

# Jewish Scene

Volume 16 | Number 2 | 2021

CONNECTING JEWISH COMMUNITIES



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acts of loving  
kindness





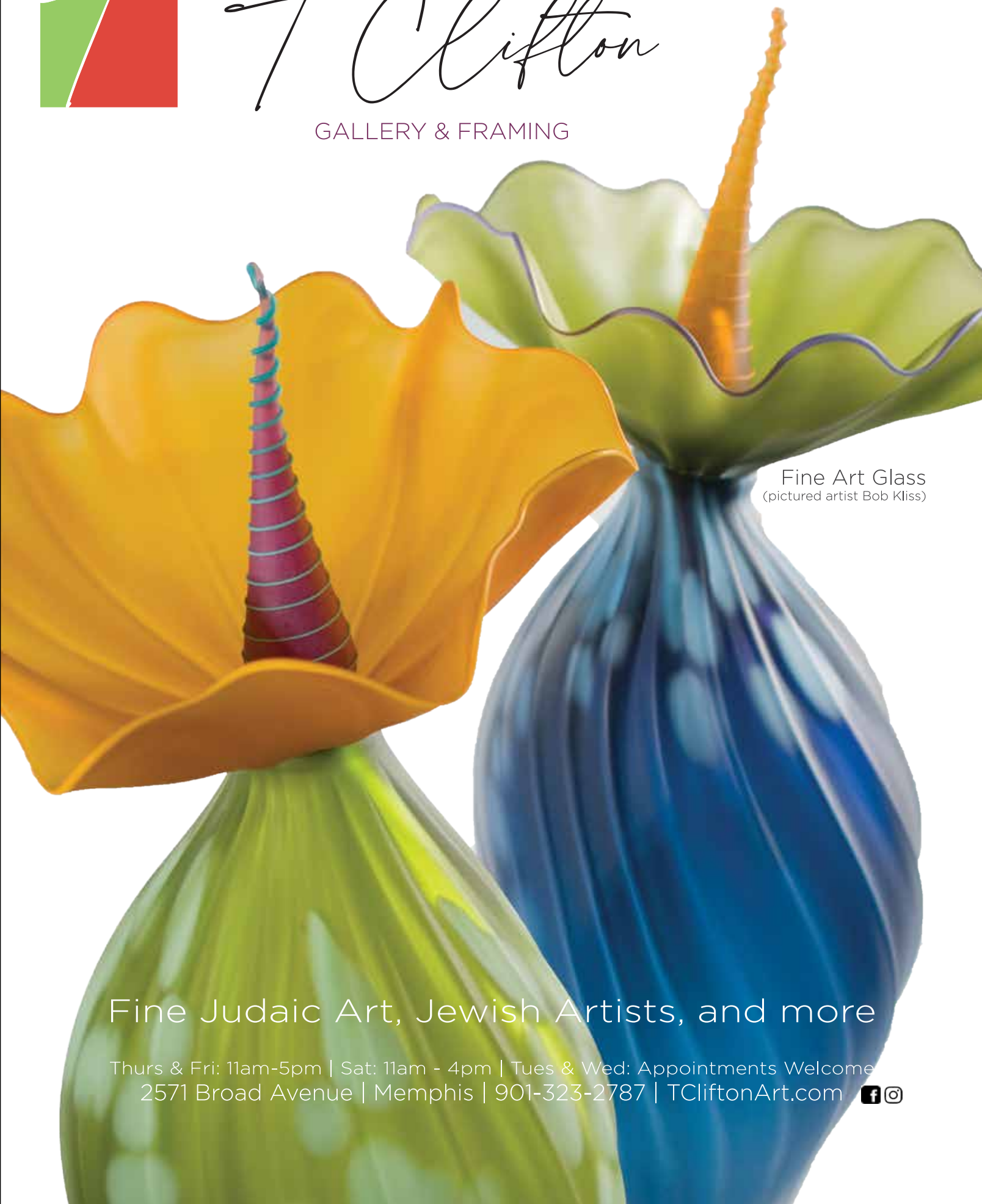
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# LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Dear JSM Readers,

This time last year, we all wondered if and how we would spend Thanksgiving and Hanukkah with our loved ones and friends. Thankfully, with the development of the vaccines, and the fact that most of 2021 was much better than the quarantine of 2020, we had the opportunity to visit family, hang out with friends and take vacations.

But as the coronavirus lingers on, it's hard to remember when things were actually "normal." One day we are in masks, the next day we are not. One day we can gather indoors without fear, the next day it's masks on again.

But I have many things this year to be thankful for, as I am sure you do too.

Our spring adventure began two weeks after my second COVID-19 shot when we hit the road, first to the mountains of East Tennessee to camp in a tiny house with my son and daughter-in-law, and then to see the historic sites of Charleston and St. Augustine. We visited my daughter and her boyfriend in Savannah and spent a couple of weeks in South Florida with my dad and our



close friends. Once home, we spent the summer enjoying time in our backyard oasis where I find calmness wash over me through stressful times.

As this issue goes to print, we have family plans for Thanksgiving, Hanukkah and New Years. We have plans for a winter vacation and taking time to see places around the country where we've never been.

I have simple things to be thankful for – a loving husband, healthy, happy (grown) children who have found their own niche in this crazy world and a business that is thriving even through a pandemic.

It appears the Memphis Jewish community appreciates our two publications even more than I ever expected. The Hebrew Watchman, in its 96th year, and which we acquired in February, is anticipated each week; as is Jewish Scene, which we publish six times a year.

This annual Tikkun Olam issue is filled with stories of organizations providing amazing services to hundreds and thousands of people in Memphis, around the country and throughout the world. We thank them for their ongoing efforts and wish them much success in the future.

Thank you all for keeping Memphis Jewish journalism alive.

