as its new Director of Community Security. Bronner brings nearly three decades of law enforcement experience to the role, including work as a drug intelligence officer with the New York/New Jersey High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area. His background also includes serving as a senior investigator with the New York State Police and participating in the Onondaga County School Safety Task Force.

In his new role, Bronner will be responsible for enhancing the safety and security of Jewish institutions throughout Central New York. He will collaborate with local law enforcement, community leaders, and national security organizations to develop and implement proactive security measures. His extensive experience in threat assessment, crisis response, and interagency coordination is expected to strengthen the Federation's ongoing efforts to protect the community.

The Federation's Magen Circle leadership expressed confidence that Bronner's expertise will be instrumental in advancing its mission to ensure a safe environment for all community members. His appointment marks a significant step in the Federation's commitment to community safety and resilience. Federation President & CEO Mark Segel said, "We are very pleased to have Bill join the Federation team. He brings a world of valuable experience to the table and has already demonstrated that he's a great fit for our organization and the community. Thank you to the Magen Circle members who conducted the interviews and made the wise decision to recommend hiring Bill." Expressing his commitment to his new position, Director Bronner said, "Thank you for entrusting me with the vital responsibility of keeping our community safe. I am committed to working closely with everyone to ensure that our security measures are proactive, responsive, and rooted in the values that make our community strong."

Jewish Federation

New Communications & Advertising Guidelines

COMMUNITY CALENDAR

The Community Calendar is for the entire community to help stay informed and avoid overlapping events.

To maintain the accuracy and usefulness of the calendar:

- Only events with fully confirmed, specific dates will be accepted
- Estimated dates, tentative plans, or ranges (e.g., "early June" or "June 5–7") will NOT be approved

How to Submit an Event

1. Visit: jewishfederationcny.org/submit-event
   - You can also visit the Jewish Federation of CNY website and on the calendar page there is a button that says "SUBMIT AN EVENT"
2. Fill out all required fields.
3. Once submitted, the event will be reviewed and typically added to the calendar within 1–3 business days
4. It is your responsibility to check the calendar before scheduling your event to help prevent conflicts
5. The Federation is not responsible for overlapping events.
6. For any updates to specific events please email esheedy@jewishfederationcny.org

COMMUNITY HAPPENINGS

Community Happenings is our weekly email bulletin, distributed every Friday to our extensive subscriber list. It highlights Jewish events happening in the community and is a great tool for visibility and promotion.

Eligibility

- Must be a dated event (specific day)
- Events will be listed for three weeks leading up to the date
- For multi-part or ongoing series:
  - Submit the first event as usual
  - For remaining dates, submit a new flyer, with REV in the file name once the previous one expires
  - Flyers with past dates will be removed automatically

Submission Process

- Email materials to: esheedy@jewishfederationcny.org
- DUE: Wednesdays at 12:00 PM (noon) for inclusion in Friday's email

File Requirements

- Format: PDF or JPG only
- Max size: 5MB
- File naming format:
  - Single event: OrgNameMonthDay (e.g., JCCMarch6)
  - Multiple events same day: SHDSMar17#2
  - Revisions: add REV (e.g., TAYMay2REV)

Common Issues to Avoid

-Incorrectly named files will not upload in Constant Contact

-Early or incomplete submissions will not be held or queued for later

-Files larger than 5MB will be rejected

JEWISH OBSERVER

The Jewish Observer is our monthly print publication distributed across Central New York, providing news, thought pieces, and updates from across the Jewish community.

Publication Deadlines

Our publisher requires final copy on the 1st of the month prior to the publication date. To ensure time for review, layout, and editing, we require submissions at least two weeks before that date.

Examples:

- October issue: Content due by August 15
- May issue: Content due by March 15

Early submissions are strongly encouraged. Articles sent late may not be included.

QUESTIONS?

We're happy to help guide you through the submission process or answer questions about the best platform for your message.

Email: esheedy@jewishfederationcny.org

Phone: 315-445-0161

Let's work together to keep the local Jewish community inspired, and connected!

DEFIANT REQUIEM

VERDI AT TEREZÍN

APRIL 16, 2026 7 PM OnCenter Crouse Hinds Theater

"We will sing to the Nazis what we cannot say to them."

In the darkness of the Terezín concentration camp, where hunger, despair, and death were daily companions, a small group of Jewish prisoners clung to the only weapon left to them—music. Led by conductor Rafael Schächter, they raised their voices in Verdi's *Requiem Mass for the Dead*, not as victims but as resisters. Sixteen times, under unimaginable conditions, they sang this towering work of art. Sixteen times, even as their numbers dwindled, each rehearsal cruelly interrupted by transports to Auschwitz where they were slaughtered.

Yet the chorus endured. Schächter rebuilt it again and again. Before SS officials, before the Red Cross, they sang words that their captors could not silence: music that thundered with defiance, sorrow, and an unbroken will to live. It was an act of resistance so profound that it echoes across the generations—proof that even in the heart of genocide, the human spirit could not be extinguished.

Today, the world urgently needs to hear their story. In an era when Holocaust ignorance is spreading, when distortion and denial find fertile ground online, and when antisemitism grows ever bolder, *Defiant Requiem* stands as both a warning and a beacon. It confronts hate not with arguments, but with art.

This monumental concert drama has been performed throughout the world. Now, the Jewish Federation, the Syracuse Orchestra, the Syracuse University Oratorio Society and the Defiant Requiem Foundation will bring it to Syracuse. April 16th, we will gather to bear witness—to honor the prisoners who sang for their lives, to remember the millions who were silenced, and to remind ourselves of what is at stake when hatred goes unchallenged.

This is more than a concert. It is a call to conscience.

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Our Leaders of Tomorrow

National programs for Jewish teens have particular resonance for communities like Central New York, allowing local teens to bring home new energy, ideas, and networks. They become conduits between their peers and a broader Jewish world, enriching synagogue youth groups, schools, and community programs with what they have experienced. They can then model how serious Jewish engagement can look at the local level—immersive, thoughtful, and rooted in shared experience. At a time when Jewish young people face complex questions about identity, antisemitism, Israel, and pluralism, these programs provide a space for honesty, learning, and community. They remind participants that Judaism can be both rigorous and joyful, ancient and relevant.

