

THE WEEKLY PRINT

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JUNE 2, 2022

In Egypt, an effort to restore the country's historic synagogues

Egypt's restoration of its Jewish sites represents an effort to bolster tourism and revive Jewish heritage in the North African country

By Rebecca Anne Proctor

CAIRO – Since mid-April, Cairo's 1,140-year-old Ben Ezra Synagogue has been under renovation as part of government efforts to resurrect the slumbering Jewish heritage in Egypt that resonates around the world.

Located amid some of the oldest Coptic churches in the country as well as the oldest mosque in Egypt, the Mosque of Ibn Tulun, the synagogue, which dates to circa 882 CE, is sometimes referred to as the El-Geniza Synagogue or the Synagogue of the Levantines. The area where it is situated, formerly the center of El Fustat, the first Islamic capital of Egypt, built by Amr Ibn El Aas in 642 CE, presents a unique cluster of ancient religious buildings spanning all monotheistic religions.

"The building serves as witness to the freedom of religious belief Egypt had" when the Jewish population numbered as high as 80,000, Femony Anwar Okasha, an Egyptian researcher in heritage who guides tours through Old Cairo, told *Jewish Insider*.

According to popular folklore, the synagogue is situated close to the site where baby Moses was discovered in the Nile

before he grew up to lead the Jews out of slavery, an exodus marked by the festival of Passover. Ben Ezra is by far the oldest synagogue in Cairo.

"The sanctity of the place for the Jews comes from the belief that Moses was found near the site when he was a child and that he prayed in this place before he left Egypt," added Okasha. "Also, that the Prophet Jeremiah came and worshipped God in this place. The synagogue was the largest Jewish religious center at the time, with the Rabbinic court next to it and a garden large enough for the members of the community to gather on special occasions."

Today, even before much of the renovation initiated by the Egyptian Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities begins, it is difficult to enter the synagogue. Situated behind the "Hanging Church," or Saint Virgin Mary's Coptic Orthodox Church, and reached by deep winding pathways passing Coptic churches and mosques, the synagogue is heavily guarded. For those who entered it before restoration began, they would have found a small yet elegant interior filled with unusual features in its current structure that dates to 1892 after the

collapse of the original temple. Its basilica-style architectural structure with two floors, like other synagogues, is decorated with rectangles, star and pentagonal patterns that reveal the influence of the Ottoman period and comprise Roman columns and archways among other classical references. In the east of the structure is an ark for the Torah scrolls.

What also makes the synagogue all the more historic is that it is the site where Jacob Saphir, the 19th century writer, ethnographer and researcher of Hebrew manuscripts, found the Geniza documents, Jewish writings from Egypt dating from the late 800s CE to the 19th century. To this day, the famous Cairo Geniza serves as the main source for writing the history of the Jewish communities in the region.

The head of the committee supervising the restoration process, Mustafa Abdel-Fattah, told *El Watan News* that the renovation work includes insulating surfaces to protect against moisture, treating cracks, cleaning the walls and protecting color layers from the ravages of weather.

The project is part of the Egyptian government's aim to attract more visitors to

the country. Tourism accounts for about 12 percent of Egypt's gross domestic product, a sector that suffered badly during the COVID-19 pandemic. Travel restrictions and lockdowns wiped out \$17.6 billion from the Egyptian economy in 2020, according to the World Travel and Tourism Council.

It is also, says Yoram Meital, a professor in Ben-Gurion University's Middle East studies department and Egypt specialist, indicative of a growing Egyptian interest in its Jewish heritage dating back to the 2011 Arab Spring uprisings, which has increased since normalization between Israel and several Gulf Arab nations.

"The Jewish past in Arab countries, not only in Egypt, has gained widespread public recognition and respect in recent years, and this is a new development," explained Meital. "After several decades of seeing Jews in a negative way, there is now a new trend of presenting them in a much more positive way, and [this includes] the restoration of Ben Ezra synagogue and before it of Eliyahu Hanavi Synagogue [in Alexandria, which was restored in 2020] in addition to projects in Morocco and the Gulf states, not just synagogues but also cemeteries. I think these [restoration] projects are a direct expression of this revisionism about the Jewish past."

"It will not be a full-fledged restoration, but just includes a few minor works," he added. "Still, it follows other restoration projects and reflects growing social change regarding Jews in Egypt."

In 2020, Egyptian authorities invested \$6.2 million in the restoration of the Eliyahu Hanavi Synagogue after a committee at the Ministry of Antiquities recommended preservation of the synagogue, which dates to 1354.

Further, added Meital, the Jewish cultural heritage is now presented as an integral part of local culture and history in various Arab countries.

"This new trend reflects a drastic and meaningful change that has developed in very specific political and social contexts," he said. "This change should be examined as part of the change that is taking place in the Middle East and North Africa following the 2011 uprisings known as the Arab Spring."

According to Meital, during this period of upheaval, many Arabs and Muslims

turned their gaze inwards towards their own Arab societies and began to reengage with questions concerning social and cultural identity. "It wasn't necessarily about Jews or Muslims — but about 'who are we as Egyptians or as Emiratis or Moroccans,'" he added. "It is about the social and cultural identity of Arabs, including the issue of attitudes to minority communities, but also Greeks and Italians and Maltese, others who used to live in the Middle East for many years and then during the middle of the 20th century many left."

The shift is also seen in the number of television series developed in recent years about Jews in the Arab world. One example, is "Um Haroun," produced by MBC (Middle East Broadcasting Center), the Arab world's largest private broadcaster owned by the Saudi state, which aired during Ramadan in 2020, and tells the story of a Jewish family living under Arab-Muslim rule in Kuwait during the 1940s.

A precursor to the MBC show was the 2015 Egyptian TV series "Haret El Yahood," directed by Mohamed Gamal Al Adl and featuring major actors from Egyptian cinema; it depicts the period between the July 23 revolution and the Suez Crisis in 1952, including the capture of the main thoroughfare in the Jewish Quarter of Cairo and the subsequent expulsion of the Jewish population under Nasser, and how the politics of the period affected Jews' daily lives.