Shalom,

Susan C. Nieman – Publisher/Editor



## ✚ On The Cover

**B'nai Tzedek Teens Natalie Wertheimer, Meredith Epstein, Joelle Judaken and Shoshanah Kaplowitz help organize coat collection items for Afghan refugees.**

*Photo by Sarah VanderWalde*

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*Jewish Scene is dedicated to creating awareness among the Jewish community; and promoting and supporting the religious, educational, social and fundraising efforts of Jewish agencies and organizations.*

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# Contributors



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**Melinda Lejman**, Jewish Community Partners' director of Outreach and Leadership Engagement, has more than a decade of experience working in the non-profit sector. A native Memphian, mother of three, and Jew-by-Choice, Melinda and her family enjoy being a part of the vibrant, diverse Jewish community of Memphis. In addition to her non-profit skillset, Melinda is pursuing a Doctor of Education at Northeastern University where she studies organizational leadership.



**Harry Samuels**, author of *"Beshert: True Stories of Connections"* and *"Crossroads: Chance or Destiny?"* is a graduate of Washington University. He has devoted many years to volunteerism in Memphis. He and his wife, Flora, have been married for 60 years and are the parents of Martin, William and the late David Samuels.



**Matt Timberlake** has led the Jewish Community Partners marketing team since 2016, becoming director of Communications in 2019. He has dedicated his career to nonprofit marketing, beginning in the Marketing and Communications Office of the University of Memphis while still earning his bachelor's degree. In the years since, he has worked as a staff member or consultant for countless Memphis-based organizations, the Soulsville Foundation, Urban Child Institute, and the Pink Palace Family of Museums (now known as MoSH). A home chef and published songwriter, Matt is a father to two girls.



**Sarah VanderWalde** is the director of Foundation Programs at the Jewish Foundation of Memphis. A transplant to Memphis, Sarah is happy to call Memphis home with her husband and five children. She loves how welcoming and friendly everyone is down South!



**Lorraine Wolf**, who joined Jewish Community Partners last summer as manager of Community Impact, has been passionately involved as a participant and leader in numerous non-profit organizations in our community. In addition to enjoying researching family genealogy and southern Jewish history, Lorraine is the current president of the Jewish Historical Society of Memphis and the Mid-South. Lorraine and her husband, Bert, are active members of the Memphis Jewish community and participate in many of the diverse and interesting programs and events our community offers.



## CROSSROADS: Chance or Destiny?

By Harry Samuels

This collection of connection stories is a follow up to Harry's first book, *Beshert*, which Jewish Scene readers enjoyed years ago. I hope you enjoy them as much as I do.

*All of us have the ability to experience the synchronicity that is often the result of reaching out to others. ~ Harry Samuels*

## TO SAVE A LIFE

As told to Harry Samuels by Baruch Gordon

Dov, a young soldier serving in the Israeli army, was manning an isolated guard post in Hebron when an Arab sniper shot him. With no one to help him and unable to call for help, it was likely that he would bleed to death before he could be found. Another soldier fortunately heard the shot and rushed to investigate. He spotted Dov on the ground bleeding profusely. He immediately administered first aid to stop the flow of blood and called for an ambulance. When medical help arrived, he left without leaving his name.

Eventually Dov was treated at a medical facility. The doctors told Dov's parents that had it not been for the immediate and appropriate actions of the other soldier, their son would not have survived. The grateful parents felt it was indeed a miracle that their son's benefactor had heard what no one else had heard that night. They tried to locate him to express their gratitude, but he had left the area. During Dov's recovery, his family contacted army officials to learn the name of the soldier who had saved their son's life, but no one knew him. The parents posted a sign in the tiny grocery store they operated in Kiryat Malachi. They described the miracle that had occurred and asked for information about the man – hoping for a lead to find him.

A year later, a woman entered their store and noticed the sign. "I believe my son Doron is the one you're seeking," she said. "I recall him telling me of a similar incident in which he was involved." She called her son on her cell phone. "Yes," she told them, "He remembers the incident quite well. He was the one who had saved Dov's life."

Soon all the local families gathered for a joyful celebration and to express thanks

to the stranger on behalf of her son. One of those present knew of an additional reason to celebrate.

Doron's mother pulled Dov's mother aside to say, "I came here today for a specific purpose. You don't remember me, but twenty years ago, I stood in your store feeling great stress. You and your husband noticed how sad I looked and asked me what was the matter. I explained that I was pregnant and overwhelmed. There were so many unbearable difficulties – financial, social, and emotional. I had decided to have an abortion. You both stopped everything and listened calmly and lovingly to my problems. You offered much encouragement and support. Because of you, everything began to

look different, and I chose to keep my baby. I no longer live around here, but I happened to be passing through. I thought it would be nice to visit your store and thank you for all your help. The name of that precious baby who would not have been born had it not been for you is my nineteen-year-old son, Doron.

*The above names have been changed, but several individuals have attested to the facts. Our friend, Baruch Gordon, the English editor of Arutz Sheva (channel seven) of Israel National News, granted permission to use this remarkable story.*



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*Frieda and Sam Weinreich  
have built a family despite the  
hardships of the Holocaust*

## SAM AND FRIEDA WEINREICH: **Surviving and Thriving**

*By Shoshana Cenker :: Photos by John Pregulman*

**A 75-year marriage is remarkable. When the couple are both Holocaust survivors, it is a downright miracle.**

That incredible couple is Memphis community's beloved Sam and Frieda Weinreich. If they are not the oldest Holocaust-surviving couple in the United States, as local Memphis news reports claim, they are certainly in the running. Quite a unique distinction.

So, how do you recap the long lives of these two folks in just a few paragraphs. You don't. You simply can't. You share some highlights, knowing it barely scratches the surface.

