

THE WEEKLY PRINT

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DECEMBER 14, 2022

Kevin Warren's big tent

The sports executive has leveraged his position to promote diversity, equality and inclusion while raising awareness of antisemitism, racism and other forms of bigotry

By Matthew Kassel

Last March, Kevin Warren, the powerful commissioner of the Big Ten Conference, took a moment from his demanding schedule to congratulate Yeshiva University's men's basketball team after the end of a historic season.

The small but mighty Maccabees had drawn national headlines for racking up a stunning 50-game winning streak and bagging a conference title while en route to a highly anticipated Division III tournament game that would ultimately end in defeat.

To Warren, the achievements of the regular season were an inspiring testament to "the wonderful influence the Maccabees have had on our nation and the Jewish community," he wrote in a heartfelt letter to Elliot Steinmetz, the head coach. "As your team uniquely appreciates," he went on, "so

much of life is *bashert* — predestined and connected through God."

The Yiddish term, as it happens, is particularly resonant for Warren, who holds a personal connection with the Jewish experience that extends back to his childhood and now animates a professional dedication to promoting social justice initiatives. "I heard the word *bashert* years ago, and it was so apropos for so many periods of my life," he explained in a series of interviews with *Jewish Insider* this fall. "It has great meaning to me."

As the first Black commissioner of a Power Five conference, Warren, 59, has received plaudits for his business acumen since he assumed leadership of the Big Ten in 2019, after years with the NFL. His most high-profile feat came this past August,

when the former lawyer negotiated a TV deal worth more than \$7 billion over seven years that divided football games among three leading broadcast networks, setting a record for college athletics while shattering the league's previous agreement.

But the groundbreaking sports executive, who is based in Chicago, has also leveraged his position to promote diversity, equality and inclusion while raising awareness of antisemitism, racism and other forms of bigotry on college campuses and beyond. Last year, for instance, he formed an ongoing commission to address bias and hate amid an uptick in anti-Jewish incidents, enlisting the Anti-Defamation League to provide commission members with training and education.

"One of the things I've been really

struck by in conversations with Kevin is he recognizes the platform that he has, he recognizes the responsibility that comes with the role, and he blends that with his personal commitment,” said David Goldenberg, the ADL’s Midwest regional director, who is actively involved with the program.

The feeling is mutual. “Anything the Big Ten Conference can do to eradicate hate on our campuses and in our communities, in society, we’re all in, and the Anti-Defamation League has just done such great work in that area,” said Warren, who established the Big Ten Equality Coalition in 2020 to build on that effort. “The platform here has afforded us the opportunity to move the dial.”

Such activism has long been central to Warren’s involvement in sports and dates back at least to his tenure working for the Minnesota Vikings, which has collaborated with the ADL. During the 15 years he spent with the team, Warren, who had previously held positions with the St. Louis Rams and the Detroit Lions, became the NFL’s first Black chief operating officer as well as the league’s highest-ranking Black executive. He also developed a close relationship with the Wilf family, which owns the Vikings and whose surname graces Yeshiva University’s main campus.

In 2019, shortly before he moved on to the Big Ten, Warren was among a group of Vikings staff members who participated in what he described as an “emotional” visit to the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C., with Mark Wilf, the team’s president and co-owner, and a former chair of the Jewish Federations of North America.

“He was very much always counseling us to share our stories,” Wilf said of his former charge, recalling that Warren had encouraged him to speak openly with players and employees about Wilf’s relationship to the Holocaust as the Jewish son of survivors. “He’s promoted so much in the areas of diversity and tolerance,” Wilf told JI. “He’s been a leader on all of those fronts.”

The horrors of the Holocaust have also loomed large throughout Warren’s life. Growing up in Phoenix, he said, his late father, a veteran of World War II, would often recount his experiences witnessing firsthand the concentration camps in

Germany and Poland. “He had pictures from Auschwitz and Buchenwald, and he would show us those pictures,” Warren told JI. “They just forever resonated in my mind and my heart and soul.”