For the last five years, Meital has been assisting Drop of Milk, a Jewish welfare organization committed to rescuing and preserving Jewish cultural heritage. It also includes Christian and Muslim volunteers. The organization is led by Magda Tania Haroun, the president of the association and head of the Jewish community in Egypt.

Under the regime of Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi, Egypt's president since 2014, a small Jewish community has gained approval to undertake initiatives to restore and protect local Jewish heritage.

In February 2020, 180 Jews from Europe, Israel and the United States traveled to Alexandria, a city on Egypt's Mediterranean coast, to attend religious ceremonies at the recently restored Eliyahu Hanavi synagogue. According to *The New York Times*, it marked the largest such gathering of Jews in Egypt

since they were forced to leave the country during the Arab-Israeli wars of the 1950s and 1960s.

"For the first time in many years, I have seen, especially among the young generation in Egypt and throughout the region, people in their 20s and 30s, look inwards asking questions concerning identity such as, 'What society would we like to envision today?'" said Meital. "Are we in a better or worse situation now because of the lack of these minorities, and who is responsible for this?"

"Is it true that only Israel and Zionism are responsible for the emptying of the Jewish communities in the Arab world? This is the taboo question," stresses Meital.

While restoration projects certainly point to a desire to increase tourism in Egypt, they are, as believes Meital, part of a bigger societal change taking place in the Arab world — one that is now questioning the very structures on which present-day Arab societies are built and maintained. ♦

New yeshiva aims to put South Florida on the map for Torah learning

A new residential yeshiva in Boca Raton offers college-aged men an opportunity to learn Torah and get a degree — and it gives South Florida's Jewish community a new way to grow

By Gabby Deutch

Some people call South Florida the “Sixth Borough.” At the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, an exodus from New York to the Sunshine State was national news, with emigres ranging from investment bankers to crypto entrepreneurs to ocean enthusiasts.

For those in South Florida's Jewish community, the arrival of newcomers from New York was nothing new — even if the scale, in such a short time frame, was markedly larger. But as South Florida's Orthodox community has ballooned, locals have acknowledged that the area's educational institutions are not yet a match for the scale and breadth on offer in New York and New Jersey.

That is starting to change, beginning with the opening this fall of a new residential yeshiva in Boca Raton that will offer intensive Torah study as well as the option to earn a bachelor's degree from New York-based Touro College. While Yeshiva of South Florida (YOSF) is located in South Florida, it aims to be a top-tier institution that will be an academic destination for young men from around the country.

YOSF is the creation of Rabbi Efreim Goldberg, the senior rabbi at nearby Boca Raton Synagogue, the hub of the local Orthodox community. In his more than two decades at BRS, Goldberg has overseen huge growth at the synagogue. Today, it serves more than 800 families and recently opened two satellite locations, because there is rarely housing available within walking distance from the synagogue. Goldberg has hosted leaders from across the political spectrum, and he has also collaborated with the broader Jewish community on events that cut across denominational lines.

Goldberg told *Jewish Insider* he

first considered the need for more local educational institutions when his six daughters started to move away for different opportunities.

“I have all these daughters. They're going to go to college or university. We're flying back and forth, and we miss them,” he said.

The yeshiva may eventually host a seminary for women, but it is starting as a rigorous house of learning for young men to attend after a gap year in Israel. The vision for YOSF is larger than just a way to keep religious Jewish men from South Florida close to home.

It's offering something akin to a liberal arts college, but instead of courses in Western civilization's Great Books and philosophical discussions on John Locke, the curriculum, like those at yeshivas worldwide, features the Talmud and debates that were started by Torah sages of past generations.

Rather than a tree-lined quad in New England, YOSF offers palm trees and year-round warmth — perfect, perhaps, for walking to synagogue. “South Florida, I just think, is a comfortable, joyful, happy existence for most people,” said Rabbi Simcha Shabtai, who oversees learning initiatives at YOSF, “and for that to be the backdrop of this intensive pursuit really complements it very nicely.”

And just like a small liberal arts college might be cocooned in a tiny town miles from the nearest city, YOSF hopes to offer a bubble of sorts to its students, an immersive experience where learning comes first.

“This is saying you're going to have seven days a week of a program, and you're going to have the entire experience. It's more like a college campus,” said Shayna Weiss, associate director of the Schusterman Center for Israel Studies at Brandeis University. Compare that to a place like

Yeshiva University, or other yeshivas that are in the middle of densely populated Orthodox communities like Brooklyn or Lakewood, N.J. “There are people [in those places] who can stay in, but it's kind of lame. A lot of people go home, unless it's an official Shabbaton.”

On a practical level, none of what YOSF is offering is new. There are options for post-high school young men who want to spend their time studying Torah and earning a degree: Touro has its own Lander College in New York, which offers a yeshiva for men and a seminary for women. Lakewood's Beth Medrash Govoha has hundreds of courses of study for its thousands of students, who can earn a bachelor's degree if they choose.

“I don't think it's meant to be substantively different than traditional yeshiva learning. Even ideologically, I don't think that we're coming to create some new ideological bent,” said Shabtai. “I think much of the sell is the setup, in the sense that in Israel, when guys go there post-high school, they have a unique environment that allows them to maximize spiritual growth within the yeshiva. Torah learning on its own, done in the right way, can lead to tremendous personal growth and spirituality.”

YOSF plans to open in August in a building about a mile from Montoya Circle, the heart of Boca Raton's Orthodox community.

Boca used to be seen as a place just for retirees, but that's changed in recent years. A 2018 study of the South Palm Beach County Jewish community found that 8% of Jews in the area identify as Orthodox, up from 4% who identified as Orthodox in 2005.

“Boca Raton is on the map all over the world in terms of its exploding Orthodox Jewish community, so people know that. They've heard of it,” said Goldberg. “One of

the institutions that we've not really had or not had, at least reflecting our vision or worldview, is a post-high school yeshiva where young men who want to continue to study Torah, and maybe move on to the next chapter of their life, including college, have a place to go, which is immersive and intense."