Let's set the stage. It's extraordinary that 102-year-old Sam and 97-year-old Frieda are thriving. Sure, they move slowly these days. Frieda is tiny. Like you could

put her in your pocket. But looks can be deceiving. Clearly, in her case, that's true. After all, she survived hell on earth for six long years, as did Sam.

His hearing and eyesight aren't great, but as he says, "I still have most of my marbles." In reality, he has so much more – Sam tells his life story with every detail: dates, clothing, sounds, the weather, smells, exact quotes. Like he's talking about something that happened yesterday. It's uncanny.

See, Sam has made it his life's mission to tell his story to as many people as possible – at schools, synagogues, on Zoom, any place that'll have him. Ask him one question and he can talk for hours. Not out of ego. But out of his lifelong quest to share his truth. He welcomes this conversation. Although painful, it's an opportunity to perpetuate the memory and honor those who perished, hoping

future generations learn from the past and promote tolerance and compassion. It's an extremely thorough history lesson from someone who lived it. And most importantly, "everything I tell you is true," Sam assured. "Everything I say is real and happened."

Sam was born into an Orthodox family in 1919 in Łódź, Poland. One of nine children – four brothers and four sisters – his family owned four furniture and antique shops. Sam began singing in his school's choir when he was 8 years old. Gifted with perfect pitch, he was a mezzo-soprano in his youth, later becoming a tenor as he grew up. "When I got wet as a baby, I'd cry in high C," he joked. Sam beams as he talks about singing in shul with the greatest chazzanim (cantors) of that time. "We'd see so many Jews walking on Shabbos in Łódź," he said smiling. That was until life changed in



every way, with the start of WWII in September 1939.

Frieda was also born in Łódź, on July 22, 1924. She grew up with five brothers and sisters and loving parents. Though she too has a remarkable memory and stories of her own, she's quieter, usually deferring to Sam. Frieda was just 15 when "the Germans began beating up Jews in Łódź," she said. "Synagogues were burned down, Jewish schools destroyed."

Shortly after, both Frieda and Sam's families were locked in the Łódź Ghetto, enduring despicable, unlivable conditions and meager food rations. Frieda prayed in secret and honored the Sabbath however she could.

"Life in the Ghetto was cramped," she said. "We were so cold, and many people died from starvation."

One of whom was her father, in 1941.

"I saw people dying of starvation and disease in the streets. They'd sit on the sidewalk and die, right there," Sam said with tears in his eyes. The tragic memories still raw to this day. "I watched my mother, sister and brother starve and die from hunger. If someone died in the Ghetto, we wouldn't tell anyone right away, so others could still take their food rations. Life was miserable."

When the Nazis transferred kids out of the Ghetto, guards went after Sam's nephews. Two of Sam's brothers and their wives decided to go with their kids instead. "We never saw them again," Sam cried. "My nephews' shoes are in the display of children's items at the Holocaust Museum." Eventually, SS guards began liquidating the Ghetto. Sam and Frieda were separately stuffed into a train's wrecking cattle cars with other Jews.

Arriving at Auschwitz, Sam stood face to face with Josef Mengele who decided

prisoners' fate. Soon after, Sam was transferred to Dachau to work. Sadly, there are far too many gruesome stories. One involved Sam singing for a doctor in exchange for food while sick with Typhus.

"I assume because of that extra food, I'm still here to tell you what happened to my family and so many people," Sam said with a quiver in his voice. Another time, an SS guard kicked Sam in his face for hiding a potato he'd found. "I lost seven teeth, for a potato!" he hollered.

In 1945 as allied forces drew closer, the Nazis moved prisoners deeper into Germany. When Sam's train was bombed, he and a friend hid in the woods, eventually stumbling upon a farmhouse with an American soldier standing guard. "I knew then that we were free," said a tearful Sam. "I'm the only survivor of 11 immediate family members."

Though Frieda was with her mother in Auschwitz in the beginning, it didn't last long. They were forced into a line headed for the gas chambers. Somehow, fellow prisoners pulled Frieda out, but couldn't save her mother.

"I held on to my mother as they dragged me away," Frieda said. "I had no idea what was happening, but they knew, and they saved my life. My mother died in the gas chamber."

Eventually, Frieda was taken to work as a bricklayer in the Parschnitz labor camp in Czechoslovakia. "I have no idea how I survived long enough to see the Russian soldiers in 1945," she said shaking her head.

After the liberation, Sam met Frieda in a displaced persons (DP) camp in Germany.

"Boy meets girl," Sam said of their courting.

The survivors were married on Sam's 27th birthday, September 3, 1946. Frieda was 22.

"We had a chuppah with a Hungarian rabbi and a Lithuanian chazzan," Sam explained as he broke out in song, which he often does, to my delight. "We didn't have any relatives, so everybody in the camp came – 300 people at our wedding dinner."

On April 5, 1949, Sam and Frieda emigrated to the United States with the help of a rescue organization.

"We were sent to Memphis," he said. "I thought, 'Why not Chicago, New York, Hollywood? What's in Memphis? Where is Memphis?! Are there Jews?'"

When they arrived, Memphis Jewish Federation sponsored them and helped them acclimate.

"I learned how to speak English by listening to the radio," Sam added. "In America, everything was new to us."

Sam first worked restoring furniture, then transitioned to the paint



*The Weinreich's extended family*

industry and later retired as a property management superintendent. Both Sam and Frieda, who still speak Yiddish to each other, were active in the Memphis Jewish community. Sam has sung the "Partisan Song" and "Ghetto Song" for nearly 60 years at the annual Yom HaShoah commemoration.

From the dark pit of horror and despair, Sam and Frieda blossomed. They raised five children and now have many grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

"Everyone has ups and downs," said Frieda of their marriage. "We kept the ups up and the downs down!"

