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TRANSITIONS / FINMAN WILL SUCCEED RABBI RON SYMONS

Jewish Community Center welcomes new senior director of Jewish life

“The mission and initiatives of the JCC of Greater Pittsburgh, including the nationally recognized Center for Loving Kindness and Civic Engagement, deeply resonate with me.”

By **TOBY TABACHNICK**

April 9, 2024, 4:58 pm



Hindy Finman (Photo courtesy of the JCC of Greater Pittsburgh)

The Jewish Community Center of Greater Pittsburgh has appointed Hindy Finman as its new senior director of Jewish life.

Before pursuing her rabbinical degree at Hebrew College in Boston, Finman worked in Colorado as a program coordinator helping to launch BaMidbar Wilderness Therapy. Finman, who majored in criminal justice at Temple University, also served nine consecutive summers at Camp Ramah in the Rockies, with roles including camper care liaison, inclusion specialist and head of the Jewish Outdoor Leadership Institute.

“The mission and initiatives of the JCC of Greater Pittsburgh, including the nationally recognized Center for Loving Kindness and Civic Engagement, deeply resonate with me,” Finman said in a prepared statement. “I can’t wait to continue the important work of building bridges of healing, hope, love and kindness across the Pittsburgh region and beyond.

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“As a
rabbi,”
she

continued, “I am continually pondering how we cater to the needs of those present and extend support to those absent, emphasizing the importance of kindness and care for marginalized communities and strategizing ways to address their needs. My unwavering commitment lies in cultivating spaces that are not only inclusive and secure but also demonstrate the warmth reflective of a pluralistic Judaism.”

The search process for the role included more than 60 local, national and international applicants, and “there was an extensive vetting process,” said Jason Kunzman, the JCC’s president and CEO.

Kunzman will travel to Newton, Massachusetts, in June to attend Finman’s rabbinic ordination.

“I am excited for what Hindy will bring to Jewish life here at the JCC and across our community,” Kunzman said in a prepared statement.

Finman will succeed Rabbi Ron Symons, who will move to New York this summer. **PJC**

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COMMENTS

South Hills AgeWell helps new friends cruise along

'People are put into your life for a particular reason. And I believe it's really up to you, if you choose to follow that path.'

By **ADAM REINHERZ**

April 15, 2024, 10:17 pm



Barbara Supinka, Dolly Valenti and Mary Ann Sember. (Photo courtesy of Dolly Valenti)

It's no surprise that friendship is a salve to life's wounds. But when new friends are mistaken for childhood pals, it's a pleasant wonder.

Dolly Valenti met Barbara Supinka and Mary Ann Sember in October 2022 at the South Hills Jewish Community Center during a "Mahj Mania."

The event offered new players a chance to learn the tile-based game.

Valenti knew little about mahjong and had just joined the JCC months earlier.

Sember played the game for about a year before the pandemic and understood its rules well enough to "help guide" new players, she said.

About eight people attended "Mahj Mania."

During the event, Sember, Valenti and Supinka sat at the same table. None of the three women knew each other.

"We kind of clicked," Valenti said. "Our personalities got along really well."

The women returned to the JCC to play. Week after week, they continued.

“Then we started having lunch together,” Supinka said. “And it just blossomed from there.”

Along with attending concerts together, the group met at the Galleria of Mt. Lebanon. Sember, Valenti and Supinka continued frequenting the JCC, playing mahjong, eating together and even adding Reiki-infused sound bathing classes to the mix.

About a year after the three women met, Sember pitched an idea: She said that she and her husband were going on a nine-day cruise to the Caribbean and invited Valenti and Supinka to join.

Valenti was intrigued and gauged Supinka’s interest. Meanwhile, Sember told her friends about the amenities.

