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# Saying farewell to Pittsburgh: '4 The Record' sits down with the Rabbi Ron Symons

Host Shannon Perrine speaks with Rabbi Symons as he heads to New York City

Updated: 11:30 AM EDT Jul 7, 2024

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Nick Matoney

**PITTSBURGH** — Rabbi Ron Symons, the founder of the Jewish Community Center of Greater Pittsburgh’s Center for Loving Kindness, is saying farewell to Pittsburgh as he heads to New York City after 18 years.

In a recent edition of "4 The Record," host Shannon Perrine sat down with Rabbi Symons to learn about his time in the city.

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"We have a center for loving kindness and civic engagement," said Symons. "And we founded it seven years ago knowing that the nature of how people were talking to each other in public was changing. And it's not about the outcome of elections or the outcome of trials or anything of that sort. It's simply how can we strengthen the fabric of community by amplifying the long-held values of love your neighbor as yourself. Do not stand idle while your neighbor bleeds. And redefining the word neighbor from a geographic term to a moral concept."

Rabbi Symons expanded that thought by saying, "The concept of neighbor is that because we are living together, whether that together is on the same block or in the same neighborhood or in the same city, or let's even expand it out - the same state, the same country, the same world - that our fates or inextricably connected to one another."

He looked back at the October 2018 mass shooting at the Tree of Life Synagogue in Squirrel Hill in which 11 worshippers from three congregations were killed, saying, "Everybody came. Everyone dropped everything and said, 'we want to be with our neighbors in the Jewish community who were hurting' because everyone was hurting."

"4 The Record" also spoke with Rabbi Symons' wife, the Rabbi Barbara Symons.

She'll appear in an episode of "4 The Record" airing on Sunday, July 14, at 11:30 a.m. on WTAE Channel 4.

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## News

# JCC Welcomes Rabbi Hindy Finman as Senior Director of Jewish Life

## NEWS

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Jul 30, 2024



In April, the Jewish Community Center of Greater Pittsburgh (JCC) announced the appointment of Rabbi Hindy Finman (she/her) as its new senior director of Jewish Life. She

serves on the JCC's professional leadership team, with a core focus on ensuring that Jewish values and expression are woven through the fabric of daily JCC life.

"In the past several weeks in my new role, I've spent a lot of time getting to know the landscape of Pittsburgh, and I'm excited by the organizations and people I've met with both in the JCC and throughout the region. With our Jewish and multifaith organizational partners, we are eagerly preparing for the High Holidays and a busy election season immediately following," Rabbi Finman said.

In her position, she also leads and implements regular activities of the JCC's Center for Loving Kindness and Civic Engagement (CFLK) established in August 2017 to strategically counter the demoralizing rhetoric of public discourse to strengthen the fabric of the community. The CFLK fulfills this goal by creating and modeling safe spaces in which neighbors can live in community with one another based on our shared humanity through real and perceived differences.

Rabbi Finman hopes to continue to support the work of the volunteer ["Upstander"](#) program by strengthening existing partnerships. Throughout the remainder of the summer and into the fall, Rabbi Finman plans to assess community needs and how CFLK can be a resource for those who may not already be engaged with the programming.

Rabbi Finman brings a wealth of experience from her extensive background with Jewish organizations, congregations, and camps, coupled with a deep commitment to community engagement grounded in the principles of care and kindness.

"One of my goals in this position is to normalize human experiences that might traditionally isolate others. We're working toward becoming a hub for those historically not included in the conversation, and I want people to know my door is always open. I look forward to continuing this holy work through the JCC's guiding values and becoming an upstanding Rabbi and leader in the Jewish community," Rabbi Finman said.

Prior to joining the JCC, she pursued her rabbinical degree at Hebrew College in Newton, Mass., receiving ordination from Hebrew College on June 2. She holds a degree in criminal justice from Temple University with a focus on youth mental health. During her professional career, Rabbi Finman has worked with many Jewish organizations such as Friendship Circle, Ramah Camping Movement, and Moishe House.