"She likes green grapes, I like red," said Sam. "I like poached eggs, she likes deviled. If one person has a hot temper, the other has to have a cool temper. I'm not going to tell you we didn't have any misunderstandings. But one of us always has to forget what happened yesterday."

As we wrapped up our conversation, Sam politely walked me out. Always a mensch. I relish the moment as he serenaded me with the Purim song "Shoshanas Yaakov," because of my name. Passing through the couple's beautiful home, you can't help but notice it's filled with numerous framed photos of their lovely family – that almost didn't exist. On the shelves are countless VHS tapes, DVDs, binders and folders – all with the Weinreich's life history. Sam's documented everything, ensuring a permanent record.

"I feel it's my duty to save these for history's sake. For my family's sake," he said. "I know I am blessed. And, I can still sing!"

"After what we went through, I never thought I'd survive – but to get married and have children... the Man upstairs is watching over me," Frieda added. "Thank G-d, we have a beautiful family. That's the most important."



*Frieda and Sam's wedding photo from 1946 hangs above them*



Ari Zelig, center, with his father, David Zelig and grandfather, Avron Slutsky

## PEOPLE ON THE MOVE

# Ari Zelig: A Third-Generation Memphis Physician

By Susan C. Nieman

**Selecting a physician is one of the most personal choices one must make. We often look to relatives or friends for recommendations, but the qualities we seek while making those choices are diverse. Kindness or a pleasant bedside manner might mean more to me, while years of experience may mean more to another.**

For me this feature is personal. Ari Zelig, son of Elise Meyer and Dr. David Zelig, and grandson of Dr. Avron Slutsky, has deep roots in Memphis, and in turn to me. His grandmother, Ann Lansky Slutsky, and my mom, Alice Greenberg Drake, both of blessed memory, were close friends in high school. I was once Ari's mom's MJCC Day Camp counselor, and his grandfather was my internist from the time I was 18 until Dr. Slutsky retired. Ari's dad, David, an oral surgeon, pulled my children's wisdom teeth as well as a couple of mine.

But this story isn't about my connection with Ari, it's about Ari's connection with Memphis. He recently returned to his hometown to continue the legacy his father and grandfather began before he was born. As a third-generation Memphis physician, he's starting the next chapter of his life with his wife, Danielle, and his new position.

Ari recently joined Tammy McCulley, who founded McCulley Allergy. "I am so excited to have Dr. Ari Zelig join our team," exclaimed Tammy. "It was clear from our initial discussions that he is passionate about delivering excellent allergy care to

both adults and kids. Combining that passion and drive with his exceptional allergy training and experience was a natural fit for our practice. He's so personable and our patients and our staff have been so excited to have him. He's often referred to as Dr. Ari or Dr. Z and has quickly become loved by all. One of my life mottos is always to be humble and kind, and Dr. Zelig exemplifies those qualities. I am so fortunate to have him join the practice."

Dr. Ari currently practices primarily in the Southaven office but will soon see patients at a new office right in East Memphis. "It's a natural fit for Ari as he grew up right there, and generations of his family members have also practiced along that corridor," said Tammy.

Ari received his undergraduate degree from Emory University. After an early career in the field of special education, he attended The Sackler School of Medicine/Tel Aviv University. He completed his Pediatrics residency at Mount Sinai Hospital in New York and pursued his Allergy and Immunology Fellowship at Montefiore Medical Center in New York.



“After five years of practicing in Florida, I felt like it was time to come home and be part of a smaller community,” said Ari. “I wanted to be closer to family and to be a member of a medical community where I could make more meaningful connections.”

## It is such a great feeling knowing that my son is following a tradition that his grandfather started

Ari grew up making hospital rounds with his grandfather and remembers how he treated his patients like family. “I strive to recreate that experience with my own patients,” he said.

“Having my grandson, Ari, move back to Memphis to practice medicine has been very meaningful for me,” said Dr. Slutsky. “I fondly remember the early days when Ari would follow me on rounds in the hospital and the moment that I walked across the stage with him at his medical school graduation. It has brought me a great deal of pride to watch him grow into such a knowledgeable, understanding and compassionate physician. Having him follow in my footsteps after 50 years of love for the profession has made me a very proud grandfather.”

During his medical training, Ari performed focused research on food allergies within the pediatric population. He is board certified in General Pediatrics as well as Allergy and Immunology and treats both adult and pediatric patients with allergic and immunologic disorders. He is a member of the American Academy of Allergy, Asthma, and Immunology (AAAAI), the American College of Allergy, Asthma, and Immunology (ACAAI), and the Florida Allergy, Asthma and Immunology Society (FAAIS). He enjoys educating physicians and patients about advanced treatments for asthma, hives, eczema and nasal polyps, and he is often a featured speaker for the National Eczema Association.

Taking a role in specialty medicine is nothing new for Ari’s family. His dad, David, also spent many years in Memphis as an oral surgeon and currently works both in Israel and the U.S.

“It is such a great feeling knowing that my son is following a tradition that his grandfather started, and that I was able to continue,” said David. “I know that Ari will care for his patients in Memphis and the surrounding areas as family, with kindness and compassion.”

Ari is proud to be carrying on the family legacy: “I feel very lucky to have grown up in a medical family where my father and grandfather were my role models,” he said. “When I hear people talk about how they were pillars of the community, I know I made the right decision in moving back. The field of Allergy and Immunology has provided me with a career in which I can greatly improve my patients’ quality of life and establish meaningful long-term relationships with my patients and their families. I’m happy to have made my way back home to build a life in Memphis.”

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*Debbie H Lazarov, Eli Cloud (Sister Supply), Sarah VanderWalde, Jill Notowich, Kimberlee Strome, Dot Bilsky load donated items.*

# Federation's Lion of Judah: A Sisterhood of Tikkun Olam

*By Melinda Lejman :: Photos by Steven Holman*

"The Memphis Jewish Federation Lion of Judah Tikkun Olam Committee does anything we can to help the greater community," said Lion Kimberlee Strome, who chairs the committee. "Last year we focused on food insecurity, and this year we're reaching out to women's organizations."