“I was luring them in with all the things on the ship that I really like,” Sember said. “They have a thermal spa that’s gigantic and soft music plays. There’s big jets that you can massage your back with. And then the best part about it is you go into the next room and you’re all damp, and you put a towel down, and they have ceramic lounges and you get on that thing — I call them the hot rocks — and the heat just comes right up from the bottom of this thing and it puts you to sleep in 30 seconds. I mean it’s just the most relaxing thing you ever did in your life.”



Cruiseship Koningsdam (Holland America Line), bij Rotterdam, 20 mei 2016 (Photo by Roel Hemkes via Flickr at <https://rb.gy/ygigny>)

Once Supinka agreed to go on the cruise, Valenti acquiesced.

“We found a date and off we went, bon voyage,” Sember said.

Along with Sember’s husband, the women visited Curaçao and Aruba and experienced numerous amenities aboard the Holland America line. Having returned from the Caribbean more than a month ago, the women still talk about their time together.

Most of the conversations, they said, occur daily at the South Hills JCC.

“We all sit together and laugh and talk, and then we play mahj for a couple of hours,” Sember said.

“You’d think they’d known each other for decades — the way they interact and have a friendship,” Hayley Maher, program coordinator for [AgeWell at the JCC South Hills](#), said.

“It would give the impression to someone that we have known each other for years, but we have not known each other long at all,” Valenti said. “We’re just very, very close, very good friends.”

When asked how people can develop such deep bonds later in life, Supinka said, “I don’t know. We just have similar interests — and we’re so taken by mahjong — that we just spend time together and learn more about each other, and

that friendship deepens.”

Valenti said that she and her friends not only share a sense of humor, but that Supinka and Sember presented wonderful qualities during that first meeting: “They were compassionate people. They were interesting people. They were fun to be with. There were [things that I felt like I learned from them.](#)”

“Honestly, we happened to click, and I don’t believe it was by chance that we happened to be at the same place, at the same time, interested in the same thing. It’s more than that I believe,” she continued. “I believe people are put into your life for a particular reason. And I believe it’s really up to you, if you choose to follow that path.”

Valenti, 66, attended the JCC’s mahjong clinic in October 2022 — four months earlier, her husband died.

“After Jim passed away, one of the first things that I did was join a six-week bereavement group at our church.”

The space was “incredibly supportive” and offered somewhere to talk about a challenging period, Valenti said: “At the same time that I was dealing with my husband’s passing, my daughter had gotten engaged, and she was getting married, so I had extreme highs and lows going on for about a month, which was really difficult to deal with because on one day of the week you might be helping pick out a wedding dress. Two days later, you might be picking out your husband’s monument.”

When the bereavement meetings concluded, another session was starting.

“They were just going to do the same group again, same materials, and I thought, ‘It’s really not good for me to go into this again because I’m gonna get on the hamster wheel of just talking about grief,’” Valenti said. “I needed someplace to go. I needed something to do. I needed people to be around.”

The problem, though, was that “in doing things, or going places, people knew me as a couple,” she continued. “When I went to the JCC, and I met these people, it was like it started fresh right from the beginning. They only knew me as me. Now, over the course of time, they knew my story — that I lost my husband — because we shared all this stuff and we talked, and we cried, together. But it was easier for me I think to move forward in my healing with people knowing me just as me.”



Mahjong tiles. (Photo by Scott Schiller via Flickr at <https://rb.gy/hyf9li>)

Sember said that frequenting AgeWell is beneficial.

“I’m getting up there,” she said. “I’m pushing 77. It gets harder to meet people, to find people, to find people of like interest, to find people that you can keep healthy with. AgeWell was the best thing that ever happened to me — I 100% mean it. I’m an only child, so we don’t have a whole lot of family. And I traveled with my work, so when I retired I was really sort of friendless because everybody I knew didn’t live in this area. When I started to go to the JCC, that

was nice because you kind of saw people on and off if you went to the same classes all the time, but AgeWell has given you the opportunity to really get to know people in depth.”

[AgeWell at the JCC South Hills](#) operates Mondays and Fridays 9 a.m. to noon. and Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. Individuals 60 and older can register to participate.