“There were many nights that it troubled my spirits so much I couldn’t even sleep as a young boy,” he remembered.

Years later, he said, the lessons his father sought to impart have continued to guide him. “He spent a lot of time talking to me and my siblings about the Holocaust and for us to make sure we do our part in the world to never let these types of just horrific events ever happen again,” Warren said. “Whether it’s slavery, whether it’s the Holocaust, whether it’s the mistreatment of certain classes of people — just to stand up and protect those who need protecting, and to amplify not only our voice but our actions.”

“I just always want to make sure that I do everything I possibly can for anyone who has faced obstacles,” he told JI. “To make sure that I’m doing my part individually, my family’s doing our part, the companies where I work, that we’re doing our part to make sure that we identify all of these issues and make the world a better place for people and create equality.”

On an interpersonal level, Warren is both “fearlessly” and “fiercely inclusive,” said Adam Neuman, the chief of staff, strategy and operations and the deputy general counsel for the Big Ten.

Neuman, who is an Orthodox Jew, said the commissioner has always demonstrated an unusual level of sensitivity to his observance of Shabbat as well as kosher dietary laws, among other things. He even keeps the Jewish holidays on his calendar. “We’ve had meaningful dialogue on Judaism and Jewish principles,” Neuman said. “For him to go out of his way to be so inclusive to others, I think, creates an incredible work life for employees,” he told JI. “I think that’s why you’ve seen so much business success.”

“With Adam, so many people told me — and I think told him — that he wouldn’t be able to work in college athletics because he observes the Sabbath from sundown on Friday to sundown on Saturday, and I think we’ve proven that wrong,” Warren said. “I just have great respect for every person that places their faith as a top priority and remains disciplined.”

Warren, a Christian who counts Emanuel Cleaver as one of his former pastors, describes himself as a man of faith. “My faith is very paramount to my existence,” he said, “and I really have made it a point so that we can build bridges between the Black community and the Jewish community.”

This summer, Warren led a group of student athletes and Big Ten staffers on a civil rights pilgrimage to Selma and Montgomery, Ala., in the first of a planned series of trips that are meant “to inspire a meaningful dialogue about racial, social, religious and cultural injustices in our nation,” he announced at the time. “Part of the collegiate educational experience not only occurs in the classroom” or “on the playing field,” he told JI. “It occurs in the community.”

“To be able to spend time in Montgomery, Alabama, was just a powerful educational experience,” Warren elaborated. “To walk across the Edmund Pettus Bridge and understand that he was a former Grand Dragon of the Ku Klux Klan and all the issues that people have faced — individuals from white to Black to Jewish to young people who came during that time of crisis in our country.”

As he comes upon his fourth year as commissioner, Warren said he is eager “to continually amplify and fortify” such initiatives at the helm of a historic and potentially far-reaching institution like the Big Ten, the oldest Division I athletic conference in the U.S.

His dedication is perhaps best encapsulated in another oft-used Yiddish term that he regards as especially aspirational. “*Mensch* is a powerful word to me,” he told JI. “I strive every day that people refer to me as a mensch.” ♦

Ned Price leans into his Jewish values

Price, a former CIA analyst, traces his devotion to public service — and the ideals that he holds dearest — to his Jewish upbringing

By Gabby Deutch

Any given night, one might find State Department spokesperson Ned Price at a diplomatic reception around Washington. One Wednesday evening this past September, Price was among the guests at Israeli Ambassador Michael Herzog's Georgetown residence for a Rosh Hashanah reception.

A group of partygoers was playing the whispered parlor game that takes place among Jewish politicians in the nation's capital regarding personnel in presidential administrations. It's a simple question: *Is so-and-so official Jewish?*

It's often easy to answer — they speak about it publicly, like Secretary of State Tony Blinken discussing his stepfather, a Holocaust survivor; or Attorney General Merrick Garland sharing the story, at his Senate confirmation hearing, of his family fleeing pogroms in Eastern Europe a century ago. Second Gentleman Doug Emhoff has leaned into his status as the first Jewish person to hold that role, speaking often and openly about antisemitism and his Jewish upbringing.