Julia Zames and Remy Sinclair, SHDS alums and juniors at Christian Brothers Academy and Fayetteville-Manlius High School respectively, were selected to participate in the prestigious Shalom Hartman Teen Institute Fellowship for 2025-26. Recently, they attended the Fellowship *shabbaton* in New Jersey, which brought together high school students from across North America for a weekend of study, reflection, and Shabbat observance. Held over three days, the retreat opened the fellowship year and served as the foundation for a program that asks Jewish teens to think deeply about identity, community, and belonging. Participants arrived on Friday afternoon, settling into a space designed to slow the pace of everyday life and make room for conversation, ritual and thought. The weekend was structured around the rhythm of Shabbat, beginning with a communal dinner and Kabbalat Shabbat, followed by small-group study and discussion. Participants joined "shevet" groups—small circles of about fifteen teens guided by *madrichim*, who are alumni of earlier Hartman programs. Within these groups, the fellows studied classical Jewish texts, engaged in contemporary questions about Israel and Jewish peoplehood, and reflected on what it means to live a meaningful Jewish life today.

Throughout the retreat, the balance between formal study and informal community-building was deliberate. Shabbat services, singing, walks, and shared meals created a rhythm that encouraged both reflection and connection. On Saturday afternoon, fellows gathered to articulate the questions they were carrying into the fellowship year: What does Jewish identity mean in a diverse and often divided world? How can we hold differing perspectives on Israel, faith, and community? These conversations reflected the heart of the Hartman Teen Fellowship's mission—to take teenagers seriously as thinkers, not just as participants in Jewish programming.

For many of the teens, the weekend marked their first time living in a community that was at once observant, pluralistic, and intellectually serious. The program's organizers emphasize that the retreat is not only a learning experience but also an act of modeling what Jewish life can be when ritual, community, and thought come together. The *shabbaton* set the tone for the year ahead, establishing expectations and relationships that will sustain participants through the fellowship's ongoing online study and leadership development sessions.

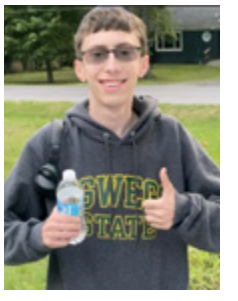
Julia Zames said that "the best part of the *shabbaton* was meeting so many Jewish teens like me who had a common interest in learning more about pluralistic Judaism, Israel and community. One of the greatest takeaways that I have is that some things may have to be sacrificed if we are to have a pluralistic community, and people need to be open to seeing ideas from new perspectives and welcoming different mindsets." Remy Sinclair commented, "The best part of the Hartman *shabbaton* for me were all the group activities which included everyone, such as the *havdalah* Saturday night and the singing after meals and at free time period it was the best part because it gave a sense of real community and something that I can remember and look back on with joy. He added, "the most important thing that I learned was that I will never be truly alone even if I feel lonely. There will always be someone where I can talk to and trust and that will understand exactly how I feel as a Jew today."

A delegation of five Central New York teens will attend the 2026 BBYO International Convention over U.S. Presidents Day weekend in February. More than 5,000 of the Jewish community's top teen leaders, educators, influencers, professionals, and philanthropists from around the world will gather one of the largest Jewish communal events of the year.

This year, the IC will take place in Philadelphia and local BBYO chapter members Gil Juran, Rose Scheer, Issy Weinberg and Anya and Owen Reckess will be attending for the first time. "It is a great way to connect with Judaism and find a Jewish community on an international scale," said Anya. "My goal is to bring home the energy and excitement from the International Convention to our local community to grow our BBYO chapter and create connections with more Jewish teens in Syracuse." Issy added, "I can't wait to be a part of a huge BBYO experience and to meet so many new people. I think that going will definitely help me understand and learn so many new traditions and it will also strengthen my pride in being Jewish as well." Rose said, "I'm so excited to meet so many other Jewish teens from across the order and have my first IC experience." Owen agreed, saying, "I'm also really excited to be the first of the Syracuse teens to go to IC because I know this will become a strong tradition in the future." Gil summed up what the convention means for him: "Not only am I able to see my friends and BBYO family from ILTC, but I am able to have a place within the international order. I will be able to see and be surrounded by so many Jewish teens from all around the world, all united as Alephs and BBGs."

BBYO is the leading pluralistic Jewish teen movement aspiring to involve more Jewish teens in more meaningful Jewish experiences. BBYO welcomes Jewish teens of all backgrounds in a network of hundreds of chapters across North America and 60 countries around the world. BBYO reaches nearly 70,000 teens annually and serves as the Jewish community's largest and most valuable platform for delivering fun, meaningful and affordable experiences that inspire a lasting connection to the Jewish people. At IC, delegates hear from and meet inspiring speakers, deepen their leadership skills, serve the local community, celebrate Shabbat and learn together, have access to exclusive music performances, and do their part to strengthen the Jewish future.

Jewish student life at SUNY Oswego centers on Jewish Life Oswego, a student-led organization that offers social, cultural, and educational programs on campus. Its president is Joseph Seidman, a graduate of the Syracuse Hebrew Day School and the Epstein School of Jewish Studies. Jewish Life Oswego's activities are designed to connect students with Jewish traditions and provide a setting for discussion and observance. The group hosts weekly Shabbat dinners, holiday events, and open meetings such as "Safe Space" gatherings, where participants discuss identity and campus life. Joseph says his job as president is to "attend, set up, and run events."



Educational programming for Jewish students is supported through JewishU, a national college learning series that partners with campus groups. At Oswego, JewishU courses have included short sessions on Jewish history, ethics, and modern cultural topics. The program uses an informal discussion-based model, intended to supplement academic study with focused exploration of Jewish ideas. "Students can learn about Judaism while also getting rewarded for their studies through cash or credits that can be saved up for trips to places like Gibraltar, Israel, Panama, and more," adds Seidman.