Since its inception in 2020, the Tikkun Olam Committee has organized a Drive-Through Baby Shower for the Wendy and Avron B. Fogelman Jewish Family Service at the Memphis Jewish Community Center, collected food for various food pantries, and started the Caring Casseroles campaign for food-insecure college students. This October, they found a way to help vulnerable women around the Mid-South by collecting items for two partner non-profit organizations, Memphis Hospitality Hub Hotel and Sister Supply.

"The women on this committee want to do more than just write a check, we want to help out, be involved, and show up," said Kimberlee. "We found Sister Supply and Memphis Hospitality Hub Hotel and knew we could make a difference for women in need."

The Lions donated gently used handbags and toiletries like shampoo, lipstick, and hairbrushes to benefit women who turn to the Memphis Hospitality Hub Hotel for emergency shelter, and feminine hygiene products and personal care items to Sister Supply, which provides support for girls and women who are victims of period poverty.

"Education, employment, and almost everything is affected by period poverty. If you don't have access to these products, it's very hard to leave your house one week out of every month," said Eli Cloud, co-founder and CEO of Sister Supply. "We appreciate partnering with groups like Lion of Judah, because our budget limits us to only buying generic products. And on top of that, there's a supply chain problem. When the Lions all shop on our behalf and donate the products, it has a tremendous impact on the people we're able to serve."

Because of their interconnectedness, the Memphis Lions have the unique opportunity for creative philanthropy, and to make an impact in the world through their Jewish values of compassion and loving kindness.



*Cindy Finestone, Jill Notowich and Kimberlee Strome sort donated items*

"With the Lions, you ask once and they come. As a newcomer to Memphis, it's amazing to me to watch the way everyone comes together no matter what," said Kimberlee. "In my experience, that's unique to Memphis. Everyone wants to get involved with a project like this and help out."

Lions of Judah are among the most generous donors to Memphis Jewish Federation's Annual Community Campaign. The passionate women contribute their time and resources to aid the vulnerable, preserve human dignity, and strengthen Jewish life. In Memphis, more than 130 women proudly wear their Lion of Judah pin, a symbol of sisterhood, shared values and empowerment.





*Lorraine Wolf and Miriam Roohvarg arrange cut flowers*

## Petals for a Purpose: JCP Team-Building Project Brings Blooms to Plough Towers

*By Melinda Lejman*

In October the staff and management of Jewish Community Partners (JCP), came together to enjoy lunch and teambuilding after a long hiatus due to COVID-19. The Hillels of Memphis' Morris S. Fogelman Jewish Student Center near the University of Memphis provided the perfect space.

"Because community service is a pillar of both Federation and Foundation, of course the event had a giving component," said Memphis Jewish Federation's Director of Outreach and Leadership Engagement Melinda Lejman. "We wanted our time together, outside of the office, to result in something good for the community. After speaking with Leigh Hendry, executive director of Plough Towers, we decided to create floral arrangements that would be donated to the residents of the building."

Local floral arranger Vera Feldman facilitated the team-building event, bringing in unique vases and faux flowers, and offering her expertise as the team members' designs came together.

"I thought it was a great idea to spread joy through exploring meaningful creativity and collaboration," said Vera. "And creating something beautiful to share with the residents at Plough is a wonderful thing."

"It was a great experience for our team to bond and create something special for the residents of Plough Towers to enjoy," said JCP Chief Operating Officer Michael Barnett. "It felt really good to do something out-of-the-ordinary and hands-on that was simply for smiles."

"Our residents will enjoy the flowers for sure," said Leigh. "We are going to think of a few residents that will benefit with a 'pick me up' and give them a happy surprise. We will also use some to help add color to our lobbies. It is a win-win, and we thank the Jewish Foundation of Memphis and Memphis Jewish Federation for their generosity and creativity."



*Elyssa Pfeffer with her creation*



*Melinda Lejman with her mom and Plough resident, Linda Shaw, and Plough Towers Executive Director Leigh Hendry*



*Melinda gifts her arrangement to Plough Towers*





*Families in Rwanda receive assistance and training from Hands of Mothers*

# Hands of Mothers

*By Melinda Lejman*

No matter where you are in the world, when women generate income they feed and nurture their families – first and foremost. They provide safe housing and education. They work for the good of their families and their communities. According to the United Nations, “Educating women and girls lifts households, communities and nations out of poverty.”

Hands of Mothers is a nonprofit organization that empowers vulnerable women in the global community through education and economic development. Founded by Susan Moinester and her daughters, Arielle and Margot, what began as a small, family Tikkun Olam project

in 2003, has grown into an organization that has created sustainable business opportunities for over 850 women in Honduras, South Africa and Rwanda. These women have not only improved their own lives, but also those of more than 5,000 children and family members.

For the last 12 years, Hands of Mothers (HoM) has focused its efforts on and in the extraordinary country of Rwanda. In 1994, Rwanda experienced a horrific genocide. An estimated 800,000 men, women, and children – over 10% of the population – were killed in 100 days. An estimated 250,000 Rwandan women experienced multiple episodes of torture and sexual

violence. Thousands of women and young girls were systematically raped and many contracted HIV/AIDS.

Hands of Mothers works in partnership with the AIDS organization, WE-ACTx (“Women’s Equity in Access to Care and Treatment”) to develop income generation opportunities for the women in their treatment program – all of whom share this unimaginable history and its legacy of loss, illness,

and poverty. They develop the capacity of vulnerable women through a high-impact combination of hands-on education and economic development programs.