"While we can always strive to do more, I have an amazing foundation to work on. Rabbi Ron created lifelong partnerships that we plan on keeping and expanding on. In true Pittsburgh

fashion, our work will focus on how to build more community bridges and not barriers. Together, we can eradicate hate and build peace with our neighbors,” she said.



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## Caregiver stress is a growing issue. Support resources in Pa. are beginning to reflect that.

'We haven't until now had structured resources for  
families'



HANNA WEBSTER ✓  
Pittsburgh Post-Gazette  
hwebster@post-gazette.com x

JUL 6, 2024

5:30 AM

With nearly half a million Pennsylvanians engaging in unpaid dementia caregiving, amounting to an expected \$360 billion in unpaid labor nationally in 2024, the job is bound to be stressful on top of a caregiver's other responsibilities.

Many are raising children and working full-time, and a [2024 report from the Alzheimer's Association](#) shows that dementia caregivers take off work and leave the workforce at a higher rate than any other type of caregiver.

Support resources exist, but they can be difficult to access — especially when caregivers are already strapped for time and cash. Organizations

around Pennsylvania are working to ease access burdens to these resources so that, ultimately, the burden of caregiving is lifted, too.

“Dementia is a terminal illness; we don’t have great treatment for it, and it hugely impacts families,” said Lyn Weinberg, a geriatrician, division director for geriatrics at Allegheny Health Network and medical director of the Aging Brain Care program.

“We haven’t until now had structured resources for families. They’ve had to find them on their own, which is exhausting, and sometimes impossible.”

## **State support**

At the state level, there’s a growing recognition of need to help dementia patients and caregivers, and increasing support for access to resources.

The Pennsylvania Senate Aging and Youth Committee on June 4 unanimously passed a bill to establish an Alzheimer’s Dementia and Related Disorders Office, as well as a Related Disorders Advisory Committee, something 27 states and the District of Columbia are already funding, per an Alzheimer’s Association spokesperson.

An Alzheimer’s office would be expected to secure federal funding and to leverage additional resources to better support those in Pennsylvania with dementia and their caregivers.

“I was pleased with the recent show of bipartisan support for Senate Bill 840 as that legislation passed out of the Senate Aging and Youth Committee,” said Sen. Judy Ward, R-Blair/Fulton, and chair of the Aging and Youth Committee, via email statement. “That support reflects the tremendous work that has been done with stakeholders to create a bill that truly will make a difference in the lives of so many Pennsylvanians.

“As our population continues to age, we need to continue to advance policy that helps our older adults age with dignity and get the care they need when facing Alzheimer’s, dementia, and other cognitive health challenges,” she added.

In addition, Gov. Josh Shapiro introduced the “Aging Our Way PA” program in his 2024-25 budget proposal, a 10-year plan that includes supporting caregivers emotionally and financially. The proposal is expected to be voted on in July.

“Caregivers face a variety of challenges while caring for the person under their charge and dealing with their own personal issues,” said Department of Aging spokesperson Jack Eilber in an email statement.

Part of the proposal includes \$2.95 million specifically for Pennsylvania’s caregivers, paid and unpaid. According to Eilber, \$1.5 million of that is reserved for addressing the workforce crisis, and \$1.45 million for direct caregiver support such as trainings, toolkits and connection to resources.

Resources for caregivers already exist in Allegheny County. And the Alzheimer’s Association of Greater Pittsburgh recently set up a 24/7 hotline for anyone seeking resources. The number is 1-800-272-3900.

Over the phone, advocates can help set up a care plan, answer scientific questions about the disease and connect to resources in their area.

“My hope is that when a caregiver does decide to reach out, there is no wrong way for them to do so,” said Clayton Jacobs, executive director of the Alzheimer’s Association of Greater Pittsburgh.