The program is “about making those social connections, getting out of the house and doing those things that are good for you,” Maher said.

Supinka has little difficulty creating new ties, but said she still appreciates AgeWell.

“I’m a pretty active person. I do a lot of different things,” she said. “Even though I don’t think it’s hard for me to make friends, the JCC has kind of opened a lot of doors because we’ve made many friends there — and mahjong at the JCC has really been the catalyst.”

For Valenti, AgeWell and the relationships formed there have been invaluable.

“I will always miss my husband. I will always love him. I will always think of him. But I have been able to continue with a healthy, productive and happy life knowing that we had our time and we had our season and it was beautiful,” she said. “I will always be grateful for that. But that part of my life is over. And now I have to learn to move on. And that’s kind of what I met, and I have.”

Sember, Valenti and Supinka can be found most days enjoying each other’s company at the South Hills JCC. There’s a period when they won’t be there, though: February 2025.

The new friends will be back on the seas. This time it’s for 12 days. **PJC**

Adam Reinherz can be reached at areinherz@pittsburghjewishchronicle.org.

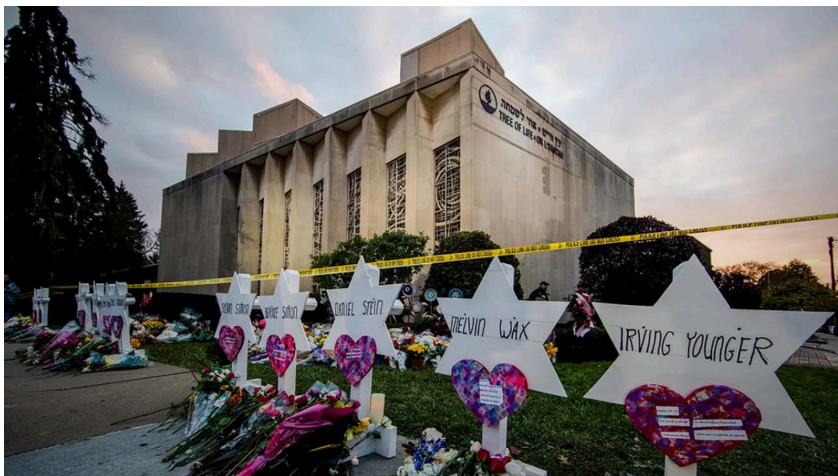
Survivor, family of shooting victim at Tree of Life Synagogue: "We always want to tell our story"

By [Sarah Scinto](#) | [WVIA News](#)

Published April 5, 2024 at 6:00 AM EDT



LISTEN • 4:28



Repairing The World / Submitted

A memorial to the victims of the Tree of Life Synagogue shooting in 2018. Eleven people were killed in the deadliest antisemitic attack in U.S. History.

Andrea Wedner often catches herself saying things her mom might say.

"I'm a lot like her," she said. "She loved being with people, that's why she liked going to synagogue every Saturday."

Her mother, Rose Mallinger, was killed in 2018. She was the oldest victim of the shooting at the Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh.

Five years on, Wedner and her siblings keep their mother's memory alive by visiting schools and other organizations to show the documentary "Repairing the World: Stories from the Tree of Life."

"It helps me a lot...before the trial there were certain things we couldn't talk about, but now we can," Wedner said. "We always want to tell our story. We want people to know who Rose Mallinger was and we're happy to share that."

Andrea, her husband Ron Wedner and her brothers, Alan and Stanley Mallinger, will attend free screenings of the documentary in Kingston and Scranton next week, hosted by WVIA.

The film, directed by Patrice O'Neill, focuses on the synagogue community in the aftermath of the shooting and how the broader Pittsburgh community came together in support of their neighbors.

Alan Mallinger, one of Rose's sons, said he and his family have spoken about the film and their experiences at several schools in western Pennsylvania. Each time they share their story, he said, the students respond with questions and in many cases are motivated to start "Eradicate Hate" clubs at their schools.