"Several people were wondering whether Ned Price was Jewish. I said I might be able to find out," recalled Rabbi Levi Shemtov, executive vice president of American Friends of Lubavitch (Chabad). So he did what Chabad rabbis learn early in their training: He went up to Price and simply asked.

"A few minutes later, I returned to them and said, 'He tested positive,'" Shemtov joked. "What does that mean? I asked him whether he was Jewish and he immediately said yes. When asked whether I got into all the details, I said, 'No, not really. I'm God's agent. I'm not his enforcer. I didn't have to make an inspection. I just made an inquiry.'"

Price took up his position to great fanfare in January 2021, when he made history as the first openly gay person to serve in

that role. But he didn't require a Senate confirmation, and as a spokesperson, his job is to explain the U.S. government's position on global challenges, and not to speak about his personal life. So it's no surprise that Price hadn't previously spoken about his Jewish faith in any public forum.

An emissary from Washington to the world, Price, who is 40 years old, is one of the most visible faces of America's foreign policy. His professional journey to Foggy Bottom began with his time as a CIA analyst, but he traces his devotion to public service — and the ideals that he holds dearest — to his Jewish upbringing.

The son of a Jewish father and a Christian mother, Price grew up exposed to multiple faith traditions. He attended a private Episcopal high school and went on to college at Georgetown, a Jesuit university. (It was watching smoke billow above the Pentagon from a Georgetown rooftop on 9/11 that led him to pursue a career at the CIA.) Price identifies as Jewish.

"When I think back on what propels me and what motivates me, at the end of the day, it's public service, and I think that is more than a political thing," Price explained to *Jewish Insider* during a recent conversation in his Foggy Bottom office. "I think it is also a drive that is rooted in a sense of values and a sense of principles that really come from every faith tradition to which I've been exposed to any degree, certainly from the Jewish faith, the emphasis — and especially in the congregation [Temple Emanu-El in Dallas] that I attended growing up — on the marginalized, a tradition that emphasizes empathy, a tradition that emphasizes service."

That commitment to seeking out and elevating the voices of marginalized communities comes from his father, a Dallas attorney who took Price with him on trips around the world. The elder Price's favorite

destinations were not seaside resorts or any place that an ordinary person might choose as a vacation spot. Instead, he was drawn to far-flung locales such as Tibet, where he once went on a bike trip, or conflict-scarred nations like Peru during widespread protests over the controversial leader Alberto Fujimori, or even North Korea.

Now, if Price traveled to the places his dad loved most, he would spark international headlines.

"[I] would say, Americans absolutely should not go there," Price said with a laugh, reminiscing on his father's travel to North Korea. (The younger Price did not get to go to North Korea himself.) Looking back, Price's most memorable trip was to Cuba, where he went as a teenager in the 1990s.

"You're transported back in time," he recalled. "As someone who knew that I wanted to be in foreign policy, you literally felt like an ambassador because maybe you were the first American that they had ever met. You have this, what felt at the time, like this awesome responsibility to represent the American people." He went back to Cuba nearly two decades later, but this time he was serving as spokesperson for the National Security Council, and he arrived on Air Force One with then-President Barack Obama.

Price's father always took Ned and the rest of the family to see "the extremes," as Price put it. "There were places we went where you would see extreme opulence and in some places, extreme luxury, but he would be much more fascinated with seeing the other extremes, whether it was going to protests, which was sort of a favorite of his, or going to the more downtrodden neighborhoods, the places that tourists and certainly American tourists almost certainly never went."

As a result, Price has a collection of "nostalgic propaganda" from regimes

around the world — “not as a sign of support,” he quickly explained, “but just a reminder of the world that is well beyond our borders” — although these artifacts do not line the walls of his spacious State Department office.