The first group of students, which will include roughly a dozen college-aged men, will live and study on the campus beginning in August. Only a small minority of those students will be from Florida. Annual tuition at the yeshiva is \$12,000, and an additional \$18,000 for Touro College, with substantial financial aid available. The yeshiva's biggest donor, who wants to remain anonymous, is a New Yorker who also has a home in Florida.

Enrolling in Touro College's bachelor's program is not required, although Goldberg expects most students to do so. They can count their year of learning in Israel as credit toward a degree, so most will be at YOSF for three years. And since the students will be virtually enrolled in their classes at Touro, a private university system based in New York, they can major in nearly anything.

The YOSF team has anticipated what they worry will be one of the biggest challenges of operating in Florida:

convincing men who want to get married that they will have options for dating in South Florida. Goldberg knows that there are young women in the area who will be excited to meet the YOSF students. But they are also building in occasional long weekends for students who want to date in New York to return there.

"We're even prepared to offer some subsidies to help travel for dating, if that for some guys is going to be the obstacle to wanting to be in the yeshiva," Goldberg explained.

A gap year in Israel has become a rite of passage for Orthodox students, and YOSF is directly tying itself to that experience. In the 2020-2021 school year, 12,000 mostly American Orthodox yeshiva and seminary students spent a gap year studying in Israel. That's more than 70% of the 17,000 total foreigners who were granted student visas that year.

"Our tagline is, 'Don't just keep learning. Keep growing,'" added Goldberg. "It's not that your major growth spurt happened in Israel, and now you're technically just studying. It's that your growth spurt's not over. You keep growing."

The yeshiva, while not technically

connected to BRS, is meant to be a part of the growing Boca Jewish community. Six *kollel* students — married young rabbis, along with their wives — will study at YOSF, and the students will occasionally spend Shabbat meals with members of the community.

"A lot of these guys come from areas and neighborhoods where there are countless shuls, but not necessarily a community," said Goldberg, "and being connected to a real community that has an identity as a community can be something that enriches them, and the community could gain from these guys, their energy, their intensity, their inspiration."

What Boca has to offer the students, said Goldberg, is its "unique brand of Orthodoxy," which he described as "much less judgmental [and] divided, much less interested in being critical of others."

And the yeshiva has something to offer to Boca, too. "When cities make football stadiums, they're like, 'We've made it,'" said Weiss. "I feel like this is the same, like South Florida's on the map in a serious Torah way." ♦

MAY 29, 2022

In a first, Israel participates in Global Aerospace Summit in Abu Dhabi

Israel's presence at the conference signifies increased cooperation in the fields of defense and technology between Israel and the Gulf

By Rebecca Anne Proctor

This article first appeared in The Circuit.

In another debut for Israel stemming from the Abraham Accords, the country's leading aviation manufacturer — Israel Aerospace Industries (IAI) — participated in a major industry conference last week in the United Arab Emirates.

The three-day Global Aerospace Summit, held at the Emirates Palace in Abu Dhabi and hosted by the Mubadala Investment Company, covered topics ranging from

aviation and space to cybersecurity and innovation. It brought together more than 1,000 senior executives from the aerospace and defense sectors in countries around the world that are eager to foster global collaboration and partnerships.

The presence of IAI, which produces aerial and aeronautic systems for both military and civilian use, broke new ground for Israel nearly two years after it signed normalization agreements with the UAE and several other Arab nations.

"What is important is that we are in the

UAE and this summit is a semi-historical event for us because we are attending it for the first time ever," Sharon Biton, IAI's vice president of marketing for the Middle East and North Africa, told *The Circuit*.

The summit, now in its sixth edition, also welcomed 120 expert speakers that engaged the audience with more than 30 hours of panel discussions and workshops aiming to help shape the future of the industry.

IAI was one of the sponsors for the Global Aerospace Summit. With 15,000 employees, including 6,000 engineers, the company,

according to Biton, is the largest high-tech firm in the Middle East. A leader in both the defense and commercial markets delivering state-of-the-art technologies in air, space, naval, cyber and homeland defense, IAI is fully owned by the Israeli government. It designs, produces, develops and maintains civil aircraft, drones, fighter aircraft, missile, avionics and space-based systems.

In 2021, IAI reported annual sales of approximately \$4.5 billion with an order backlog of \$13.4 billion.

"The UAE is a hub for the Arab world in general, and the Abraham Accords gave us a big boost so that we as Israelis are now able to come to all kinds of places [in the UAE] and we get licenses to market in all kinds of places," Biton said. "The UAE as a business hub symbolizes success for the region."

Since Israel signed the Abraham Accords at the White House in September 2020 with the UAE and Bahrain, it has rewritten the rules of Middle East business after being shunned by most of the Arab world following its establishment in 1948. Among other significant developments in the past two years have been the first direct flights to the Gulf states from Israel and invitations for Israel to participate in the Dubai Expo and the World Cup soccer championship matches in Qatar later this year.

While IAI was the only Israeli company

with a physical booth at the summit, several other Israeli individuals from the industry were present and participated in various panels, including one on "Cybersecurity in the Aerospace Sector," which examined the most significant cyber security challenges facing the aerospace sector. It was led by Mohamed Al Kuwaiti, the head of cyber security for the UAE government, with speakers including Yigal Unna, former director general of the Israel National Cyber Directorate, and IAI's Esti Peshin, the company's vice president and general manager of its cyber division.

In the talk, Peshin highlighted the need for cyber security solutions for commercial aviation.

In a panel on R&D investments, Eytan Eshel, IAI's chief technology officer, stressed the company's work as a bridge. "IAI's Innovation Center is a prime example of bringing together startups and the defense ecosystem to develop new, unique solutions," he said. "We invest in the future by investing in innovation."

Jacob Rozmann, vice president and general manager of Lahav Aerostructures in IAI's Aviation Group, emphasized the importance of forging regional ties between Israel and the region., "Regional cooperation for transforming supply chains will result in quicker shipment, lower costs and a stronger

industry network," Rozmann said.

Irit Fried, who is in charge of education programming in IAI's Space Division, said teaching young people about opportunities beyond earth's orbit is critical. "Our mentorship programs share knowledge and passion with students and inspire future commitment to space."