## **Resources going local**

Although the goal is to bolster Alzheimer’s resources over time, the state and counties already have caregiver resources in place. Through the Department of Aging, and administered through the Allegheny County Department of Human Services Area Agency on Aging, the Caregiver Support Program has been a point of contact for years.

Those who want to participate can call 412-350-5460. Participants will be assigned a care manager through one of the three organizations that the department contracts with: Wesley Family Services, FamilyLinks and Lifespan.

A care manager will assess the caregiver and family’s needs and create a care plan. Payment is on a sliding scale reimbursement model. Caregivers can be reimbursed for supplies they buy out of their own pocket that they use in their role. Counseling and respite services are also provided.

“Our goal in this program is to alleviate stress,” said Russell Goralczyk, director for the Older Adult Support Bureau for the Area Agency on Aging and overseer of its support program. “Caregiving, although extremely



rewarding, can be very demanding and overwhelming. Our goal is to help them thrive in their role.”

Currently, Goralczyk said there are about 400 caregivers enrolled in the program in Allegheny County, and the department provides many “soft services” to those not enrolled as well — such as trainings on self-care, communication and stress reduction.

## **The toll of the pandemic**

He acknowledged that staffing shortages and cost both pose future challenges.

“The shortage of in-home workers has definitely been a challenge post-COVID,” he said. “The Caregiver Support Program is growing in interest and population, as people live longer. There’s going to be more of a need.”

According to [the Census Bureau](#), those over the age of 65 made up more than a fifth of Allegheny County’s total population in 2023, higher than the national average. Pennsylvania has the 10th-highest elderly population in the country.

Weinberg has seen the strain that can impact those trying to help. “Caregivers are really facing burnout and exhaustion,” she said. “They don’t get a lot of information upfront about dementia.”

The Aging Brain Care program began in January 2023, supported by a grant from the Hillman Foundation. It’s now being funded by Allegheny Health Network. Participants must be existing AHN patients.

Caregiver stress can hinder the ability to access resources.

“Some of our caregivers are so stressed that they don’t have the bandwidth to do one more phone call,” Weinberg said. “We’ve learned there seems to be a sweet spot for getting people engaged in care. Earlier in the diagnosis is better, before they get into crisis mode.”

Post-COVID, the price of goods has also increased, which is why Goralczyk sees the Caregiver Support Program as particularly helpful.

“If someone is spending \$200–\$300 for supplies, we can reimburse for costs,” said Goralczyk.

And not only are people living longer, but the opioid epidemic continues to ravage families, creating caregiving gaps. Goralczyk said the program is seeing an uptick of grandparents taking care of grandkids whose parents have passed away.

## **A multidisciplinary approach**

At AHN, participants are enrolled as a caregiver-patient dyad and bolstered by an interdisciplinary team. To date, there are 105 patient-caregiver pairs enrolled in the Aging Brain Care program.

A social worker, behavioral health therapist and caregiver coach make up the support team and tackle the unique challenges of both being a caregiver and struggling with dementia. Therapy is provided around anticipatory grief, financial stress and family stressors.

“We are really addressing the emotional needs of caregivers, so they can serve their loved ones more effectively and also take care of themselves,” Weinberg said. “We empower caregivers to put some of that in-home care in place so they can take care of their own health.”

That might include supplies and help for daily activities like showering or sorting out medication needs.

The team is meant to be interdisciplinary to tackle the complex nature of a disease like Alzheimer’s. “We know that behavioral health clinicians are difficult to access already, so we’ve built that into our team,” said Weinberg.

“And behavior challenges add a layer of complexity to trying to bring services in,” she added. “You might have a person who is very fearful of non-family members coming into the home. That can be very tough.”

## **What’s next?**

Looking toward the future, the Aging Brain Care program is working to incorporate people with different insurance coverage.

“This has been a work in progress,” said Weinberg. “We’re growing. We recently brought in a new caregiver coach, so we’re hoping to continue to expand.”

As more people are expected to develop dementia in the coming years, increased demand for services may tip the scale toward increased supply —

that's the hope, anyway, for people like Weinberg, Goralczyk and Jacobs.