That result is just one reason he keeps talking about the shooting.

"Some of these high school kids are talking about mentoring middle school kids," he said. "They're learning hate somewhere, and if you can work your way back to where that is, maybe we can help people."



Repairing The World / Submitted

Andrea was with her mother on the day of the shooting. She was shot in the arm and survived. She said the community's support is the reason she was able to recover.

"It was the key to my healing," she said. "I still feel support from the Jewish Community Center and all the organizations around. I never felt alone."

The gunman went on trial in 2023. He was found guilty and sentenced to death. Andrea testified at the trial with the support of the Mallinger family and the families of the other victims in the courtroom.

She said the trial couldn't possibly offer them closure, but going through it has helped them to move forward.

"It told the whole story. If there was no trial, we would not have known a lot of what happened," she said. "A lot of the days were very emotional, but we all had each other to lean on and guide each other through it."

Alan thinks Rose would have been proud of how her family and community have stuck together. She would have wanted to help as much as she could, he said.

"I think she would have been a big part of that," he said.

Rose was 97 years old, but Alan said she took good care of herself. Doctors were often shocked to learn of her age.

"We all thought she would live to be 100," he said.

Andrea said she thinks of Rose every day - small things like going out to lunch after any trip to the grocery store, her typical order at Panera, or her love of word puzzles and sweets often come to mind.

"She'd find any excuse to get together with family," Andrea said. "If she had a coupon, it was 'let's go to dinner.' If the cousins were coming in from out of town, it was 'let's get a tray and have everyone over.' And she still cooked, she was a good cook."

Whenever the family gets together now, they often share stories about Rose. Mostly everyone in their family and at the synagogue called her Bubbe, the Jewish word for

"We have roses all over the house and my two granddaughters have her name as their middle name," she said. "She's just always with us. She's always in my heart. Always."



Repairing The World / Submitted

In this still from Repairing the World, a man holds a "Disarm Hate" sign outside a rally in Pittsburgh.

Screening Details

WVIA invites the community to attend two public screenings of "Repairing the World: Stories from the Tree of Life."

- [Monday, April 8](#) at 6:30 p.m. at the Friedman Jewish Community Center, Kingston
- [Tuesday, April 9](#) at 6:30 p.m. at the Scranton Jewish Community Center

Special guests attending the screenings include Alan and Stanley Mallinger and Andrea and Ron Wedner. The Mallingers will attending both screenings, the Wedners will attend the Kingston screening.

Additional guests include Rabbi Larry Kaplan in Kingston and Attorney David Falk in Scranton.

Following each screening, WVIA will host a discussion for reflection and community dialogue.

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Sarah Scinto | WVIA News

Sarah Scinto is the local host of Morning Edition on WVIA. She is a Connecticut native and graduate of King's College in Wilkes-Barre, and has previously covered Northeastern Pennsylvania for The Scranton Times-Tribune, The Citizens' Voice and Greater Pittston Progress.

You can email Sarah at sarahscinto@wvia.org

[See stories by Sarah Scinto | WVIA News](#)

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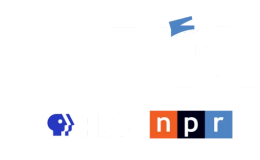
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OPINION / GUEST COLUMNIST

You need a plan to vote

The deadline to register to vote in Pennsylvania is April 8.



By **RABBI RON SYMONS**

April 3, 2024, 10:24 am



home page



As the Jewish community approaches the sacred celebration of Passover, there lies an essential civic duty that must not be ignored: voting. While we get ready to join our friends and family at the seder table, let us not forget the importance of participating in the electoral process.

Even though our democracy is only a couple hundred years old, we can look back in Jewish values from 2,000 years ago to guide our understanding of what so many of us understand as the “sacred right” (or is it “sacred rite,” or both?) to vote.