Hands of Mothers conducts literacy classes for women who never had the opportunity to attend school and funds vocational education. It’s economic development programs include the formation of Savings and Lending Groups, entrepreneurship training, and extending microloans to women with promising business ideas and demonstrated drive. Loans range from \$200 – \$350 and most are repaid within two to three years. In addition, Hands of Mothers has started and developed the capacity of two agricultural and five craft cooperatives that are supporting themselves through sales of their products within their own communities.

Since 2018, Hands of Mothers has been paying school fees for children who otherwise would not have the opportunity to get an education. Currently, they fully fund 161 children – paying for tuition and lunch, providing uniforms, books and school supplies. At an average cost of \$150 per year for primary school and \$250 per year for high school, education – especially for girls – becomes a luxury for most vulnerable families.

“These programs are supported mainly through personal donations with the



*Attendees of the 5th Annual Brunch Concert, which was held outside at Shelby Farms this year.*



majority of those coming from Memphis families,” explained Susan. “We also receive a small grant from a non-Memphis family foundation.”

On the ground in Rwanda, three very devoted part-time staff keep the operation running smoothly. The international team consists of volunteers. The 5th Annual Brunch Concert held once a year raises needed dollars.

Since the government banned street selling, women may only sell their goods in markets where rent and taxes are more than they can afford. They often turn to sex trade, which is also against the law, but is easier to do discreetly in their own homes where the children are often present.

“We have been working very hard to send young girls to boarding schools where they receive a better education and experience a new lifestyle,” said Susan. “There they receive three meals a day – something they may never have had at home.”

Beyond tuition, books and educational materials, the organization also supplies boarding school students with mattresses, linens, etc. to make them fit in and feel like middle-class residents.

“These girls are all so optimistic,” exclaimed Susan. “When you ask an 11- or 12-year-old what she wants to be when she grows up, they express their desire to cure HIV/AIDS, or become a parliamentarian.”

As the daughter of Holocaust survivors, Susan shares a tragic legacy of loss with Rwandan women. Unlike her parents who fled Eastern Europe after the war, these women are unable to escape their former enemies. However, the story of Rwanda is one of hope and possibility. Despite their traumatic history and the daily challenges of living with HIV and poverty, the women Susan has the honor to work with are resilient and optimistic about the future and their ability to create a better world for their children. By working side-by-side with their former tormentors in Hands of Mothers’ education and development programs, these extraordinary women are living the true spirit of reconciliation in the face of overwhelming obstacles. We are awed and inspired by them every day.

For more information or to make a donation, visit [handsofmothers.org](http://handsofmothers.org) or contact Susan Moinester 901.573.5231 or [smoinester@gmail.com](mailto:smoinester@gmail.com)



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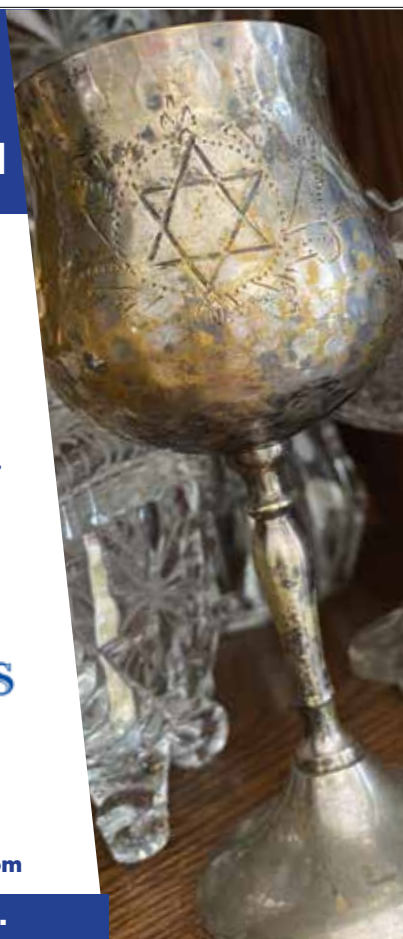


  
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Indianapolis Survivors

# KAVOD: Honor & Respect

By Shoshana Cenker :: Photos by John Pregulman

**What started as a photography project has blossomed into an incredible organization with two impactful projects – and even a marriage. We’re talking about KAVOD, whose mission is to provide emergency aid to Holocaust survivors in need. Kavod, fittingly, means honor or respect in Hebrew.**

Here’s how it started. Partnering with Jewish Federations and museums, co-founder John Pregulman began taking photos of survivors across the U.S. in 2012. Somewhat surprisingly, the people he met were mostly positive and happy, having overcome the atrocity to enjoy incredible lives. It was during one of the photography trips that John met Amy – the couple eventually married, founded KAVOD and now run the program together.

“Usually, survivors want to feed us,” John said over our Zoom interview. “One woman didn’t have much to offer – no food, plus she was dealing with an unexpected AC issue. It was then that we learned that one-third of survivors live in poverty – and there were 100,000 survivors in 2015. We had to do something.”

While living in Memphis in 2015, the Pregulmans created KAVOD, a fundraising effort to ensure dignity for Holocaust survivors. They had no expectations. They just wanted to help in some way. Their cornerstone is to give away 100%

of everything they raise – taking no administration fees from the funds. Over the first three years, The KAVOD Project distributed \$200,000 to Holocaust survivors in the form of gift cards.

The program has continued to grow – as they’ve partnered with Jewish Family Service agencies across the country as well as Seed the Dream Foundation, determining where and what the need is, so KAVOD can help fill it.

“In 2019, we were approached by Seed the Dream Foundation in Philadelphia. They work in the space of emergency services for survivors,” explained Amy. “Together, we co-created a new way to exponentially increase the impact through collective communal response. We are truly doing more together.”