Nova Survivor Speaks at Hamilton Chabad House

by Sophie Karbstein

Shoham Cohen, a survivor of the Oct. 7, 2023 Hamas-led attacks on the Nova Music Festival, spoke to approximately 75 Colgate University students during Shabbat services at Hamilton's Chabad House. Cohen, who is 22, was attending the festival when Hamas militants attacked. He spent several hours evading gunfire and rocket-propelled grenade attacks before being rescued by the Israeli Defense Forces.

The event, open to all Colgate students, regardless of religious background, was organized by students and sponsored by parents, alumni and Colgate trustees. The visit originated from discussions in Chabad's Sinai Scholars group, a weekly cohort of about 30 students who meet to explore modern-day Jewish identity. Chabad Rabbi Shmuly Haskelevich shared that "students wanted to better understand what happened on October 7th and what it means for them as Jewish students today."

During his talk, Cohen described how he and his friends initially attempted to flee along a main road before seeking cover beneath a stage. As gunfire approached, they ran through forests and fields for the remainder of the day. He recalled harrowing encounters with false allies, bullets and RPG fire, and he acknowledged the miracle of his survival in the context of so many lost lives that day. Junior Noah Dry, president of Chabad in Hamilton, shared his deep admiration for Cohen's composure. "Shoham is an incredibly impressive individual. He moved so seamlessly between moments of emotional, sensitive storytelling and the kind of lighthearted conversation you'd expect from college-age students sharing dinner over glasses of wine," Dry said. "Speaking with him felt like talking to an old soul, one of calm and composure who spoke with confidence, as if he had already lived a lifetime of experience."

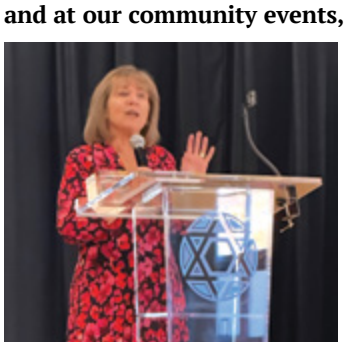
Cohen eventually joined up with other Israeli civilians who had taken weapons from Hamas militants, and they held their position until IDF forces arrived. "Cohen's message is one of hope, resilience and faith. He kept returning to the simple phrase 'keep on smiling,' a reflection of his determination to choose life and light despite the darkness he witnessed," Rabbi Haskelevich said. "The students were visibly moved, not only from sadness, but from pride and purpose."

Dry reflected on the significance of hosting Cohen. "Hearing directly from someone who endured an event of such global significance, and a tragedy of mass scale at that, was a profoundly impactful experience. In an age where so much of our information is sourced from the internet, the opportunity to engage face-to-face with a survivor brought with it a rare and powerful authenticity." Colgate senior Sarah Salzman added that, "The Israeli/Palestinian conflict is so highly contested, and I thought that it would be an interesting and beneficial experience to hear a firsthand perspective. She noted the difference between reading about events online and hearing them in person "Hearing about a 20-year-old having to run for his life and dodge bullets shot by terrorists is not the easiest thing," Salzman said. "I think that Colgate students live in such a bubble of privilege and naïveté, and so by having someone who has lived through experiences of war come and share their stories firsthand is an eye-opening and beneficial experience."

Sophie Karbstein is editor-in-chief of the Colgate Maroon-News from which this article is reprinted with permission and slight emendations.

NCJW 50th Hannah Solomon Award Luncheon

The National Council of Jewish Women's (NCJW) Syracuse Section held its annual Hannah G. Solomon luncheon in October, celebrating the work of Susan Case DeMari. The event was chaired by last year's award recipient, Anick Sinclair. Barbara Davis, the 2015 awardee, introduced DeMari, saying "Susan's work in Syracuse since 2000 has emphasized a coordinated and unified approach to critical safety and security needs, emphasizing common standards to embrace a culture of security awareness, preparedness and disaster response. Due to her efforts, we have established proactive and reactive protocols, in which there is one point-person—Susan—who works exclusively with law enforcement on behalf of the entire Jewish community. When we see the reassuring presence of law enforcement at our religious schools, at our synagogue services and at our community events, Susan is behind it."



DeMari spoke of her work as Director of Community Security of the Jewish Federation, noting that "the strength of our partnership with law enforcement is based on a mutual trust, and what is so important to me—an understanding that we in the Jewish community make no demands or hold no outsized expectations, but rather, we are here to be their partners and provide information to help them do their jobs. Equally as important to me is that we, as a community, make sure to take the time to simply say 'thank you' and 'we appreciate you,' whether it's over a breakfast, a luncheon or simply by helping to underwrite some equipment needed to help them do their jobs to keep us safe. We cannot do this enough."

There were well over 100 attendees at the luncheon at the JCC, who donated over $4000 in support of the NCJW's annual contributions to the CNY Diaper Bank and the Beard School, in conjunction with the Pomeranz Shankman Martin Charitable Foundation, Inc. The NCJW Hannah G. Solomon award is presented annually "to a woman who has helped to change and expand the role of other women in vital areas of community life, and whose leadership has motivated others to fight for change."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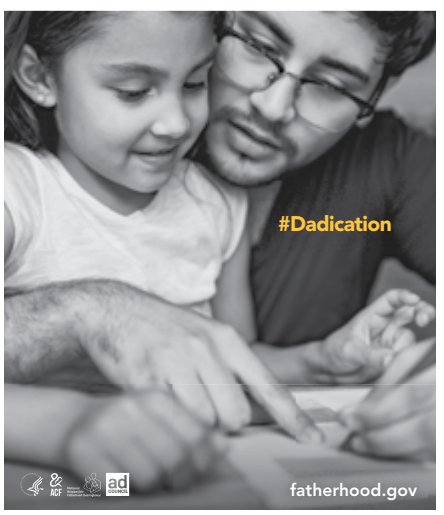

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Nelson Mandela's White Comrades and Their Legacy at Temple Concord

by Chana Meir

On January 8, 2026, at 7:30 pm, Glenn Frankel will discuss his book *Rivonia's Children: Nelson Mandela's White Comrades and Their Legacy*" as part of Temple Concord's Regina F. Goldenberg Cultural Series. The book recounts the little-known story of three Jewish families who fought alongside Nelson Mandela in his struggle against apartheid, at a time when South Africa's white-minority regime had descended into a brutal police state. Facing imprisonment, exile, and even murder, these activists nonetheless found the courage to play their part in paving the way for a multi-racial democracy. *The New York Times* praised the book as "A scrupulously researched, riveting examination of people who fought to make their country a better place."

