“We are as great as the challenges we have the courage to undertake”
Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks
In Jewish tradition, it is considered important for each Jew to listen to the traditional sounds of the Shofar at least once during the month leading up to Rosh Hashanah. In that spirit, the Jewish community of Greater El Paso came together to fulfill that tradition, doing it together with our fellow Jews from Congregation Beth Yehuda in Ciudad Juarez.

Even though the border barrier separated us, we were united in song and strengthened by the mighty sound of the shofar, reminding us that we are bigger than borders when united by faith, courage and the will and resolve to leave this world a better place each and every day.

We were led by great teachings from Rabbi Larry Kanol, Rabbi Scott Rosenberg, and Rabbi Ben Zeidman with introductions by Debra Kanof and Peter Swarbein. Carlos Gamez led us in song.

Our deep gratitude goes to Tatiana Avila, Brian Kanof, Ariel Lysander, Peter Swarbein, and Alison Westermann, along with Officer Martinez and Mr. Arcereto. A big thank you also goes to the Jewish Federation of Greater El Paso; Debra Kanof, the new chair of the Federation’s Jewish Community Relations Council; and Robert French, the Federation’s executive director. They all helped in organizing and producing this beautiful event and meaningful moment for our wonderful and special bi-national border community.
Choose to lead: Your Federation needs you

“Tell me what it is you plan to do with your one wild and precious life.”
Mary Oliver

Life is full of choices, choices that can uplift us when we’re down, fill our lives with meaning, inspire creativity and laughter.

The people we are with, the places we go, the music we enjoy, whether to speak to someone or smile, the traditions and rituals we practice: these are all choices we make.

“Oh, The Places You’ll Go” by Dr. Seuss reminds us “You’re also all choices we make. The rituals we practice: these are all choices we make...

Just to be is a blessing. Just to live is holy.
Abraham Joshua Herschel

Thank You to Our “Friends of the Voice”

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Rabbi Harry Karol
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Rabbi Ben Zeidman
Allison Westermann
Brian Kanof, photography

Lion of Judah and Pomegranate Tea
Jackie Gulbas, hostess

Maimonides Society Roundtable
David and Cindy Metrixin, co-chairs
Emma Schwartz, guest speaker

Cardozo Society Roundtable
Debra Kanof, chair
Alain and Aaron Goldfarb, venue hosts

Borderland’s Café Europa
Felipa Solis, executive director, El Paso Pro-Musica

El Paso Holocaust Museum and Study Center
Jamie Flores, director

Jewish Heritage Night @ The Chihuahuas
Allison Westermann

Due Date for the November Issue of the Voice: October 10
Due Date for the December Issue of the Voice: November 12

The Jewish Voice
A publication of the Jewish Federation of Greater 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.

This Jewish Voice will consider for publication any materials submitted that support the mission of the Jewish Federation of Greater El Paso and have relevance and appeal to the El Paso Jewish community. Articles are subject to editing by 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@jfedelpaso.org

Opinions are those of individual writers and not necessarily those of the Jewish Federation of Greater El Paso. The Jewish Voice is not responsible for the kashrut of any product or eating establishment advertised herein.

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We prize leadership. For our youth there are leadership camps. For students there are often leadership tracks in schools and universities. Many large companies have leadership tracks for their most promising young professionals. In truth all of us are leaders in some way at some time: in the community, in our work, in our families and social circles.

Often the role of leadership fluctuates, sometimes putting us front and center and then a moment later relegating us to the back seat while the role of director falls to someone else. It is a hard thing to be a leader. Hardest of all is attempting to lead a group of people who don’t know how to be followers!

After the Exodus, our ancestors approached the Holy Land. Moses sent out scouts (or spies) to check out the Promised Land and report back. Their report was not overly optimistic, so the Israelites rebelled against God and Moses’ leadership (Numbers 13-14). They proved what we readers suspected from the early verses of Exodus, that this was not a generation capable of being led. The punishment of wandering the desert for forty years was more than just a reprimand. Leaving the entry to a new generation of Israelites was necessary, as first the Israelites needed to learn how to be followers.