This second project is The KAVOD SHEF (Survivors of the Holocaust Emergency Fund) Initiative, in partnership with Seed the Dream. Seed the Dream Foundation, along with 25 other national funders, has enabled the program to create a



Lily K. Lives in NY



national matching effort to provide support for this silent crisis in communities across the U.S. Every local dollar is matched by KAVOD SHEF's national funder coalition dollars. Again, 100% of the funds raised go to survivors. And this is "new" money raised – not taken from other projects. And it's all confidential. In its pilot year, KAVOD SHEF supported 17,000 emergencies in 28 communities with over \$3.3M.

**"I would like to thank KAVOD on behalf of my mother ... KAVOD provides a Mitzvah for Survivors and for all your work there is a special place in heaven for you all." ~ Survivor's Child, Houston TX**

"We were impressed immediately by John and Amy's passion and dedication to working with dignity for our Holocaust survivor community," explains Talia Kaplan, executive director of Seed the Dream Foundation. "KAVOD's hard work to scale the initiative is a testament to their commitment to collective action. In 2021, 32 U.S. communities are participating in The KAVOD SHEF Initiative."

Combined, The KAVOD Project and The KAVOD SHEF Initiative now service more than 50 communities and have filled over 30,000 emergencies, dispersing over \$6M.

"There is a deep significance to that number," Amy added, "as we know there is much more we will need to do in the years to come."

And when COVID hit, the teams got creative to ensure survivors' needs were still being met. "We were first filling requests for dental or doctor visits, then food, PPE, home repair, utilities, rent – whatever was needed," John noted. "Because of The KAVOD SHEF Initiative, we went from providing gift cards for the first three years to paying providers directly, so survivors don't have to pay out and get reimbursed. During COVID, we've partnered with caterers and restaurants to deliver hot meals. We also worked with local grocery stores on a credit system. And many survivors had no way to go get vaccines. So, we began an initiative to pay for car services like Uber. We've continued filling the needs, just in a different way. It was pretty incredible to see that happen ... we just pivoted."

In Memphis, where it all began, there's also a special grant from the Plough Foundation that The KAVOD Project matches. Those funds go toward significant Chanukah gift cards for all the survivors who live in Plough Towers as a holiday gift. "KAVOD is seeing more partnerships, and they're getting stronger," Amy said, "plus, there are more donors who are learning about this crisis."

Sadly, survivors' needs are still high, even as people pass away and the number of survivors alive diminishes. Unfortunately, a consistent one-third of survivors' struggle.

"An Israel study determined that Holocaust survivors live seven years longer than typical seniors their age," John added. "There were many child survivors, too, and we anticipate at least 10 more years of need."

"We remain a secondary resource – primary grants or other funding sources comes first – so both of our projects fill in the gap for emergency unmet needs. The team we've built of managers, office staff, request fillers ... they're incredible," Amy explained. "Our KAVOD mission will only be complete when there are no more survivors. We'll continue until there's not a need. It's a privilege."

You can learn more at [kavodensuringdignity.com](http://kavodensuringdignity.com)



Shoshana Cenker's  
Bubby Gertrude  
"Giti" Schlanger



Joe L. 101 years old



John and Amy  
with a Survivor in  
Kansas City, KS



John taking photos  
in Charlotte, NC



# Hasidah Offers Hope and Help to Build Jewish Families

By Shoshana Cenker

For most people, life's journey goes something like this: school, job, marriage, kids. But what if that last part isn't a given? Sadly, for many couples, it isn't. What's more, just talking about fertility struggles is still hush-hush.

But there's hope and help – plus more awareness on the horizon – from critical organizations like Hasidah, a Jewish infertility program that gives grants to Jewish folks who are trying to conceive a baby. Hasidah, which means stork, is taken from the Hebrew root word of chessed, meaning loving-kindness.

Hasidah CEO Rabbi Idit Solomon founded the organization when she realized that the Jewish community provides a plethora of resources to families to help raise children Jewishly. There's financial aid for Jewish school, camp, trips to Israel, “but I didn't need that incentive to raise kids Jewishly, I needed hope that I may ever have kids and some help along the way,” she explained. “Having children is a fundamental mitzvah in Judaism. But as my then-husband worked in a clinic parking lot from his car, there I was at an in vitro fertilization (IVF) appointment, giving blood from one arm and handing over my credit card with the other. I felt so alone and hopeless. I thought there should be Jewish support for this. So, when my kids were born, I made a commitment that my good deed was going to be to help others get through this, remove the isolation, some stigma and barriers.”

Rabbi Idit spent the next year creating Hasidah to help people build Jewish families by offering support and resources. In Columbus, Ohio, in 2014, the organization gave out its first grant. When Rabbi Idit moved to California, Hasidah began giving out grants nationally. But



it was important to be much more than just a bank. Offering support was just as critical.

"The most important feedback comes from recipients saying how much they appreciate talking to someone who supported them, gave them spiritual guidance, who could speak from their own experience and give them resources," Rabbi Idit said. "We started local meet-ups just to talk to one another. Then we began an online support program in 2019. People from all over the country attend these virtual meetings."

To date, Hasidah has provided over \$200,000 worth of grants, and also offers loans. Remarkably, the program has helped 32 Jewish babies come into the world. While that is incredible, Rabbi Idit acknowledges that it's not all just about the numbers.

"Our vision is about building Jewish families. But the reality is we're not in control of that outcome," she said in her warm, empathetic tone. "Our focus is also on removing barriers and promoting wholeness in the journey. Not everyone we give a grant to has a baby, and sometimes they do multiple IVF rounds. But the fact that we, as a community, gave them the chance – that's something we can be in control of. Those undergoing IVF can be an emotional and spiritual wreck. The wounds last forever. So, we also help people take care of themselves, help them stay connected, give them support."