Temple Concord's Author Series, part of the Regina F. Goldenberg Cultural Series, is made possible through the Jewish Book Council and is supported by the Jewish Federation of Central New York. The event is virtual and free. ***To receive the Zoom link, register by clicking the link on the Events Calendar at templeconcord.org.***

CBS-CS series: *Sofrot*: Anatomy of *Tefillin*

by Lawrence Wilde

Community members will have a chance to take a closer look at one of Judaism's most recognizable rituals, wrapping *tefillin*, in a three-part Sunday series at Congregation Beth Sholom-Chevra Shas series called *Sofrot: The Anatomy of Tefillin. Tefillin,* the small black leather boxes that contain passages from the Torah, are worn on the arm and head during morning prayer and are meant to help a person to focus, settle the mind, and bring intention to the start of the day. Many people find the practice grounding, especially during difficult moments such as illness, grief, or periods of stress.

The course will be taught by CBS-CS Adult Learning Committee member Zvi Teitelbaum on January 11, January 25, and February 8 from 10 to 11 am. The class will explore what *tefillin* are, how they are made, and why this practice continues to hold spiritual meaning for so many people. It is designed for anyone who wants a clearer understanding of the tradition, whether they have wrapped *tefillin* before or are curious to learn for the first time.

The series leads directly into the community's participation in the World Wide Wrap on February 8, when Jews around the world celebrate the mitzvah of *tefillin* at their Sunday morning *minyanim*. The morning begins with *minyan* at 9 am at CBS-CS, followed by the World Wide Wrap at 9:30 am, when the class joins the larger community in taking part in this global initiative.

At the World Wide Wrap, participants will learn how to wrap tefillin with guidance from experienced members of the congregation. Men and women will be teaching, and extra sets of *tefillin* will be available for anyone who needs one. The event is open to everyone, regardless of background or experience.

For more information, contact admin@cbscs.org.

A Jewish Carnivore's Dream Come True

Bert Erlebacher was a distributor for the Globe Slicing Machine Company; he formed his own company, Earlco Food Processing Machines, Inc., and later worked for Central Food Processing Equipment, Inc. He was a man who knew the importance of a good slicing machine and sharp high-quality knives.

When Bert's grandson Alec, the man in charge of the JCC's annual KlezFest extravaganza, wanted to serve corned beef and pastrami, the iconic deli meats of Jewish-American cuisine, he ran into a problem. Slicing corned beef and pastrami requires a precision blade. Without it, the meat resists.

Enter Bert's sons Mark and Jay. Together with Lewis Dubroff, they purchased a high-quality slicing machine for the JCC kitchen – and lovers of rich, savory, melt-in-your-mouth perfection can now order these delectable kosher meats to take home to make the most incredible sandwiches.

BTW, the new machine is called "The Bert."

A Special Tikkun Olam Day

Students at Temple Adath Yeshurun spent a Sunday afternoon bringing lessons about kindness to life. During a special Tikkun Olam Day—rooted in the Jewish value of "repairing the world"—children and families moved through hands-on service stations set up throughout the synagogue, each one focused on helping people locally and abroad. Kids jumped in to assemble care bags for children in Onondaga County foster care, make blankets for Project Linus, create Chanukah cards for Israeli soldiers and write postcards for the residents of Menorah Park. "Today is a community service day for our students and our congregation," said curriculum specialist Kimi Sisskind. "We wanted to give students a hands-on opportunity to make a difference in our Syracuse community." The goal is to help kids connect what they learn in the classroom with real acts of kindness, showing them that even small efforts can create meaningful change. Another Tikkun Olam Day is already on the calendar for April.

Temple Adath Yeshurun to Host Inaugural Chesed Celebration in February

by Lauren Thirer

Temple Adath Yeshurun will launch a new tradition with its first annual *Chesed* Celebration, an evening dedicated to honoring compassion, service, and the individuals who help shape the heart of our community. The event will take place on February 7, 2026, at Temple Adath Yeshurun.

Rooted in the Jewish value of *chesed*—grace, benevolence, and compassion the celebration will honor Diane Kuppermann, Dr. Jaclyn Sisskind, and Ben Gnacik, three exceptional individuals whose contributions have strengthened both the TAY community and the wider Central New York region. These honorees were selected for their unwavering commitment to lifting others up, supporting communal life, and embodying the spirit of kindness that lies at the center of Jewish tradition.

The evening will feature live music, signature cocktails, and elevated hors d'oeuvres, creating a warm and celebratory atmosphere for guests. The highlight of the night will be a special awards ceremony recognizing each honoree's unique impact and the ways in which their work continues to inspire others. "*Chesed* is not just a value—it's a way of life," said Fundraising Chair Chaim Jaffe. "This event is an opportunity to spotlight those who demonstrate every day what it means to care deeply for others and for our community. We hope this becomes an annual tradition that reminds us of the power of compassion and service."

With plans to make the *Chesed* Celebration an ongoing yearly event, Temple Adath Yeshurun aims to bring the community together to honor service, celebrate connection, and elevate the work that strengthens Jewish life in Central New York. ***Tickets and sponsorship opportunities will be available through Temple Adath Yeshurun.***

Internationally Known Jewish Genealogical Researcher to Speak at Temple Concord

by Chana Meir

On January 11, 2026, at 1:45 pm, Janette Silverman will discuss her book, *The Stories They Never Told Us,* as part of Temple Concord's Regina F. Goldenberg Cultural Series in conjunction with The Jewish Genealogical Society of Central New York.

Silverman, a star researcher with Ancestry.com, is renowned for her Jewish genealogical research, which she has pursued for nearly 35 years. *The Stories They Never Told Us* explores the questions: "After so many European families were scattered by world wars, countless border changes, and genocide, how do we find our ancestral families? How do we find the descendants of those who left?" Silverman interweaves historical events with her own family history, researching family memories and often finding surprising facts that contradict what's been passed down.