Hillel, an early architect of rabbinic thinking who lived in the first century before the turn of the era, commented “Al tifros min hatzibur, Do not separate yourself from the community.” (Pirke Avot 2:5) In his day, separation meant not being a part of the vibrancy of community life. While he didn’t live in a democratic system in which every citizen’s vote mattered, his message is even more powerful for us today: In a time when many are frustrated with the political system, stay connected by voting.

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Civic

engagement as a Jewish community ensures that our society is better aligned with our values, charging us to call for economic justice, environmental stewardship and human rights. The ideals laid out in the Torah and proclaimed by the prophets were a guide for the Israelites when we were settled in our land, and with this sovereignty came a spiritual and moral responsibility. Voting is also a form of expression using our commitment to tikkun olam, the Jewish principle of repairing the world. By taking part in the democratic process, we have the power to allow our voices to be heard.

Many GOTV (Get Out The Vote) campaigns speak about how eligible voters need a plan to vote long before voting day. Year after year, this is often a partisan message to out-vote the other party. This year, however, planning to vote for the primary is neither partisan nor a win-lose proposition. This year, it is a win-win proposition for our democracy.

That being said, it is complicated given that election day is on the first day of Passover, April 23. These are the implications of the confluence of events:

- The deadline to register to vote in Pennsylvania is April 8.

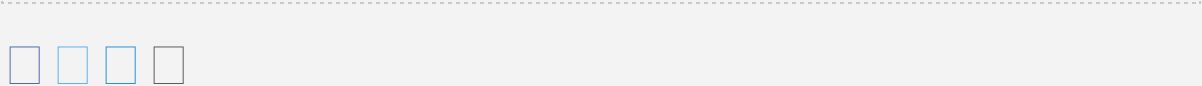
- Jewish organizations, like the JCC, that normally serve as a polling place will be closed for Passover on April 23.
- If your polling place is closed and you want to vote in person on April 23, you will be reassigned to another location.
- If you do not want to vote in person on April 23, the first day of Passover, you need to apply for a mail-in ballot by April 16.
- For a full list of resources, you can visit Pennsylvania’s Department of Elections website at Upcoming Elections (pa.gov).

While it is not as easy this year as it has been in other years, it is important to follow the wisdom of Justice Louis Brandeis: “Democracy means that the people shall govern, and they can govern only by taking the trouble to inform themselves as to the facts necessary for a correct decision, and then by recording that decision through a public vote.” **PJC**

Rabbi Ron Symons is the senior director of Jewish Life at the Jewish Community Center of Greater Pittsburgh.

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COMMENTS



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SUNSET ON THE HORIZON / RESILIENCY CENTER WILL END MISSION IN FIVE YEARS

10.27 Healing Partnership secures state funding

“This space is no stranger to evolving with community need,” JCC President and CEO Jason Kunzman said.

By **DAVID RULLO**
April 8, 2024, 1:53 pm



Maggie Feinstein (left), State Rep. Dan Frankel, steering committee members Andrea Wedner and Carol Black and JCC President and CEO Jason Kunzman. (Photo by David Rullo)

As the 10.27 Healing Partnership begins to think about sunsetting it’s mission, it is

actively pursuing funding for the next five years.

The [10.27 Healing Partnership](#) . And, after that, the organization will sunset its mission.

Founded to help address the ongoing mental health issues and trauma related to the Oct. 27, 2018, Pittsburgh synagogue shooting, the resiliency center recently secured \$350,000 in state funding through the efforts of state Sen. Jay Costa and state Rep. Dan Frankel.

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Maggie

Feinstein, executive director of the 10.27 Healing Partnership, said the organization's steering committee spent a lot of time pondering the question of what to do when its initial funding ended.

"Is it something we keep open indefinitely or is it something that we continue for a finite amount of time? We, as a steering committee, took that question very seriously," Feinstein said, "because the realization is that there is going to be more triggers, that there's other things going on, but also that there a time for moving on."