Over the last few years, IAI has expanded its business activities in the UAE. In November 2021, Abu Dhabi-based EDGE, the region's leading technology company for defense, signed a memorandum of understanding with IAI during a ceremony at the 2021 Dubai Airshow to establish a maintenance center for a selection of IAI's systems in the UAE.

"This summit is about meeting people," Biton said, "and it is about bringing into action our slogan, which states 'Together we have a Brighter Future.' We are aiming for a mutual future that must be brighter and that must talk about not only providing Israel with solutions but also cooperation."

The summit, added Biton, was "a tremendous success with lots of traffic of very important people that led to very important meetings, which led to interesting opportunities. We felt a warm welcome from the Emiratis as individuals representing IAI and as ambassadors of the State of Israel — emotionally and business-wise." ♦

MAY 26, 2022

Saudis positioning for next move as Israel, UAE sign free-trade pact, Emirati VC chief says

Trade agreement signed by Cabinet ministers in Dubai eliminates customs duty on 96% of goods traded between Israel and the Emirates, giving stimulus to business deals after Abraham Accords

By Jonathan H. Ferziger

This article first appeared in The Circuit.

The free-trade agreement signed yesterday between the United Arab Emirates and Israel is generating interest among investors in Saudi Arabia who are patiently making plans for the possibility their own government will soon normalize

relations with the Israelis, an Emirati venture capitalist said.

"I would expect that Saudi businessmen are just going to watch, learn and try to position themselves for if and when anything opens up" with Israel, said Sabah al-Binali, executive chairman of OurCrowd Arabia, a UAE-based unit of Israel's OurCrowd venture capital platform.

Al-Binali spoke to reporters following a ceremony yesterday in Dubai in which Israeli Minister of Economy and Industry Orna Barbivai and Emirati Minister of State for Foreign Trade Thani Al Zeyoudi signed the agreement. Some 96 percent of goods traded between the two countries, including food, agricultural products, cosmetics, medications and medical equipment, will be

exempt from customs duty under the pact.

The effort to tear down trade barriers between Israel and the UAE comes nearly two years after the two nations and the Gulf state of Bahrain signed the U.S.-brokered Abraham Accords, normalizing relations between the former Middle East adversaries. U.S. President Joe Biden is preparing a visit to the Jewish state in late June amid indications that his administration is pressing the Saudis to allow more open business relations with Israel.

Those include a report in the Israeli business publication *Globes* that dozens of Israeli executives have been allowed to enter Saudi Arabia recently using their Israeli passports, instead of being required to use second passports from other countries, as has long been the practice. Two senior Biden administration officials, meanwhile, traveled to Riyadh last month to discuss a possible agreement between Israel, Saudi Arabia and Egypt that would increase oil production in the region, according to *Axios*. The White House is also pressing for an agreement finalizing the transfer of two Red Sea islands from Egyptian to Saudi sovereignty, which would facilitate the oil deal.

As Arabs and Israelis grow more

comfortable with each other, Al-Binali said it's time to start work on a more comprehensive regional framework for the holdouts to the Abraham Accords: Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar and Oman. The pact signed in Dubai covers regulatory enforcement, customs regulations, government procurement, protection of intellectual property rights and e-commerce.

"It's one thing to go do six bilateral free-trade agreements," Al-Binali said in the discussion with reporters by Zoom. "The interesting question is can Israel end up at some point in the future doing a single, bilateral, free-trade agreement with the GCC [Gulf Cooperation Council] itself? Let's not forget that the GCC is its own economic and political bloc."

Trade between the UAE and Israel is expected to reach \$5 billion in the "upcoming few years," Al Zeyoudi said last week at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland. He said trade volume between the two countries since the Abraham Accords were signed has already exceeded \$2.5 billion and will probably exceed \$2 billion in 2022.

A private-equity fund run by Jared Kushner, the son-in-law of former President Donald Trump who led negotiations on

the Abraham Accords, has arranged a deal to invest millions of dollars from Saudi Arabia's sovereign wealth fund in Israeli startups, the *Wall Street Journal* reported last month. Jerusalem-based OurCrowd, which invests in some 340 companies through its crowdfunding platform and is the first Israeli venture capital firm licensed in the UAE through the Abu Dhabi Global Market, hired Al-Binali to run its operations in the Gulf.

Al-Binali minimized concern that the UAE might retreat from its growing ties with Israel because of recurring friction with the Palestinians, including clashes in East Jerusalem and the death of Al Jazeera reporter Shireen Abu Akleh during a firefight between Israeli soldiers and Palestinian gunmen in the West Bank city of Jenin.

"The Emirati culture is one that, yes, you can sit there and say we don't like this or we like that and so on, but you know, we stay on course," Al-Binali said, noting that the relationship was already "stress-tested" by the Israel-Hamas missile battles in Gaza in May 2021. Emiratis "spend a lot of time thinking about these things, and I believe that we will see a lot of resilience." ♦

MAY 31, 2022

Arizona Senate GOP frontrunner lays out foreign policy views

'Every foreign aid dollar spent must be in the interests of the American taxpayer, and American security,' Jim Lamon told JI. 'Anything that does not meet that standard should be eliminated, but Israel would likely be the last on the cut list.'

By Matthew Kassel

Like most candidates in Arizona's Republican Senate primary, Jim Lamon has emphasized his commitment to a number of standard-issue conservative policy objectives, including border security, "election integrity" and countering China.

When it comes to Middle East foreign policy matters, the solar executive and Army veteran also generally aligns with

his main GOP rivals in the Aug. 2 primary, chief among them Mark Brnovich, Arizona's term-limited attorney general, and Blake Masters, the venture capitalist and Peter Thiel protégé.

But in a notable contrast, Lamon suggested to *Jewish Insider* in a candidate questionnaire that he had not ruled out the possibility of cutting U.S. assistance to Israel, while expressing skepticism over

international aid more broadly.

"Every foreign aid dollar spent must be in the interests of the American taxpayer, and American security," he told JI. "Anything that does not meet that standard should be eliminated, but Israel would likely be the last on the cut list."