Price follows in the footsteps of several previous Jewish spokespeople at the department, including Morgan Ortagus, who served before Price in the Trump administration.

“I would like to think that Ned’s approach to service and empathy and having a long and global view can be traced back to his Jewish roots,” said Eric Schultz, who served as deputy White House press secretary in the Obama administration. (Schultz lived across the street from Price for several years in Washington’s Shaw neighborhood, and they often celebrated Passover together. Eric Selbst, another frequent guest at Price’s Passover Seder, said “Dayenu” was a favorite song of Price’s.)

Like many American Jews — more than half of them, according to a 2020 Pew study — Price rarely attends synagogue.

“I see [Judaism] as something that connects me to family. I see it as something that connects me to friends. I wouldn’t want to overestimate the number of times that I’ve been to services in the past decade or so,” Price acknowledged.

Shemtov said of his conversation with Price, “I don’t know his whole life story. I didn’t ask him to submit an application. I just asked him a question as part of a conversation. You can see that he was very clear to say that he’s Jewish.”

“More Jews in America look like [Price and Emhoff] than like me,” he added. “It’s not really a surprise to anybody that I would identify Jewishly, simply from the way I appear. But for people who might not look like me and look more like people like Doug Emhoff and Ned Price, it’s important for them to know — there’s no reason to hide the fact you’re Jewish. And whatever degree of Judaism you do, or don’t practice, you still have that spark of Judaism.”

One of Price’s early overseas trips was to Israel, where he went as a 12-year-old before his bar mitzvah. He’s since been back several times in the course of his career, and Selbst said they and other friends are discussing another trip to Israel that would focus on

exploring Judaism in the country.

“You can read about 1948, 1967 and 1973, and the First and Second Intifada, but I don’t think you can fully understand the complexity of it until you go there, you see the small space that is at the heart of these questions, to see the passion that is at the heart of the emotions that you hear from the Israelis and Palestinians,” said Price.

That passion intimidated him when he first got behind the lectern. “When I first started in this job, I would go to extraordinary lengths not to talk about it,” he said of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. “There are few issues where words are parsed as finely as when it comes to this particular issue.”

While that issue in particular may have vexed Price, everything about the job was a bit bewildering to him when he first started. He had never fielded journalists’ questions from behind a lectern before. He served as National Security Council spokesperson in the Obama administration (on a rotation from the CIA), a position that required frequent contact with reporters — but behind the scenes, over email or on the phone.

“I think what I failed to appreciate is that you can know the policy and have a good sense of the policy, but people are going to be watching everything that you do, everything that you say, and in some cases, trying to put that in the worst possible light, and when there is a policy disagreement trying to turn it into an ad hominem issue as well,” Price reflected.

The personal attacks came as a surprise to Price, who spent a decade at the CIA, where he started as an intelligence analyst focused on counterterrorism before eventually becoming the agency’s top spokesperson. His jobs there were not political in nature, and he identifies more with an ethos of government service than a drive to score political victories.

“I think the virtue of working at the State Department is that it’s not about politics. It’s always about the national interest, and we’re pursuing the national security interests of the United States of America,” said Price. “Those national security interests don’t change if you have a Democrat in office. They don’t change if you have a Republican in office.”

This might be true, but Price knows

that Democrats and Republicans can have drastically different methods of protecting those interests. He resigned from the CIA in February 2017, writing in a viral *Washington Post* essay that he couldn’t continue working there under President Donald Trump.

“Despite working proudly for Republican and Democratic presidents, I reluctantly concluded that I cannot in good faith serve this administration as an intelligence professional,” Price wrote, citing Trump’s attacks on the intelligence community and his removal of the CIA director from a key committee in the National Security Council. “To be clear, my decision had nothing to do with politics, and I would have been proud to again work under a Republican administration open to intelligence analysis.”