Although not user-friendly for many older people, technology may provide an opportunity to bring resources closer to families and caregivers, as with AI scheduling appointments, telehealth or online conversations with providers.

And while services are ramping up, so is research into Alzheimer's.

"I'm excited for the new era we're entering in," said Jacobs. "We're on the precipice of seeing things like blood biomarkers for diagnosis. Researchers are incredibly optimistic."

*Hanna Webster:* [hwebster@post-gazette.com](mailto:hwebster@post-gazette.com).

*First Published:* July 6, 2024, 5:30 a.m.

*Updated:* July 6, 2024, 11:29 a.m.

Tags: Aging Guide

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# Israeli-touring band shares stories of war, holds free concert

The event was held at Beth El Congregation in the South Hills

Updated: 11:43 PM EDT Aug 1, 2024

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**Yazmin Rodriguez** ✉

Reporter

**SCOTT TOWNSHIP, Pa.** — At a Thursday night concert in the South Hills, members of the Israeli band Shufuni opened up about living through Oct. 7.

"Today, we mark the 300th day since the beginning of the war. We mark 300 days since many people were taken captive," said Sar Sless, the assistant director of Israel Engagement for JCC.



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Thursday night was the band Shufuni's third North American stop. They have been touring to express their stories to audiences and share experiences through music.

Thursday's date held extra meaning.

"We survived the Hamas attack after 11 hours that I've been in a safe room. Hearing the shots of the guns outside the barracks and me and my brothers get out late at night and survive the Hamas attack," said band member Daniel Waiss.

The band's four traveling members express through music and stories how the war has shaped their lives and music.

"This war changed my whole life, but the music became for me really good too for healing and express my bitterness into something beautiful," said Waiss.

"We can heal them through music because its not us, it's the music we transfer to the world and I hope that they feel loved and that we are one nation," said band member Mira Azriel.

Jason Kunzman, president and CEO of the JCC, said bringing the concert to Temple Beth El in Scott Township was an opportunity to show the Jewish community reached beyond just the Squirrel Hill area.

"A testament to the resilience of our Israeli neighbors and loved ones as well as our local Pittsburgh Jewish community," Kunzman said.

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From the Pittsburgh Business Times:

<https://www.bizjournals.com/pittsburgh/news/2024/07/23/jcc-maccabi-games-come-to-pittsburgh-summer-2025.html>

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### Travel & Tourism

# JCC Maccabi Games to bring tourism to Pittsburgh next summer



Aerial view of the University of Pittsburgh campus, which will host the Maccabi Games in 2025.

GETTY IMAGES



By [Mitra Nourbakhsh](#) – Intern, Pittsburgh Business Times

Jul 23, 2024 **Updated** Jul 23, 2024 3:26pm EDT





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A large athletic event will be coming to Pittsburgh next summer in the form of the Jewish Community Center (JCC)'s annual Maccabi Games. This weeklong event will host Jewish teenagers from around the world, where they will compete in a slate of individual and team-based athletic events.

The [University of Pittsburgh](#) will host the over 6,000 youth, families and coaches, who will be staying on a campus for the first time in the Games' history. Having participants live, eat and compete on campus in an "Olympic-style atmosphere," instead of staying with host families, will remove the capacity constraints of the last few years, according to a release.

"This model offers top-notch facilities and a transformative experience for Jewish teen athletes from all over the world while enabling hundreds more to experience the magic of JCC Maccabi than has been possible in its 40-year history," said Samantha Cohen, senior vice president and director of JCC Maccabi at JCC Association of North America.

The Maccabi Games are modeled off the Maccabiah Games, or Jewish Olympics, which take place every four years in Israel. In addition to competing, athletes will engage in volunteer and community support experiences through JCC Cares.