Temple Concord's Author Series, part of the Regina F. Goldenberg Cultural Series, is made possible through the Jewish Book Council and is supported by the Jewish Federation of Central New York. The Jewish Genealogical Society of Central New York thanks the Jewish Community Center for its ongoing support.

The event is virtual and free. To receive the Zoom link, register by clicking the link on the Events Calendar at templeconcord.org.

HADASHOT TOVOT GOOD NEWS! GOOD NEWS! GOOD NEWS!

SHDS ELECTS STUDENT COUNCIL OFFICERS

NEXT GEN HAS A NEW LOOK

FEDERATION LEADERS ATTEND JFNA GENERAL ASSEMBLY IN DC

MAYOR OF KFAR HEVRON VISITS SYRACUSE ON FRIENDSHIP MISSION

TAY TIKKUN OLAM DAY

Students at Temple Adath Yeshurun spent a Sunday afternoon bringing lessons about kindness to life. During a special Tikkun Olam Day—rooted in the Jewish value of "repairing the world"—children and families moved through hands-on service stations set up throughout the synagogue, each one focused on helping people locally and abroad. Kids jumped in to assemble care bags for children in Onondaga County foster care, make blankets for Project Linus, create Chanukah cards for Israeli soldiers and write postcards for the residents of Menorah Park. "Today is a community service day for our students and our congregation," said curriculum specialist Kimi Sisskind. "We wanted to give students a hands-on opportunity to make a difference in our Syracuse community." The goal is to help kids connect what they learn in the classroom with real acts of kindness, showing them that even small efforts can create meaningful change. Another Tikkun Olam Day is already on the calendar for April.

JCC

Something for Everyone: Community Programming at the JCC

by Ashley Schmitz

The JCC of Syracuse's Community Programming Department has a winter lineup worth braving the cold for, with opportunities to connect, learn, and create. From classic mystery novels and mindful doodling to thought-provoking films and cozy crafting, there's something for everyone to enjoy no matter how chilly it gets outside.

Knit & Crochet for a Cause!

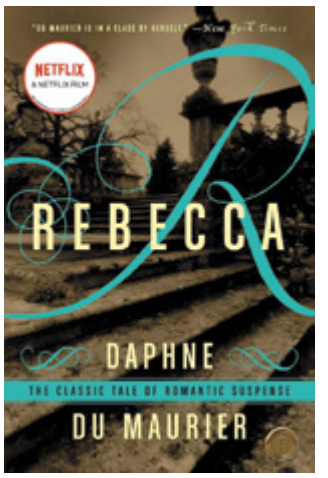
Sunday, January 18, 11 am - 4 pm

Don't forget needles (or hooks) for the Knit and Crochet-a-Thon, hosted by the JCC and Temple Adath. Participants will make scarves for the local unhoused community and help spread warmth this winter. Yarn donations are still being accepted at both locations.

Dive into a Mystery or Two

First Wednesday of the Month, 12:45 - 1:45 pm

Love a good plot twist? Join the Mystery Book Club and get lost in classic whodunits and modern thrillers. The upcoming schedule is a page-turner and spoiler alert: great discussions are guaranteed:



Rebecca by Daphne Du Maurier - February 4
Sharp Objects by Gillian Flynn - March 4
The Midnight Feast by Lucy Foley - Date TBD
A Botanist's Guide to Parties and Poisons by Kate Khavari - Date TBD

Write On! Workshop

Sunday, February 8, 10:30 am - 3:30 pm

Calling all storytellers, experienced or novice! The JCC's Writer's Workshop Day offers a fun and engaging space for participants to explore their skills in poetry, memoirs or short stories with instruction from local writers.

Relax, Create, and Zen Out

Date TBA

Need to unwind after the holiday hustle? The *Zentangle – In Color!* Workshop offers a fun, creative way for attendees to relax their minds and let their imagination flow. Learn how art and meditation intertwine beautifully by using rhythmic patterns and splashes of color. No artistic experience required.

Chess for All Ages

Date TBA

The *JCC Chess Club* welcomes players of all skill levels for open play sessions starting this winter. It's a great way for participants to exercise the mind and meet fellow enthusiasts.

Lights, Camera, Screenings!

Film buffs, save the date! There's plenty to look forward to on the JCC's big screen this winter with stories that inspire:

***Holocaust Remembrance Day: Reckonings* Screening:**

On Sunday, January 25 at 3 pm, the JCC will present Reckonings, a powerful documentary recounting the intense negotiations that led to reparations for Holocaust survivors.

***For Your Consideration* Screening:** On *Sunday, February 22 at 1 pm*, enjoy this witty comedy featuring Eugene Levy, Catherine O'Hara, and Jennifer Coolidge.

Lectures and More Coming Soon...

Settle in for a season of fascinating lectures and eye-opening stories at the JCC of Syracuse. Meant for history buffs, lifelong learners and everyone in between, the JCC's upcoming lectures will keep calendars full all winter long.

92NY Lecture Series: Streaming monthly from New York City, these lectures bring world-class thinkers, performers, and cultural icons right to the JCC.

Caretaker Lecture Series: This thoughtful lecture series brings together experts and organizations offering tools, insights, and emotional support for caregivers navigating this important stage of life.

The Gilded Age on Syracuse's James Street Presentation: Take a stroll through history with Historian Dennis Connors while he explores Syracuse's James Street from the 1890s to 1930s.

The Golden Age of Hollywood Lecture: Step behind the curtain of early Hollywood and discover the Jewish composers whose music gave classic cinema its magic. Presented by Adam Fine, host of *WCNY's Classic Choices*.

***Four Winters: A Story of Jewish Partisan Resistance and Bravery in WWII* Screening:** *Four Winters* weaves together rare interviews, archival footage, and personal letters to illuminate the lives of those who fought back against Nazi occupation.

The JCC of Syracuse has a full season of connection, creativity, and discovery waiting for everyone to enjoy. Visit jccsyr.org/cp for dates, registration, and updates on all upcoming events.

JCC Youth Athletics Keeps Kids Moving All Winter

By Ashley Schmitz

When the weather outside is frightful, the JCC's Youth Athletics program keeps things delightfully active! From flips and kicks to leaps and spins, children can stay active, energized, and engaged all winter long through a lineup of fun-filled fitness and sports classes.