Lamon did not elaborate on any instances that would necessitate reducing aid to Israel in his questionnaire, and his

campaign did not make him available for an interview with JI.

Lamon, who described Israel as “the most trusted ally in the region,” said he is in favor of U.S. funding for Israel that is guaranteed in a 10-year memorandum of understanding between the two countries, as well as supplemental funding for Israel’s Iron Dome missile-defense system.

“Promises made in the form of the ten-year MOU between Israel and the United States must be kept,” he said. “Israel is an important, live-fire proving ground of the Iron Dome and other technologies that are important for Israel and for US defense.”

While Lamon’s approach to foreign aid is hardly unusual among GOP candidates, most have typically carved out a clear and incontrovertible exception for Israel, support for which is near-unanimous within the Republican Party.

Such issues have become sensitive in Arizona’s Republican Senate primary, where Masters in particular has drawn scrutiny from Jewish leaders who have questioned whether he will support the continuation of U.S. security assistance to Israel.

The 35-year-old Senate hopeful describes himself as a non-interventionist who is highly skeptical of providing international aid to most countries. But he has insisted that he is in favor of continued security funding for Israel, emphasizing that the U.S. and Israel have a “special relationship.”

More recently, Masters has taken heat for an essay he wrote as a 19-year-old undergraduate student — recently unearthed by JI — in which he referenced a “poignant quotation” from Nazi leader Hermann Goering while arguing that “the U.S. hasn’t been involved in a just war in over 140 years.”

Brnovich, for his part, has cast himself as a staunch supporter of Israel.

The two other Republican candidates in the race include Michael McGuire, a former adjutant general of the Arizona National Guard, and Justin Olson, a state utility regulator who recently served as the chief financial officer of the Trump-aligned campus advocacy group Turning Point USA.

Each of the five candidates spoke early last month at a forum hosted by the Republican Jewish Coalition in Scottsdale, remarks from which were not made public.

The RJC is not backing any candidate in the primary, according to Matt Brooks, the group’s executive director.

Like his opponents, Lamon, who is in his mid-60s, has made overtures to former President Donald Trump, who has yet to make an endorsement.

Lamon, who has led recent polling on the race, has notched endorsements from former U.S. Ambassador to Germany Ric Grenell, former acting U.S. Attorney General Matt Whitaker and conservative activist Matt Schlapp, among others.

Lamont was the first Republican candidate to enter the race to unseat incumbent Sen. Mark Kelly (D-AZ), a former astronaut who has raised nearly \$40 million since the beginning of 2021.

For his part, Lamon has loaned his campaign at least \$13 million, some of which he has used to cut a series of controversial ads that have drawn national attention. In one notable spot, Lamon is depicted in a Western-style shootout with House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-CA), President Joe Biden and Kelly, whose wife, former Rep. Gabby Giffords (D-AZ), is a survivor of gun violence.

Raised on a farm in Alabama, Lamon, who is now a resident of Paradise Valley, served for six years as an engineer airborne officer in the U.S. Army during the Cold War, and was stationed in Germany.

He founded the solar company firm DEPCOM Power in 2013. The firm, where Lamon had until recently served as chairman and CEO, was acquired by Koch Industries in December. Lamon launched his campaign last May.

Elsewhere in the questionnaire, which touched on a range of Middle East policy issues, Lamon expressed opposition to reentering a nuclear agreement with Iran, stating that the Islamic republic “cannot be trusted to abide by the rules of a nuclear energy deal.”

“The Abraham Accords provide a useful template for peace between Israel and Arab neighbors in the region,” he added, referring to the series of agreements that normalized relations between Israel and a number of Muslim-majority nations in the Middle East. “But it is clear that Iran has no interest in peace in the Middle East, and is a state sponsor of terrorism. Israel should be allowed to keep Iran in check.”

Lamon did not further elaborate on his final point.

The renewable energy executive also opposed the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement targeting Israel, arguing that far-left supporters of BDS are furthering what he characterized as an antisemitic agenda.

But Lamon shied away from criticizing members of his own party who have been accused of espousing antisemitic tropes, including GOP lawmakers in Arizona.

“I am a strong supporter of Israel,” Lamon averred, “and its sovereign right to defend its borders and secure the country for its citizens.” ♦

DMFI PAC announces new slate of primary endorsements

The latest round of endorsements includes several incumbents as well as some new challengers

By Matthew Kassel

The political action committee of Democratic Majority for Israel will announce seven new House endorsements on Wednesday, according to a spokesperson.

The new slate of candidates includes several incumbents competing in relatively safe Democratic districts in California, such as Reps. Pete Aguilar (D-CA), Ted Lieu (D-CA), Mike Levin (D-CA) and Adam Schiff (D-CA), the powerful chairman of the House Intelligence Committee. Both Levin and Schiff are Jewish.

DMFI PAC is backing two candidates in open-seat races, including Michigan state Sen. Adam Hollier, who is running in Michigan's 13th Congressional District, and Cora Neumann, a Jewish nonprofit executive and public health expert who is seeking the Democratic nomination in Montana's 1st District.

The pro-Israel advocacy group is also throwing its weight behind Christy Smith, a former California state assemblywoman who is one of three Democrats challenging Rep. Mike Garcia (R-CA) in the hotly contested jungle primary in California's 27th District.

"Each of these distinguished leaders has demonstrated their willingness to fight for the Biden-Harris agenda, including a strong U.S.-Israel relationship," Mark Mellman, the president of DMFI PAC, said in a statement to *Jewish Insider* on Tuesday.

Primary elections in California and Montana will be held next Tuesday, while Michigan's primary is scheduled for the beginning of August.

A spokesperson for DMFI PAC, which has spent heavily in a number of recent primaries, said the group will be launching independent expenditures in some of the races but declined to elaborate further.

While most of the seats are solidly blue, Smith's race is rated a toss-up by the nonpartisan Cook Political Report. The former state legislator is now mounting her third challenge against Garcia, following a narrow loss in a special election in 2020 and another defeat six months later in a regularly scheduled November matchup.