The event is expected to bring an influx of tourism to the region. Over the past four decades, the sporting event has engaged more than 500,000 people in total. When Miami hosted the Games in 2017, the city saw a [2.1% increase in overnight visitor expenditure](#) – though a number of other global sporting events hosted there also contributed to the impact.

Pittsburgh's tourism nonprofit VisitPITTSBURGH said in a release that hosting the Maccabi games was a priority for their team. Stefani Pashman, CEO of the Allegheny Conference on Community Development, echoed those sentiments.

"I'm excited to work alongside other local leaders to ensure that everyone who visits for the games receives the warmest welcome, has the best experiences, and leaves as an ambassador for Pittsburgh," said Pashman, who is also a co-chair for Maccabi 2025. "This

will be a win-win for our visitors as well as our community and its businesses, especially those in leisure and hospitality, who will benefit from the economic impact created by the thousands of people the games will draw.”



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## JCC Maccabi Games to bring tourism to Pittsburgh next summer

Story by Mitra Nourbakhsh – Intern, Pittsburgh Business Times • 2h • [2 min read](#)



Feedback



JCC's Center for Loving Kindness stands as pillar of strength in community  
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A large athletic event will be coming to Pittsburgh next summer in the form of the Jewish Community Center (JCC)'s annual Maccabi Games. This weeklong event will host Jewish teenagers from around the world, where they will compete in a slate of individual and team-based athletic events.



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## FEATURES &amp; ARTICLES

# Pitt will host the JCC Maccabi Games in summer 2025

August 8, 2024

In summer 2025, the University of Pittsburgh will host the world’s largest in-person Jewish youth sporting event in partnership with the Jewish Community Center (JCC) of Greater Pittsburgh and the JCC Association of North America.

The JCC Maccabi Games are the world’s largest in-person Jewish youth sporting event and has engaged more than 500,000 people globally over the last four decades. Beyond the teen experience, the Games are a powerful opportunity to galvanize thousands of volunteers, spectators, partners and sponsors of diverse ages and interests in a monumental planning process and community-building endeavor.

“We are delighted to partner with our local JCC and the continental JCC community in piloting an innovative new model of the JCC Maccabi Games,” said Chancellor Joan Gabel. “The University of Pittsburgh looks forward to welcoming the athletes and their families in support of the Games’ mission to transform lives through competition, friendship, community service and social and cultural engagement.”

The first-of-its-kind campus model will allow athletes to live, eat and compete on Pitt’s campus in an Olympic-style atmosphere, removing significant capacity constraints that have been plaguing the Games for the last several years. More than 6,000 athletes, coaches and family members are expected to attend.

“This model offers top-notch facilities and a transformative experience for Jewish teen athletes from all over the world while enabling hundreds more to experience the magic of JCC Maccabi than has been possible in its 40-year history,” said Samantha Cohen, senior vice president and director of JCC Maccabi at JCC Association of North America.

Featured sports and event venues will be announced in coming weeks. In addition to a full slate of athletic competitions across team and individual sports, athletes will engage in volunteer and community support experiences through JCC Cares, the Games’ service arm that brings to life its value of *tikkun olam* — repairing the world.