What's special about Hasidah is that it has only one criterion: Judaism is the only religion practiced in the home. The program's application specifically asks what a person's vision is for their Jewish family, because that's what Hasidah is investing in. That means – a single mother can apply, as can a lesbian couple or someone who attends synagogue services just for High Holidays – as long as they raise the child Jewishly, Hasidah can potentially help them.

"Rabbi Idit and I had a very meaningful conversation. This organization is extremely important to couples going through IVF," said a woman who found Hasidah while searching for support for her son and daughter-in-law who struggled with IVF. "Not only is this process an emotional roller coaster, but of course it's a financial strain and commitment. Assisting Jewish couples with this challenge financially can be life changing."

Something incredibly important to Rabbi Idit is making sure the women she talks with feel heard. They're often so focused on the logistics of medications and doctors and finances. But to have such a deep humankind desire challenged or denied is brutal. The emotional toll is exhausting. Ask me how I know. Thankfully,



my then-husband and I were blessed with amazing twin boys from IVF and a beautiful daughter from intrauterine insemination (IUI).

"I tell the women that I recognize that what they're going through is real and painful, and it's okay to feel that," Rabbi Idit said of her role she calls 'spiritual advisor.' "I want them to know I see them, they're not alone and this is hard."

Spirituality and religion are front and center in this issue, with 'Jewish guilt' and the mikvah serving as major challenges for many. For me during the IVF process, going to the mikvah monthly meant another devastating grief of not conceiving and also suffering a miscarriage. Honestly, I hated it. I wish I had the approach Rabbi Idit shares. She says that sometimes we have to embrace the pain and be in our sorrow – a concept of lamenting. Rather than deny the pain, women can choose to go to the mikvah,

admit they don't want to be there and also let their pain out – let it, quite literally, wash over them.

"Hasidah is important because it reminds Jewish women and couples that they are not alone and that in the depths of despair, couples have found hope and miracles when they weren't sure of either," noted Rabbi Micah Greenstein of Memphis' Temple Israel, who wrote a recommendation letter for a Hasidah applicant. "Spiritually, I remind them of the heroes of Judaism we read about on Rosh Hashanah, the birth of Samuel to the previously childless Hannah, Isaac's birth when Sarah was 90 ... the main idea is acknowledgment of both the heartbreak and hopefulness in the eternal stories of our people."

Much of Hasidah's support and donations are from "Grateful Patients" – people who've been through IVF; those of us who are open and talk about the struggle. Because the more we talk, the less of a stigma it becomes. Removing the shame and uncovering the hidden secret means, hopefully, more people will get help. More awareness, more research, more funding, more support. More Jewish babies.

"I just can't think of anything on this Earth more meaningful than to help people who want to become parents and want to have a Jewish family," Rabbi Idit concluded. "To help them realize that in the moment when I see someone holding that baby, it's so powerful, it's divine. It's the most core of our humanity, of our Judaism, of our spirituality."



*B'nai Tzedek members helped sort, organize and package the items for distribution.*

# Memphis Jewish Federation and Jewish Foundation of Memphis Offer Warm Welcome to Afghan Refugees

*Story by Sarah VanderWalde and Lorraine Wolf :: Photos by Sarah VanderWalde*

“There’s no better feeling than coming together as a community to help people,” said Jaclyn Marshall, Co-Chair of Memphis Jewish Federation’s FedLED young adult leadership initiative. “Thousands of Afghan refugees have been displaced and need help starting their new lives, and many are making their way here. Our involvement is a very small but meaningful way to show we are here for them and honored to help.”

According to World Relief Memphis, a global Christian humanitarian organization that brings sustainable solutions to problems like disease, poverty, violence, and mass displacement, approximately 50 Afghan refugees will arrive in Memphis this fall and winter.

To welcome these new arrivals to the city, Federation’s FedLED leaders and volunteers partnered with the Jewish Foundation of Memphis’ B’nai Tzedek Teen Philanthropy Program to hold a coat drive for Afghan refugees resettling in Memphis.

FedLED’s leadership planned and led the coat drive, and B’nai Tzedek’s teens enthusiastically volunteered to organize and package the items for delivery to

World Relief’s local headquarters.

“I know that I’m helping people with things that I have, and they don’t necessarily have,” said Meredith Epstein, an 8th grade student at Riverdale, who donated jackets of her own, and helped sort the donations with her B’nai Tzedek peers. “These coats are going to keep them warm through the winter and make them feel good, which makes me happy.”

Over the course of the coat drive’s nine-day run, more than 200 coats, jackets, gloves, and other winter-wear items were donated by community members, helping incoming refugees comfortably adapt to their new Mid-South winter climate.

“When I heard about Federation’s coat drive, I not only went through my closets to find extra coats but asked my parents to do the same,” said Federation Board Member and FedLED participant Emily Lennon, who donated several items to the coat drive. “The staff made it easy for me to drop off everything after work, and I hope that there will be more chances for my family to help the Afghan refugees in the future.”



*Emily Lennon dropped off her donation after work.*



## Champ: The Perfect Pet

By Shoshana Cenker

Ben and Shoshi Ryp rescued Champ through Petfinder.

"We liked his name and didn't want him to have too much change at one time," they said.

The couple agrees that Champ is the perfect dog.

"He's so sweet, well-behaved, loving and calm," they agreed. "He has been a great fit for our family."

You can thank Champ's good manners on Wonder Dog Training who professionally trains pets in their own homes.

When the Ryps go out of town, they can depend on families they find through Rover.com to stay with their fur baby.

And when he needs a checkup, he heads to see the docs at Eastgate Animal Clinic.

### Pet Peeve:

He gets in the way when we're trying to get our youngest dressed or putting our shoes on!

### Happiest Times:

Champ is happiest when playing with the kids and his stuffed animals, and training toys that allow him to find treats.

### All in a Day's Work

Shoshi works from home, so Champ gets to stay with her all day.



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