The Youth Athletics program offers children more than just physical activity; they provide opportunities to build confidence, learn teamwork, and make lasting friendships. "When kids have a place to move, learn, and belong, they grow stronger in every way," says Youth Athletics Director Sherri Lamana. "A great youth athletics program brings that spirit to life through gymnastics, dance, and other sport programs."

Classes are open to the entire community and designed for children from preschool age through school age. The JCC also offers convenient before-class care and transportation for students in the F-M schools, all public schools within the Jamesville-DeWitt School District, and Ed Smith School.

Winter Sessions run through mid-March for the following classes:

Gymnastics

Kids can flip, balance, and tumble their way through winter in gymnastics classes that focus on floor, beam, bars, and vault. Classes for beginners and intermediate gymnasts are held for one hour every Wednesday. For advanced athletes, the JCC offers Team and Pre-Team Gymnastics for two or three days per week (by tryout or coach approval), where participants compete against other local programs.

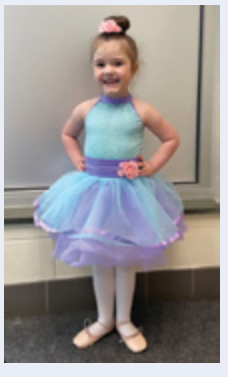
Tumbling Tots

For the tiniest athletes, the JCC offers Tumbling Tots in two different age groups, 3 year olds and Pre-K, on Mondays and Tuesdays. Both groups will be introduced to the basics of gymnastics, including beam, bars, and tumble tracks. These little learners develop balance, coordination, and a big love for movement.

Ninja Warrior

Winter energy to burn? Ninja Warrior classes let kids leap, swing, and climb their way through a custom obstacle course inspired by the popular competition show. Ninja Warrior classes are also broken up by age, with Pre-K classes on Thursdays and K-3rd or K-6th grade on Fridays. It's the perfect way to build strength, agility, and focus while having a blast!

Ballet



It's plié and play time at the JCC! Ballet classes invite both girls and boys to step into the world of grace, strength, and poise. Students build flexibility, coordination, and confidence while learning foundational movements in the JCC's beautiful dance aerobics studio, complete with mirrors, ballet bars, and a wood floor perfect for pirouettes. K-6th graders can sign up for classes on Thursdays and Fridays while mini dancers can take Pre-Ballet on Fridays.

Jazz & Tap

Get ready to shuffle, stomp, and sparkle! Jazz and tap classes bring the rhythm, energy, and fun to the dance floor. Students learn to move with confidence, build strength, and express themselves through upbeat choreography and toe-tapping tunes, all designed to develop a well-rounded dancer. Both school age and Pre-K classes are held in the dance aerobic studio on Thursday afternoons.

Rookie Sports

Snow can't stop the fun! Rookie Sports keeps young athletes running, catching, kicking, and throwing their way through winter. The focus is on teamwork and good old-fashioned fun through pre-sports skills training and the use of miniature training equipment. Classes are 30 minutes long and available for 3-year-olds and Pre-K on Wednesdays.

The temperature may be dropping, but JCC Youth Athletics is just heating up. Members and non-members can still register for Winter session classes, but space is limited and classes fill fast. ***For more on Youth Athletics, visit jccsyr.org/youth-athletics or contact Sherri Lamanna at slamanna@jccsyr.org or 315-445-2040 x126.***

This column features businesses owned by members of our community, as well as artists and musical programs and is generously sponsored by RAV Properties.

Brothers Threads

Christian Brothers Academy launched an innovative student-run business with a philanthropic purpose this fall. Brothers Threads, an apparel and branding store, merges innovation, school pride and real-world learning in a transformative way. Developed and operated by CBA students, under faculty mentorship, Brothers Threads teaches students about the operations of a business, including leadership, product design and marketing.

What is unique about the enterprise is that one hundred percent of its revenue goes directly to support financial assistance at CBA.

The program director for Brothers Threads is Mark Zames, whose four daughters attended CBA after graduating from the Syracuse Hebrew Day School. He explained that Brothers Threads sells merchandise you'd expect from a spirit store: hoodies, hats, t-shirts, polos, jackets, and bags. Soon they will be launching engraving as well. But the backstory is what is different. CBA students themselves design, produce, market, and sell the merchandise. They manage everything from sketching graphics and running embroidery machines to forecasting demand, balancing budgets, and fulfilling orders. Running Brothers Threads is no small task. Student leaders hold titles like co-CEO, design lead, marketing manager, and operations coordinator. They face the same challenges as any startup: meeting customer expectations, aligning design ideas with production constraints, managing costs, and keeping orders on schedule. But those challenges are also the point. Students learn resilience when something goes wrong, ingenuity when a design needs

tweaking, and teamwork when orders pile up. They're not just learning how to run a shop; they're learning how to think critically, problem-solve, and lead.

"This business will inspire entrepreneurial spirit. It'll develop real world skills and it will strengthen our community through purposeful service," said CBA President Matt Keough. He added that the initiative not only "inspires entrepreneurial spirit but strengthens our community through purposeful service." Brothers Threads is not just about clothes or matching water bottles; it's about equity, opportunity and pride.

The initiative was made possible by the generous support and vision of CBA alumnus Jack Morrison and his wife Mary. "You can feel the enthusiasm. You can feel the energy of the students," said Morrison, who gave $300,000 for the project. "Both Mary and I are confident this addition will make a lasting difference for CBA and its students."

Perhaps the most powerful outcome is the sense of pride. Wearing a Brothers Threads hoodie or hat now carries an added meaning: it's a product of student effort, a symbol of belonging, and a contribution to students' futures. Organizations other than CBA that purchase personalized items from Brothers Threads know that they are not only receiving high-quality wares, they are also contributing to a worthy cause. Current clients outside the CBA community include other local schools (including the Syracuse Hebrew Day School), the New York State Police, and businesses in the central New York area.