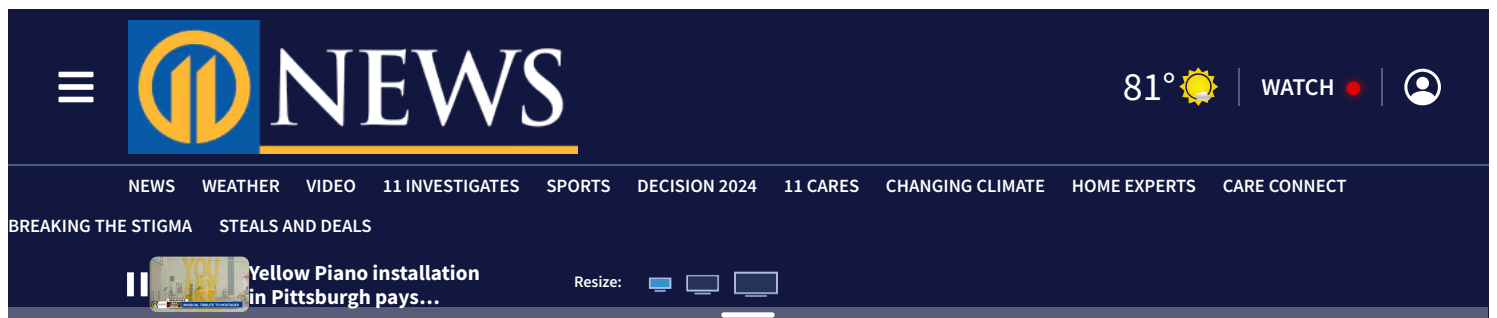
“Our region is ready to provide an unforgettable experience for all participants and visitors, with our rich history and welcoming and collaborative spirit,” Allegheny County Executive Sara Innamorato said. “We look forward to welcoming them and witnessing how these teens will leave a lasting imprint on our community.”

“As one of the nation’s premier sports cities, we relish the opportunity bring young athletes to our city and are particularly enthused by Maccabi’s commitment to give back as part of the program,” Pittsburgh Mayor Ed Gainey said.

The Games are a partnership by the JCC Association of North America, Maccabi World Union, Maccabi Canada and Maccabi USA. The Office of Business, Hospitality and Auxiliary Services will oversee planning and execution for Pitt.

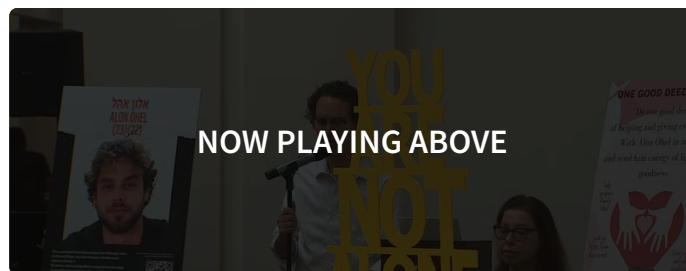
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LOCAL

# Yellow Piano installation in Pittsburgh pays tribute to hostages in Gaza through music



Yellow Piano installation in Pittsburgh pays tribute to hostages in Gaza through music

By **Christine D'Antonio, WPXI-TV**  
August 25, 2024 at 5:58 pm EDT

By **Christine D'Antonio, WPXI-TV**

August 25, 2024 at 5:58 pm EDT

PITTSBURGH — A special piano was unveiled Sunday at the Jewish Community Center of Greater Pittsburgh in Squirrel Hill.

It's called "The Yellow Piano" and is dedicated to hostages who remain in captivity in Gaza.

The concept was created by the mother of now 23-year-old Alon Ohel, who was kidnapped by Hamas over 11 months ago. Her son is a pianist from Pittsburgh's sister community of Misgav in Israel, and she believes that through music, her son and other hostages can feel that they are not alone.

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Karen Galor is a Pittsburgh-based Jewish Community Member.



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“I had the honor of going to Israel recently and meeting with Alon Ohel’s mom,” Galor said.

After Ohel was kidnapped, his mother installed a yellow piano in Tel Aviv’s hostage square with a sign “You Are Not Alone.” Since then, the concept has spread - with yellow pianos popping up in New York, Amsterdam and beyond.

“Throughout all of the world to put yellow pianos up, and there were pianos that were installed in Berlin, Paris, London, and also in hostage square in Tel Aviv. And what she wants is to just play and think of Alon,” Galor said.

Galor says in an effort to raise awareness of Alon’s story and others who remain in captivity in Gaza, the Pittsburgh community installed its own yellow piano in the Palm Court of the JCC. Several local musicians used the instrument in a concert on Sunday.

“And send him positivity and light and good vibes, and she really feels that he can feel that and that the other hostages can feel that,” Galor said.

The Yellow Piano will remain in Squirrel Hill until the hostages are released.

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