When we take on the position (formal or informal) of leadership, Moses has much to teach us. But the Israelites teach us how not to follow. The responsibilities of the community while being led are as important as the duties of the leader. Assuming competent leadership, we must strive to avoid the mistakes our ancestors made while in the desert. This includes:

1. Playing an active role in visioning for the future so that our aspirations inform our leaders’ decisions (like the elders of Israel who supported Moses in his work).
2. Avoiding feelings of nostalgia from becoming so powerful they inspire us to demand a return to that which we’ve purposefully departed (like Egypt).
3. Not getting distracted by the shiny, fancy things along the way which are half-measures or antithetical to our purpose (like the golden calf, see Exodus 32).
4. Keeping ourselves from rushing our leadership while they are engaging us in a thoughtful process forward (like rushing into the Holy Land after we’ve been tasked with wandering, see Numbers 14:40-45).
5. Speaking up but speaking with a sense of respect for the trials of leadership, honoring those who have given of themselves for the community (unlike Korach, see Numbers 16).

The Torah’s description of the Israelites’ behavior reminds us how hard it is to follow the leader. That’s especially true today, when all of us are leaders in some capacity in our lives and may be tempted to become frustrated by other leaders’ styles and sensibilities. Let us first and foremost celebrate those who take on the formal roles of leadership in our communities. Let us find ways to “lead from behind.”

Rabbi Ben Zeidman
Temple Mount Sinai
A newcomer to our Jewish community, Adam moved to El Paso in 2018 with his wife Amanda, an El Paso native. At 30, he’s already built a portfolio of professional success in advertising circles in Dallas and the high-tech world in San Francisco. Now an acquisition and relationship manager working remotely for Upwork.com, Adam recently stepped up to chair ElPasoConnect, a group for those of us in our 20s, 30s and 40s. Now in its second year, ElPasoConnect is run by the Jewish Federation of Greater El Paso with a grant from the Jewish Community Foundation of El Paso.

What do you value the most in your friends? Integrity.

What might we be surprised to learn about your interests? I grew up liking hard rock music and playing the drums.

Who’s your favorite Jewish hero? Gary Vaynerchuk. He’s an incredible entrepreneur and author who immigrated with his parents from Russia and came from nothing and is now a media and advertising leader – I like his positiveness and messages for happiness.

What’s your favorite Sukkot memory? Amanda and I loved sharing a Sukkot meal in Dallas with the Rabbi of Intown Chabad and his wife on the rooftop of their beautiful facility. We felt warm and connected and it was those kinds of special moments that led us toward having him perform our marriage.

What is the best thing about being part of El Paso’s Jewish community? I appreciate the fact that it is on the small side – there’s a level of intimacy. You’re typically only one degree of separation from people who are successful personally and professionally and you can learn from them.

As a young couple who lived in Dallas and San Francisco, what excites you and Amanda about our community? More people here are interested in starting their families and there is a lot of potential for new people to meet and form connections and friendships.

What message do you have for those who are unaffiliated in the Jewish community? Being Jewish, we have the tradition of looking out for one another and supporting each other. When you get involved, you experience your own growth and you can benefit with important friendships.

As the new chair of ElPasoConnect, what do you hope to achieve? I hope to bring out people who haven’t been involved and create an approachable environment. I want to inject energy into the group, showing people that it’s a good time, without pressure. I hope others will learn that there are a lot of great people who are connected to the Jewish community at various levels. There is the potential to have fun and take part in social and professional networking.