Brothers Threads is already looking to the future. Students are working on expanding product lines, collaborating with local groups, and experimenting with operations to ensure the highest possible standards for efficiency. They are ready for growth, with their extensive website of over 10,000 products, and students are excited to begin working with businesses all over the United States.

Kyle Evans, a junior who serves as co-CEO, said, "We have built a fantastic team of CBA's finest students, constructed a facility, and successfully started a business in under four months. At this point last year, I never could've imagined that we would ever be presented with an opportunity like this, but here we are, up and running and creating apparel that our CBA family members will wear with pride for a long time to come."

To order from Brothers Threads, visit their website: brothersthreads.com.

"Think About It"

Substack is an online platform that allows writers, artists, and creators to publish newsletters and other content directly to their subscribers via email and a dedicated website. It defines itself as "a new economic engine for culture" by which creators build communities and earn income through paid subscriptions, providing readers with a curated, ad-free experience and a variety of content formats, including text, audio, and video.

Jef Sneider, M.D. calls himself a "physician Buddhist Jew interested in all things religion, medicine, science and science fiction." He launched his Substack three years ago. It is titled *Think About It: musings medical and other* and contains "social commentary with a physician's perspective, poems, essays and fiction—old files and new writings." Jef encourages subscribers to "Think about it!"

Jef enjoys writing (and writes well). He explains that "I have taken many opportunities to write on many topics; some medical and scientific and some just exploring ideas about life, religion, Buddhism and Jewish related topics and many book reviews. Substack will give me the opportunity to share my writing with an audience for fun and feedback." His "musings" cover a lot of hot topics, and he does not shy away from controversy either medical or political. The tone is reflective, contemplative, and sometimes polemical.

Recent topics that Sneider has covered include MAHA, Let's Talk About Marijuana, Why I Oppose the NY Medical Aid in Dying Act and COVID-19, Measles, British Supreme Court, Fundamentalism and the End of the World as We Know It, Joe Biden has prostate cancer. So do I.

A sample of his posts includes:

"Information overload?" While trying to fish, he reflects on the overload of media, consumption of information, and mental space.

"Why can't we all just get along?" In which he acknowledges that meditation is not enough and explores how practice must permeate daily life.

"Islamophobia"—He addresses political and cultural tensions, particularly relating to Muslims and Palestinians, and the responses to U.S. foreign policy.

Jef's essays are often provocative and impervious to backlash. He means to make readers think. He uses the Substack format to full advantage, writing in many modes and using the space to try things out, incorporating poetry, essays and short stories. His focus is definitely on subjects of concern to the Jewish community. ***His posts are archived at https://mqadoc.substack.com/archive.*** Should one wish to become a paid subscriber, Jef notes that he will donate proceeds from the Substack to *tzedakah*.

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BARBARA ANN BLACK
November 4, 2025

Barbara Ann Black, 78, passed away in the comfort of her home on November 4, 2025 with her family beside her. Born on April 14, 1947, she had been a life resident of Syracuse.

She was a graduate of The Craig State School of Nursing at SUNY Geneseo, then earned two master's degrees in consumer affairs/economics from Syracuse University, and a post master's Advanced Certificate ANP in nursing from SUNY Health Science Center College of Nursing.

Her career began in general nursing as an ICU nurse. After continuing her education and earning two master's degrees, she established the Center for Continuing Nursing Education as the director of the program. In 2013 Barbara was appointed an assistant dean of the College of Nursing at Upstate Medical Center.

Barbara was active in her community. She volunteered at the American Heart Association, The Cystic Fibrosis Foundation, and The Rape Crisis Center, was a 27-year member of the Board of Education of the Fayetteville-Manlius School District and the board of trustees of Menorah Park.

For the last several years Barbara co-chaired the annual Menorah Park Golf Outing. She also served on the Board of the Nursing Scholarship Endowment Fund. While on the F-M School Board she spearheaded the Endowment Fund for the School System.

Barbara enjoyed playing golf, tennis, cooking, decorating, reading, dressing well, and of course partying. What she enjoyed most was spending time with her children and grandchildren.

She will forever be remembered as the force of nature that she was. Her presence filled a room. Her independent way of living her life drew people in seeking her advice and counsel. She was a valued and dear trusted friend to so many.

Her family includes her husband Gerald of 48 years, their children Nicole (Scott Crook) Black, Leah (Jason Mayo) Black, Jonathan Black, grandchildren Sophia, Talia, Zane, Avi, Marley, Lily, and Dyllan.

Contributions to perpetuate her memory may be made to the Upstate Foundation for the Barbara Black Endowment Fund, 750 E. Adams Street Syracuse, NY 13210, or the Foundation of Menorah Park.

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PAMELA S. POUSHTER
November 15, 2025

Pamela S. Poushter, 41, passed away on November 15, 2025 at Crouse Hospital with her family by her side as a result of an asthma-related cardiac event. Born on May 12, 1984 to Ron and Tracy Poushter she had been a life resident of Syracuse.

Pamela was a graduate of Jamesville-Dewitt High School and earned her bachelor's degree in business administration from LeMoyne College. She was an avid skier and softball player. Pam was a loving daughter and sister who always had a smile on her face. She had a great sense of humor.

Pamela was predeceased by her grandparents Harry and Dottie Poushter, Robert Vogel, and Robert Anklin. She is survived by her parents Ron and Tracy Poushter, her brother Andrew "AJ", her nephew Landon, her grandmother Carol Anklin, her aunts Sandra King and Laura Vogel-Missale, her uncles Bruce (Ianne) Poushter and Alan (Marsha) Poushter, many cousins and a large and loving extended family.

Contributions to perpetuate Pamela's memory may be made to the SPCA of CNY.