Garcia is backed by a new PAC launched by the bipartisan pro-Israel lobbying group AIPAC, which has faced criticism for endorsing more than 100 Republican incumbents who voted against certifying the 2020 presidential election results.

In the statement shared with *JL*, DMFI PAC described Garcia as an "insurrection-supporting Republican," alluding to his vote to overturn the election results in January 2021.

The Smith-Garcia showdown sets up a possible clash between two powerful pro-Israel groups, even as DMFI and AIPAC have, so far, been aligned in several high-profile primaries where each group has invested significant resources, including in Cleveland and Pittsburgh.

In Michigan, Hollier is seeking to fill the seat that is soon to be vacated by Rep. Rashida Tlaib (D-MI), who is now running in the neighboring 12th District.

Hollier is jockeying for the nomination in a crowded field of Democratic contenders, including John Conyers III, whose late father previously represented the parts of the district for more than 50 years until his resignation in 2017, and Shri Thanedar, an entrepreneur and state representative who unsuccessfully ran for governor in 2018.

Last May, Thanedar co-sponsored a resolution in the Michigan Statehouse criticizing Israel's "apartheid-style policies" while urging Congress "to enact policies that halt United States funding of the Israeli

military and encourage the end of the longest military occupation in the world."

Thanedar has loaned his campaign more than \$5 million, according to the most recent filings for the Federal Election Commission.

For his part, Hollier has raised just over \$500,000.

DMFI PAC released its first round of primary endorsements in January. Last month, the group endorsed John Fetterman, the lieutenant governor of Pennsylvania who recently won the Democratic nomination for Senate.

"With today's endorsements, DMFI PAC will have endorsed more than 55 well-qualified, diverse, pro-Israel Democratic candidates for House and Senate," Mellman told *JL*, "who know well that being pro-Israel is both wise policy and good politics." ♦

Former ADL Florida director looks to replace Ted Deutch

Hava Holzhauer is also a former assistant state attorney

By Marc Rod

As the former Florida regional director for the Anti-Defamation League from 2013-17, Hava Holzhauer watched as hate crimes against the Jewish community steadily rose over a matter of several years.

"I've seen painful moments for people in the community. I know that Floridians, Americans are looking for something else," she told *Jewish Insider* in a recent interview. "And they're looking for people to not be distracted but to really help with issues that are important to them."

Now, the former assistant state attorney is hoping to bring the tools she learned at the state and local levels to Congress. Holzhauer announced in April that she was entering the race to succeed Rep. Ted Deutch (D-FL), who is leaving Congress to helm the American Jewish Committee.

"A pillar of Jewish practice is working to make the world a better place — *tikkun olam*," Holzhauer said. "I'm running for Congress to make the world a better place."

She listed drug pricing, affordable housing, voting rights, abortion rights and protecting democracy as among the top issues in Florida and in her district — which she described as "very different than what's been going on in our state," decrying Republican Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis as "distracted" and "scapegoating people" rather than "helping people with these issues."

The congressional hopeful described herself as "a moderate in some ways and a progressive in other ways. I am a people-first person. I would rather be smart than right."

Deutch's district is home to Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, the site of one of the deadliest school shootings in U.S. history.

Following last week's shooting at Robb Elementary in Uvalde, Texas, Holzhauer

said in a statement, "Every elected official who has stood in the way of gun reform in the years since Columbine, Sandy Hook, and our own Parkland shootings, has the blood of these children on their hands. That includes Mitch McConnell, Rick Scott and every cowardly, self-serving legislator in the Senate and House of Representatives blocking sensible gun legislation."

Holzhauer said that she prosecuted numerous hate crimes during her time as a state attorney, detailing one antisemitic incident in which a student was assaulted by a group of his classmates.

"They had developed a strong hatred or dislike for Jewish people in particular over time and they directed their anger at him," she said.

At ADL, she continued, "it's a different toolbox... it's standing up and fighting, using research and education and incident handling and coalition-building. And I think it's this process that's needed to create possibility and progress for people in this country and for people in Florida."

During her time at the nonprofit, Holzhauer said she found gaps in the collection of hate crimes statistics at the federal level. She's now calling for action to correct the deficits. "When it's not required, it's often something that doesn't get done," she said. "So I think it would be primary to increase that collection and be able to monitor what's going on so that we can be responsive."

Former ADL National Director Abe Foxman, who hired Holzhauer, described her as a "serious person, a knowledgeable person, experienced — she knows her stuff on community issues, on social issues, she's strong on Israel, on antisemitism."

Foxman said Holzhauer's experience both inside and outside of ADL and her understanding of community issues, responding to crises and advocating for the

community would likely serve her well as a member of Congress.

Holzhauer enters the race in South Florida's 22nd Congressional District with a significant amount of ground to make up before the state's primary at the end of August. Broward County Commissioner Jared Moskowitz, a former state representative and director of the Florida Division of Emergency Management, entered the race in March, just days after Deutch announced his retirement. Moskowitz raised \$666,000 by the close of the first quarter and has racked up endorsements from a slew of local and national elected officials.

Other Democrats seeking the seat include Fort Lauderdale Vice Mayor Ben Sorensen and airline pilot Curtis Calabrese. Moskowitz has picked up the endorsements of several other Democrats who local politicians had seen as potential candidates. Calabrese may be ineligible to run in the primary, having registered as a Democrat just two weeks before declaring his candidacy.

Holzhauer announced on May 5 that she had raised more than \$100,000 during her first week in the race, but declined to provide updated totals.

"We have an incredible team that we put together," she said. "I think there's many paths to elected office, and that we're stronger as a community as a nation, when experienced, strong advocates and doers like myself, are part of the electorate... My opinions and the way I work, they're not created because I'm running for office. It's who I am."

Like Moskowitz, Holzhauer pledged to carry on Deutch's legacy as an outspoken member of Congress on issues related to Israel, saying she is "close personal friends" with the congressman and has "had a lot of conversations" with him about Israel, on which they "line up extremely closely."

Deutch did not respond to a request for comment.

"Israel is incredibly important to me personally," Holzhauer, the granddaughter of Holocaust survivors said, noting that some of her relatives were murdered in the Holocaust, while others found safe haven in Israel. "Israel's existence is fundamental. To me there's no question — I am a Zionist, and I support the safety and security and continued existence of the State of Israel."