And while the center might be closing its doors in 2029, Feinstein said the work will go on, continuing at different Jewish institutions, possibly including the

Jewish Community Center of Greater Pittsburgh.

Steering committee member and shooting survivor Carol Black said that it felt right to eventually sunset the center, but that couldn't happen immediately.

"There was still too much of a need for the services this organization provides," Black said. "So, we decided to extend it for another five years and do whatever it takes to get the appropriate funding to offer the services that the community has relied on."

Andrea Wedner, a steering committee member and shooting survivor, said she was in awe of the people who served with her and Black.

"They all have jobs, but they show up and they do the work and it's good work," Wedner said. "I'm so grateful to all of them, and I'm grateful to know them and to see how this all gets put together behind the scenes. People see the end result, and it's very gratifying."

At the time of the decision to keep the center open for five more years, Feinstein said, the Pittsburgh synagogue shooter's trial was just beginning, and the rising tide of antisemitism following Hamas' Oct. 7 terrorist attack still hadn't occurred.

She emphasized the mission of the center — "that we are better together, that we have to have a space where we can gather and that we have to use the experience of 10/27 to help other people share what we learned from it" — and the "vicarious resilience, as well as the vicarious trauma" people experienced after the synagogue shooting.

That resilience, Feinstein noted, comes from the stories of "incredible people" in their healing, and stories of allyship and solidarity shown by the community's civic and spiritual leaders.

Located at the JCC in Squirrel Hill, the 10.27 Healing Partnership is in a space that has served as an art studio, hosted a boys' Hebrew high school and even operated as the FBI family assistance center in the weeks immediately following the synagogue shooting.

“This space is no stranger to evolving with community need,” JCC President and CEO Jason Kunzman said, while noting the view from the Partnership’s window — flowers in bloom and a church that served as the spiritual home of Fred Rogers or, as most know him, Mister Rogers. The view was important five years ago during the spring, when Kunzman and Feinstein were deciding on which space the organization would call home.

“Things were in bloom, much the same way that they are today,” he recalled. “It really spoke to, I think, what Maggie and I both hoped would represent the journey of healing and building resilience.”

The JCC, Kunzman said, was “honored and humbled” to be able to play a role in the aftermath of the attack. It was through the efforts of the steering committee, and other engaged community members, that the decision to locate the Pittsburgh resiliency center at the JCC was made, he added.

Frankel, who represents the Squirrel Hill neighborhood, said he couldn’t imagine a more appropriate home for the 10.27 Healing Partnership than the JCC.

“As you know, I’m here most mornings,” he said. “The diversity you see at the JCC, the different languages spoken and the different races that are here is just the kind of modeling of what a community ought to be at its best. To have the 10.27 located here is just a perfect blend of what community is about.”

The state representative said that after 26 years in public office, he knows how to get some things done and that it wasn’t too difficult to get funding for the organization.

“We try and address all kinds of community needs. We have the ability to identify resources to do that,” he said. “It’s a privilege for us to do that and it’s a great use of taxpayer dollars.”

Costa too, is impressed with the work of the center, saying that it is responsible for healing some of the horrible wounds and pain that people have dealt with, and that it serves as an outlet for people to talk about their feelings and what occurred at the Tree of Life building in 2018.

The legacy of the 10.27 Healing Partnership, Costa said, “is that they stepped forward in a really critical time, in terms of our community, and the need to be able to communicate with other folks and to have an ear for people to be able to work with and talk with, as they continue to grieve through this process. They were very timely and very relevant and very helpful to assist people to heal.” **PJC**

David Rullo can be reached at drullo@pittsburghjewishchronicle.org.

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Camp staff strive to help create lifelong friendships for campers

LYDIA KACALA

lkacala@cjn.org

Apr 28, 2024




Cantor



Having friends is an important stepping stone for children. They can teach each other different things about their lives and expose them to new ideas and situations they might not have had if they hadn't met.