Grew up: Kansas City; parents are Terry and Julie Levine
Married: Amanda Metrnik Levine, daughter of Dr. David and Cindy Metrnik
Graduated: University of Kansas, majoring in advertising and business
Employed: Upwork, an online platform connecting employers to freelancers
Feeling the Love: Our Journey to South America

In July, we spent nine days exploring Buenos Aires, Argentina, and Montevideo, Uruguay, exploring escuelas (schools), youth programs, universities, synagogues and Holocaust memorials. The dichotomy of going from the very busy and loud to the very silent was not lost on us. Yet in the silence there was also water (rebirth). A major component of Judaism is passing traditions l’dor vador (generation to generation) to keep them alive. Another important component is remembering—even the very sad... “and you will tell your sons/daughters ... say their names as they will not be forgotten.” This message came back to us when we were speaking with Holocaust survivors, meeting teens who work so hard just to keep their faith/identity alive, remembering those lives lost during the two horrific bombings in Buenos Aires: the Israeli Embassy 27 years ago and the Jewish Community Center 25 years ago. Then while we were away, we were shocked by the shooting in our own hometown. We felt the love, the bonding of all being one—so far away yet so closely bound. When you attend a mission, you really see how we work together and help each other and come together in times of need. We were amazed at the work the Network Communities like our Federation that have the same mission and aspirations. We take care of the needs of the Jewish people and we build a vibrant future. We are together in crisis and in joy. We were so fortunate to be able to share these moving experiences together and with so many, many other dedicated people from all over the country. The enthusiasm and energy were contagious from the moment we arrived. We renewed acquaintances with friends from other trips and met and learned from new friends. All leaders in their own communities, all with a passion for the Jewish people.

In the words of Linda Hurwitz, a passionate, dedicated leader with decades of experience in all areas of Federation work, “Each of us may be ordinary people, but an ordinary person can do extraordinary things.” Rabbi Alex Felch was our Scholar in Residence on the trip. Rabbi Alex is a native of Buenos Aires who graduated from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem where he specialized in the history of the Jewish People. Rabbi Alex knows firsthand how Federation make a difference. He was a recipient of Federation help. His father passed away at age 40 and his mother had to go to work to support her children. With scholarships they were able to attend school, camp and college. He now provides leadership to so many and shared his knowledge and friendship with us.

We could go on and on about the incredible journey we shared and the beauty of the programs we saw and the people we met, all because of the generosity and caring of so many people.

If you want to be more involved with what we do, if you want to be a part of sustaining Jewish life around the world please contact Robert French, executive director; Janet Wechter, president; or any of our board members. We would love to continue the conversation.

Sue Bendalin
Campaign Director
Wendy Lanski
Campaign Co-Chair, 2020-21
It’s said that the etrog refers to the heart, a place of understanding and wisdom.

What does your etrog tell you?

This year, as we celebrate our Jewish heritage, please take time to think about future generations. Your endowment to the Jewish Community Foundation helps ensure a healthy and vibrant Jewish culture in El Paso for generations to come.

For information on how you can start your own fund with us, please contact Robert French at 915-842-9554.

The Jewish Community Foundation of El Paso
Leading Our Jewish

The Jewish Voice

October 2019

BETTER TOGETHER

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The teachers also provide opportunities that promote other types of leadership such as collaboratively composing the classroom rules that govern how the students interact with one another. All students advocate for the rules they feel are necessary and everyone must vote and agree upon them. If ever there is an issue, the students revisit the rules to discuss whether they need to amend them. Through this process the children begin to learn about advocacy and democracy.

The students also determine the roles and responsibilities necessary to run the classroom and then distribute the jobs, taking turns each week. They take on roles such as meal server, line leader, and kindness or mitzvah reporter.

Throughout our program the students also learn the importance of taking care of themselves and their families, and also our community, too. Each week at our Shabbat Service they collect tzedakah and at the end of the semester it’s donated to a charity they choose. They learn, at this tender age, that although they are small, working together they can make a big difference. This message of tikkun olam – helping to improve the world – will hopefully be formative for these, our future community leaders.

Meg Birk
Director
J Center for Early Learning
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