She added that she would "be pushing back in the same way" on anti-Israel rhetoric in Congress that Deutch has, adding that "there isn't a question anymore" that anti-Israel politics are linked to antisemitism.

In a September 2021 op-ed in a local newspaper, Holzhauer specifically condemned the eight Democrats who voted against supplemental Iron Dome funding, arguing that "Using the funding of Israel's Iron Dome missile defense system as a dispensable game piece in promoting one's own agenda flies in the face of the values and political-philosophical ideals usually associated with what it means to be progressive."

Holzhauer criticized the Democrats who voted against the funding as being

"unworthy" of being called progressives.

Their votes, she continued, support "a false narrative that ignores empirical methods, misidentifies the most ardent sources of Palestinian suffering, and denies Jewish persons their indigenous homeland."

She argued that truly "progressive thinking" about assisting Palestinians would include addressing human rights, working conditions, economic and gender inequality and terrorism and extremism; providing greater "accountability measures" for U.S. aid; supporting educational programs; creating pathways for Israeli-Palestinian collaboration and improving security for Israel.

The congressional hopeful told *JJ* she has been to Israel many times — when she was younger, primarily to meet various relatives in Israel, including her grandmother, who made aliyah. "It's a thriving democracy that is also the homeland of the Jewish people. So for me, it's always exciting to be there and to be with family and to see the country and see what's been built in the middle of the desert."

Holzhauer said she supports a two-state solution, with the U.S. "as a mediator in the future for direct talks and finding a long-

term solution to peace and opportunity in the region for Israelis and Palestinians." She also supports humanitarian aid to alleviate the Palestinians' "huge, horrible humanitarian crisis" but said that oversight is important to prevent the funding from ending up in the hands of terrorists and extremists.

She praised the Abraham Accords as an "incredibly important first step" in "restructuring" regional diplomacy, putting Israel in a "stronger position." She pledged her support to the normalization agreements' continued growth.

Holzhauer said she supports "finding a diplomatic solution to prevent a nuclear Iran," but has not yet seen a verification mechanism, including in the 2015 nuclear deal, "that would make me comfortable to ensure Iran isn't cheating on the deal."

Closer to home, as her campaign for Congress gears up, Holzhauer will likely be banking in part on the community connections she forged during her time with ADL. "When you walked into somebody's home, she was always welcome," Foxman told *JJ*. "You always knew that she had relationships." ♦

JUNE 2, 2022

General Mills says departing Israel was a business decision, not a boycott

'We continue to sell our products in Israel and look forward to continuing to serve Israeli consumers with our other brands,' the food manufacturer said

By Marc Rod

Days after General Mills announced it had sold its stake in a joint operation in Israel that operated a plant in East Jerusalem, the company emphasized that its decision was unconnected to a Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement advocacy campaign that has targeted its operations for several years.

"We have made clear the global business strategy that drove this decision. Any claims by others taking credit for this decision are false," a new statement obtained by

Jewish Insider reads. "We continue to sell our products in Israel and look forward to continuing to serve Israeli consumers with our other brands."

The food manufacturing giant had been the subject of a long-running activist campaign urging the company to divest from a factory manufacturing Pillsbury products in the Atarot Industrial Zone in the West Bank. BDS activists claimed victory following the company's Tuesday announcement it was selling off its stake in its Israeli enterprise to its business partner,

Bodan Holdings.

The company previously sold off its European dough business in November 2021, and characterized both moves as part of a new business strategy "to reshape the company's portfolio for sustainable, profitable growth by increasing its focus on advantaged global platforms."

Noam Perry, a member of the American Friends Service Committee's Economic Activism team, a Quaker advocacy group that led the two-year boycott, said in a statement on Wednesday that "General

Mills' divestment shows that public pressure works even on the largest of corporations."

AFSC did not respond to a request for comment. ♦

MAY 26, 2022

Why two federations 500 miles apart spent \$3 million on a Jewish Eventbrite

Jlive is used by 90 organizations across Montreal and Detroit, where it has advertised more than 1,200 events.

By Lev Gringauz

This article first appeared in eJewishPhilanthropy.

In 2019, on one of Scott Kaufman's trips around North America to speak about increasing local Jewish engagement, he got an unexpected request: Could he extend his stay?

Kaufman, then the CEO of the Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Detroit, was in Montreal, and his talk had included a proposal for a Jewish event-management platform, in the vein of Eventbrite, called Jlive.

"We had this three-minute concept video [but] we actually hadn't built much of anything," Kaufman told *eJewishPhilanthropy*. But after presenting at CJA, Montreal's Jewish federation, he recalls a staffer pulling him aside and saying, "I've got a donor I want you to meet, you have to come over."

Kaufman learned that, much like in Detroit, leadership at CJA had been trying to find a new way to engage their community. "We're seeing younger people becoming increasingly disengaged. We saw Jewish organizations that were struggling to connect," Natana Shek, CJA's chief Jewish identity and engagement officer, told *eJP*. "We needed to create an easy button to Jewish life."

That easy button, the Detroit and Montreal federations agreed, could be Jlive. So they teamed up to turn three minutes of concept into a real product, launched in August 2020.

Nearly two years later, and still in beta, Jlive is used by 90 organizations across Montreal and Detroit, where it has advertised

more than 1,200 events. The platform is an unusual partnership of Canadian and American Jewish organizations, representing a major investment — more than \$3 million so far — into rethinking how to draw Jews into community in the digital age. Most of that money has been spent directly on the site's development, rather than staff overhead, said Kaufman, who is now Jlive's co-managing director, and works without a salary.

The idea for Jlive grew out of frustration with each Jewish organization's silo of newsletters and events, which were overwhelming community members. To register for programs, "We [made] people fill out the same form. And if they go to a different organization, they fill out another form," Kaufman said. "It feels like medical records, you're always filling out the same thing over and over again."