Attending summer camp exposes children to hundreds of possible new friends and may even teach children how to make friends and maintain those relationships. Summer camp can be a place where these skills are strengthened and developed, allowing children to make lifelong friends from outside of their classroom experience.

Camp and camp counselors can introduce children who don't know each other, helping budding friendships thrive, according to Aaron Cantor, camp director of the Emma Kaufmann Camp at the Jewish Community Center of Greater Pittsburgh in Morgantown, W.Va.



“(During) the first 36 hours, counselors put together an intentional plan of team building, organized activities (and) opportunities for the kids to get to know each other, not just, ‘Hey, here’s my first name. Here’s my last name,’” Cantor said.

Throughout camp, children will be given opportunities to meet each other through games or activities, he explained. The children can meet others that have similar interests as them during their time at summer camp as well.

Camps work to create a fun environment for the children participating, giving them a chance to “laugh, play and have a good time together,” Cantor said. By creating a fun environment for the children, the counselors are also creating an environment in which children can bond with one another.

“That type of good feeling, good attitude type activity is right for friendship making to happen,” he said. “You always make friends during the good times, and if we can create good times at camp, it’s more likely to happen.”

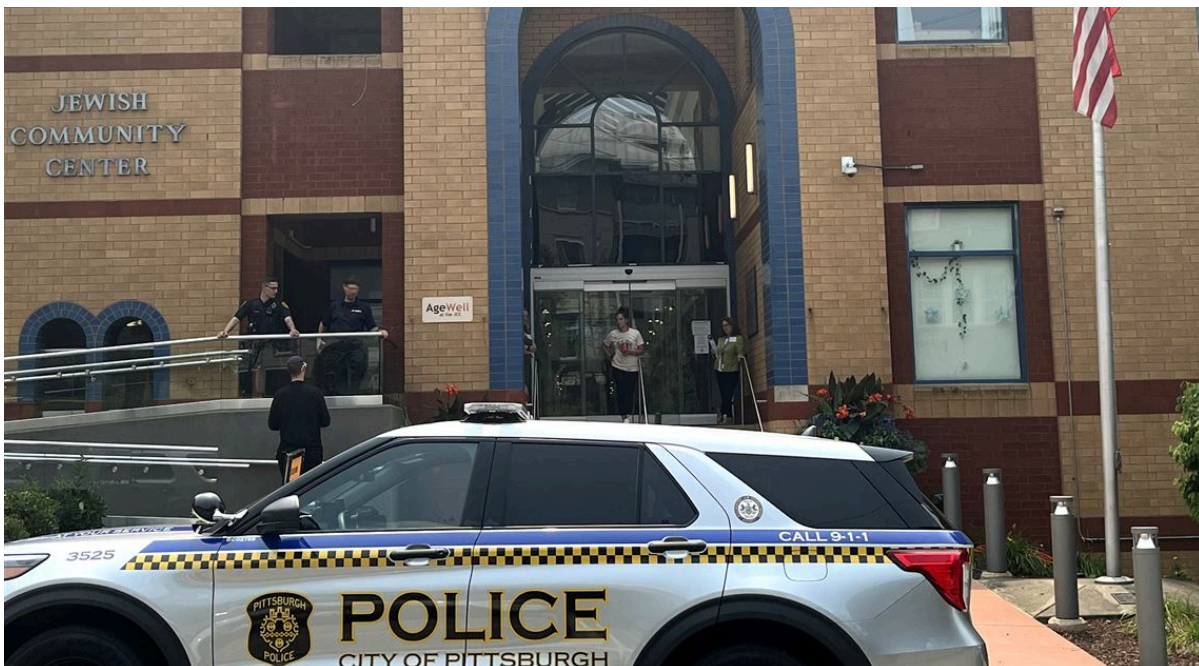
While friendships cannot be forced simply because adults think a group of children would make good friends, children can learn how to make friends themselves and how to maintain those relationships during their time at camp, Cantor added. Children often learn how to communicate with one another, how to make decisions that will impact the way their friends feel and how to problem solve when bumps in the road arise.