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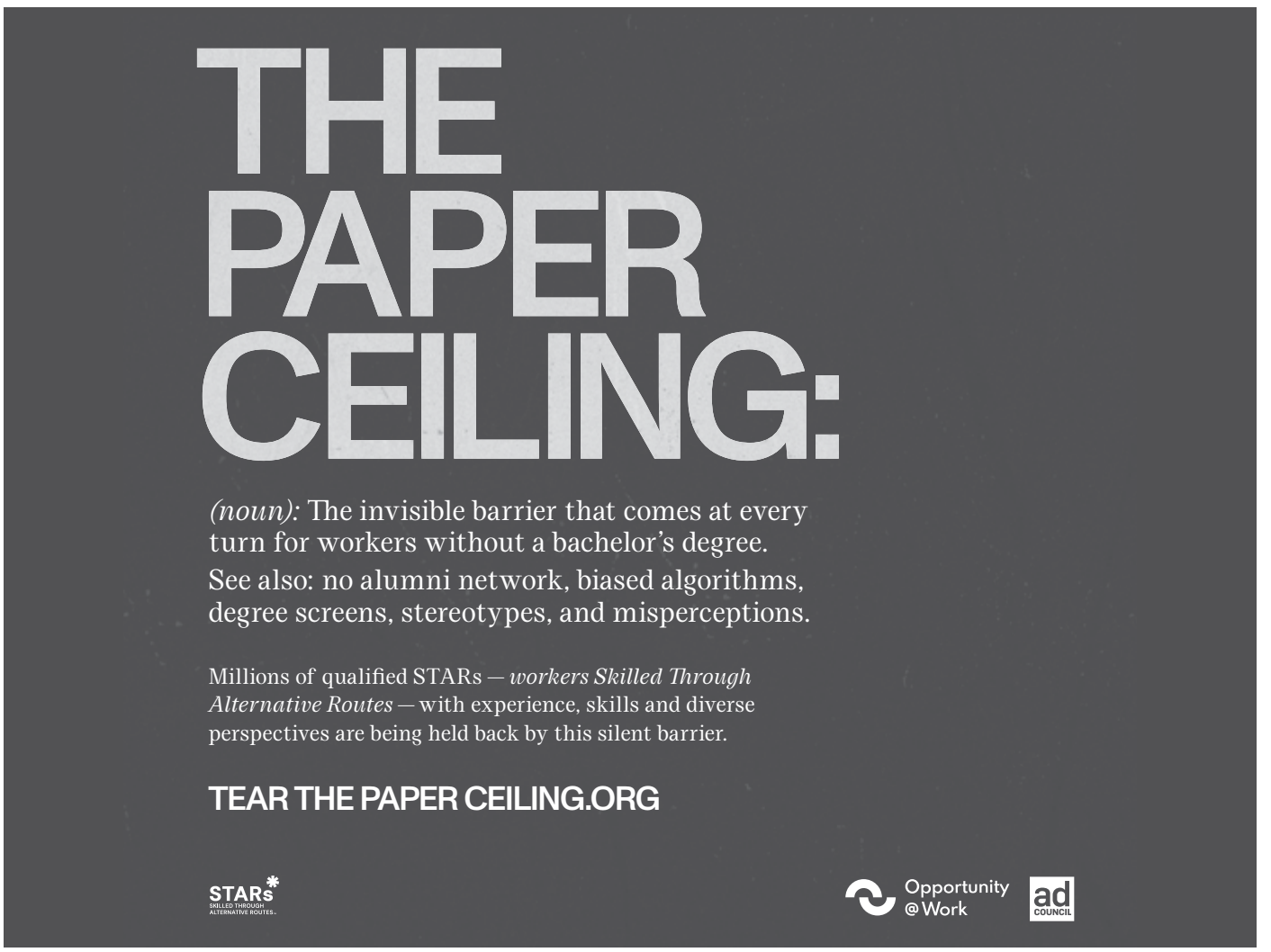

WENDY DAVENPORT
November 15, 2025

Wendy Davenport, 78, passed away on November 15, 2025 at Crouse Hospital with her family by her side. Born on Long Island on January 23, 1947 to the Honorable Paul and Vivian Lawrence she had been a resident of Syracuse for more than 50 years.

She was a graduate of SUNY Albany with a BA degree, and earned her master's degree from Syracuse University in English literature. Wendy was a teacher at Cicero-North Syracuse High School for 37 years until retiring. She also taught at Columbia College at Hancock AFB.

She was a long-time member of Temple Concord and was active in the Sisterhood of the Temple. Wendy was a volunteer and teacher at OASIS. She was especially proud to have been a founding member of CNY Reads, a member of NYSUT, and an active member of the English Speaking Union which was affiliated with the Shakespeare competition for area high schools. She was a member of the Spirit of Syracuse Sweet Adelines. After her husband Robert passed in 2010, she continued his membership and active participation in the Oneida Lake Region of the Antique Automobile Club of America.

Wendy's family includes her daughter Shana (Grant) Kohler; her son Robert F. "Bob" (Heather) Jr., and her granddaughter Nicole.

Contributions may be made to Temple Concord or Oasis.

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SONYA H. BERGMAN
November 25, 2025

Sonya H. Bergman, 95, passed away on November 25, 2025 at her home at The Nottingham. She was born on May 10, 1930 to Mortimer and Doris Solomon in the Bronx. She was raised in the Bronx until moving to Orangeburg, NY in the 1960's.

Sonya earned her master's degree in teaching and taught typing, stenography, and secretary courses at Tappan Zee High School. Though critically important at the time, all three are now from another era. She taught for more than 30 years until retiring. She remained active in her retirement through teaching at the Katherine Gibbs School in Manhattan.

She and her late husband Martin retired to Boynton Beach, Fl and enjoyed their retirement years there. In 2022 Sonya moved to The Nottingham Independent Living to be closer to her family. She remained independent until just weeks ago. She lived a full life with a positive attitude. She rose above any challenges and had a good life. It was a blessing to her family to have her nearby. She loved her grandchildren and being a part of their lives.

Her husband Martin passed away in 2003 after 50 years of a wonderful marriage.

Her family includes her sons Neal (Nomi) Bergman, and Fred (Judy) Bergman; grandchildren Danielle (Ryan), Rebecca (Justin), Dori (Brandon), Meredith, Mark, and Allison; great-grandsons Liam, and Connor; her partner of the past 15 years Burt Bloomberg; and many dear friends.

Contributions to perpetuate her memory may be made to The Sunny B. Wound Care Center at Crouse Health or The Nottingham Community Care of the Loretto Foundation.

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Contact Executive Director Mark Segel at
msegel@jewishcommunityfoundation.org or 315-445-0270.