Alongside standard event management and registration features, Jlive is also a reflection of the Jewish community's focus on data-driven decision making. By hosting organizations on a platform that is specifically for Jewish events, Jlive can aggregate and analyze granular demographic trends for individual agencies, like the age and location of attendees, as well as for entire communities.

"There have been many efforts to try to create some form of web technology to bring...different [Jewish] organizations together, whether it's for calendaring, or to help raise money," said Rabbi Jason Miller, a Detroit-based software engineer. He added that Jlive's data tools may be able to help Jewish agencies better understand and build relationships with constituents,

who will "actually feel like they're doing something, and not just giving a credit card and making donations."

Miller said that the initiative's seven-figure price tag didn't surprise him, given how much it costs to build an effective event platform.

"I don't think \$3 million is a lot for a startup like this," he said. "There are a lot of places that we can say, 'Why would they spend that much money there, when it could have been allocated here'...[but] you're always going to have multiple opinions as to how communities should be allocating their funds."

Most of Jlive's budget has come from private donors from around the world, and Kaufman said the spending hasn't eaten into the Detroit federation's social services budget. He added that compared to the tens of millions of dollars the federation spends on helping community members in need, Jlive's funding is fairly small. In 2021, according to its annual report, the federation had \$38 million in total allocations, including more than \$20 million that went to community service and a category called "additional local support."

"No one put in a huge amount of money relative to their overall portfolio of philanthropy," Kaufman said. "If we weren't actively innovating, we would just stagnate and become irrelevant...The world is moving fast. So you have to do both."

At first, Detroit leaders considered using existing platforms, like Eventbrite, to put all Jewish community programs in one place and to streamline the registration experience. But then Kaufman consulted with Robert Wolfe, a co-founder of

Crowdrise, a crowdfunding site acquired by GoFundMe in 2017, who recommended building a product from the ground up, rather than using existing platforms.

Sites like Eventbrite aren't designed for specific groups like the Jewish community, and don't offer the flexibility or control of data that a custom platform would. "So [Wolfe] said, 'Well, you could build it. It'll cost a lot more, but it may actually work,'" Kaufman said.

That's where the Montreal federation stepped in. Staff introduced Kaufman to a Jewish funders collaborative, made up of five local family foundations, that had been working with the federation to fund ideas that are "a higher risk than, traditionally, federations can invest in," Shek said.

The cross-border partnership felt natural to the federations in both Detroit and Montreal, which have similarly sized Jewish communities, each between approximately 70,000 and 90,000 people. Despite being nearly 560 miles apart, Jewish leaders in both cities faced a common challenge: an out-migration of Jews.

In Detroit, the collapse of the automotive industry in the late 2000s meant fewer jobs, so Jews left for economic opportunities elsewhere. In Montreal, the community had been shrinking for several decades amid the Quebec separatist movement, with many Jews moving to Toronto. For both communities, JLive felt like it could streamline Jewish engagement efforts.

The site is built by a team of developers and designers from Israel, Ukraine and California, along with some work from the Detroit and Montreal federations. One of its main benefits, as Kaufman and Shek see it, is the data processing and analysis now available to Jewish organizations.

At its simplest, JLive's algorithm recommends events to users based on what they register for, similar to how Netflix suggests content to viewers by analyzing what they're watching. The platform also processes user data, all of which is kept anonymous, to help organizations improve their programming.

Organizations can better understand "which events are resonating," Shek said. An organization might say, for example, "We planned this event for young adults, and we had 60-year-olds show up. What should we

be changing?..."So they get a real, real-time picture and dashboards, both on an event-by-event basis and over a period of time."

But collecting user data also poses ethical risks for the Jewish community. Personal information on JLive could either be hacked and stolen by malicious actors, or JLive could sell its data to brokers and advertisers in a growing market that is worth over \$232 billion globally. And while user data is anonymized so as not to lead back to specific individuals, experts say it is relatively easy to de-anonymize data and trace people.

Kaufman cited JLive's privacy policy, and says JLive is not interested in selling user data.

"Obviously, that's a potential profit center," he said, but added that he's confident the venture can find funding elsewhere. "We think if we get traction, the philanthropic community will support [JLive], along with some nominal fees."

Shek added that JLive is "being held accountable by data privacy laws...there's very few people in JLive who actually have access" to user data.

While data processing is important, Kaufman said, JLive is focused first and foremost on user experience to streamline community members' access to Jewish programming. The platform has been in beta since it launched so that organizations using it can give real-time feedback, allowing developers to address problems as they build it.

JLive is in talks to expand into the Milwaukee and Palm Beach, Fla., Jewish communities this year, with plans to also start serving Ann Arbor, Mich. Areas with similar Jewish populations to Detroit and Montreal will pay about \$50,000 to use the platform, with the price changing based on the size of the community. But growth will mean further adjustments for both JLive and the agencies learning to use it.

For example, JLive is working to integrate shulcloud, a website and database software used by many synagogues. For now, synagogues with events on the platform register people through a link on JLive events that redirects back to the synagogue's website, rather than with JLive's built-in registration feature. And organizations are still figuring out what JLive means for their

marketing strategies; simply posting events is not the same as actively using the data that JLive provides to improve audience reach.

"Something we want to do over the next six months is some seminars on marketing," Kaufman said. "Because this doesn't replace all your marketing, you still have to be strategic."

But just because an idea works for Montreal and Detroit doesn't mean it will work everywhere. Kaufman and Shek acknowledge that JLive, even with an unprecedented level of investment and development, could sputter out like any number of other attempted Jewish engagement apps or sites.

Miller predicted that JLive's long-term success will hinge on the site being quickly adopted as North America's main Jewish event platform. Otherwise, he worries that JLive will simply be seen as a local pet project.

"You've got to start getting these other communities lined up, I would say within six months," Miller said. "If it's just the Detroit-Montreal project, it's not going to be successful."

Kaufman agrees. "You need the critical mass," he said. "It needs to feel like the town square."

But even if other cities don't sign on and the platform fails to grow, Jewish leaders in Detroit and Montreal feel JLive will still be a beneficial tool. "We [still] have a super platform that is going to strengthen Montreal and the Detroit Jewish community long into the future," Shek said. "That ship has sailed already." ♦