These skills can be useful throughout a person's life, especially as someone's definition of a friend will change as they age, he explained. Someone at the age of 12 will need and want different things from a friend as someone at the age of 16 or 45, Cantor added.

As children age, they might also not need to lean on their parents to help them make new friends as much as they did when they were younger, he said.

At the Emma Kaufmann Camp, there are four core values that guide the way camp is run – connections, values, growth and fun, he explained. The first value, connections, explains the importance the camp puts on bringing people together to create a fun summer experience.

“Connections, intentionally, is our first value,” Cantor said. “The camp experience is all about connecting to others, building relationships, short-term in the summer that can bud into long-term friendships, but that connection to your Jewish peoplehood, as well.”



James D. Lucot, Jr.: My friends had to keep looking behind them, because they're Jewish

JAMES D. LUCOT JR.
Special to the Post-Gazette /

APR 3, 2024

5:30 AM

The evening changed me. I had the honor of being invited to the annual Jewish Community Center Gala on March 9 in Squirrel Hill. I have been to numerous similar events for Catholic schools, at Heinz Field, the Westin William Penn and multiple country clubs and I expected the same type of environment.

For the most part everything was the same, with silent auctions, food stations, niche alcoholic drinks in a large banquet setting. I was very comfortable and knew more people there than I expected to.

The J.C.C. Gala was larger and nicer than the others I attended in many ways. But to me it had an aura, a vibe, that was different — not distinguishable, or instantaneously identifiable, but different.

Then I realized what it was. The police were there.

All the police

The Pittsburgh Police officers outside at the entrance who were assisting with the traffic and parking were very polite as I entered alone, as were the two officers in the admission area immediately inside. Walking through the silent auction corridor looking for my friends and my mentor who invited me, I noticed two more officers there as well.

I met my friends and we went to the gym that was transitioned into a combined social center with satellite food and drink stations, dance floor and sitting area. We walked all around, talking and socializing, and I saw two more police officers stationed there too.

When I was alone, I went over to those officers and asked them if more officers were scheduled than normal. The senior officer explained that additional officers had been assigned to this event explicitly because of the elevated risks due to the current rise in antisemitic attacks. He added that there “are even more officers assigned in similar events New York.”

Watching so many people laughing, dancing, and having fun together, it struck me that in all those years attending similar events for Catholic grade school and high schools, I could not recall one police officer ever. For a few of those events, I was on the organizing committee. We would have thousands in cash, and we never even discussed if we should have security of any kind, much less actual uniformed Pittsburgh Police officers.

Last summer, I attended a Tree of Life event in front of the county building downtown. Again, I went alone, and my only concern was finding my friends I was meeting there. What stood out the most was walking in the middle of these blocks of streets blocked off with physical barriers and closed to all traffic. There had to be at least twenty Pittsburgh Police officers, their vehicles and motorcycles surrounding us, if not more, and wooden “horses” completely lining the streets in every direction.

As we stood listening to the speakers, shoulder to shoulder, gradually I started to notice my friends would periodically turn and look behind us. We were not waiting for anyone else to join us and I wondered why they were doing that. Slowly I realized they were concerned, consciously or not, that

there could be a threat behind us, someone who could drive into us, or worse.

I did not feel anything like that at all. Why would anyone want to hurt me?

I felt fear

Walking towards the door to leave the gala I felt a real concern, a real fear, strong and direct. Do I need to be alarmed, on alert, prepared for something happening to me? Walking past the officers, down the stairs and into the dark, no one would know that I am not Jewish. Could something actually happen to me?

I could be classified or targeted like my friends have been and still are. I felt a sliver, a fraction, of the fear or alertness that so many live with every second of their lives. It made me incredibly sad and feel very small, very powerless and upset emotionally in a way that I never have been before in my life.

I want to do something, but what more can I do?

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