His concern, he told JI, was that it would be personally difficult for him to work for a president who spent so much time criticizing the so-called “deep state” and Price’s government colleagues who held career roles, not tied to any political party. The State Department in particular lost a sizable chunk of its workforce during the Trump administration, and Price said that it’s been difficult for the Biden administration to rebound from that.

In between the Obama and Biden administrations, Price co-founded an advocacy group called National Security Action that supported congressional candidates who espoused “a strong, unified progressive foreign policy.” He made several thousand dollars in political contributions to Democrats in 2020, although he has not done so since joining the State Department.

Still, Price does not come across as a partisan. He speaks slowly and carefully, with the calculation of a swing-state congressional candidate. He is a by-the-book spokesperson, sticking strictly to administration talking points while taking questions for more than an hour at a time from whichever reporters show up to his briefing room — usually a diverse mix of correspondents representing publications ranging from the *Associated Press* to small foreign-language dailies most Washingtonians have likely never heard of.

It’s not just what he says, but how he says it — and the message that sends to U.S. embassies around the world, and “to friends,

partners, allies and adversaries alike,” Price explained.

This degree of calculation is evident away from the podium too, with Price keenly aware of how his words will be perceived. He declined to say whether there are any policy areas where he disagrees with the Biden administration approach, or if he’s struggled with having to speak publicly about something he does not support. “The personal beliefs that I have are entirely consistent with what it is that we’re trying to do, and I’m not going to speak to any potential disagreements, but I will say that there are some decisions that are really tough,” Price said.

Similarly, he did not want to say what moments have been most difficult in his tenure as spokesperson. “There are some that come to mind,” Price said. “I’m mindful of not wanting to go too far in this direction, just for some of the foreign policy implications.”

Price’s diplomatic answers are not always appreciated by journalists, who often try to push him to speak beyond the carefully calibrated administration policy positions. They rarely succeed.

His training in this comes, in some ways, from his time as a CIA analyst. “What I lack in any experience whatsoever with the press, I make up for in briefing the hostile intelligence services,” he recalled telling the person who interviewed him to be CIA spokesperson. “I jokingly, of course, said that it must be like working with the press in some ways, you sort of always watch what you’re saying and are carefully calibrated in your messaging.”

It’s a skill he also picked up at the Obama White House, where he helped lead the communications strategy on key Obama policies like the Paris Climate Accords, the diplomatic thaw with Cuba, or the Iran nuclear deal.

“[The Iran deal] was a signature

accomplishment for the president. It was also fraught politically at the time. But Ned made sure that we were as intentional and proactive as possible in making the best case we could,” said Schultz, who also worked on the strategy promoting the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action.

Years later, after all the many fraught issues he’s worked on, the job still makes Price nervous. That’s a good thing, he says.

“I’m not speaking for myself. I had a brief period in between administrations where I was able to go out and get in front of a camera and say what was on my mind. This is not that. And I recognize that I’m speaking on behalf of the department, on behalf of a secretary, on behalf of the U.S. government, on behalf of a president. Those words matter,” he argued. “As soon as I stop getting nervous and no longer feel those butterflies in my stomach, that’s probably a good sign that it’s time to do something different.” ♦

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Katie Hobbs warns of ‘toxic’ political climate as she prepares to lead Arizona

The outgoing Arizona secretary of state defeated Republican Kari Lake by 17,000 votes

By Matthew Kassel

Katie Hobbs, the governor-elect of Arizona, gave a stark assessment of the current political landscape in an interview with *Jewish Insider* on Wednesday, describing a climate “more daunting” than she has “ever experienced” amid rampant election denialism that has “continued to stoke threats and harassment against government leaders.”

“It’s really a toxic environment,” said Hobbs, the outgoing secretary of state, who

received hundreds of death threats over the course of the midterms.

But the newly elected Democrat, who won by more than 17,000 votes, still voiced a triumphant note as she prepares to assume office in just a few weeks — notwithstanding her far-right opponent, the former TV news anchor Kari Lake, who recently filed a lawsuit challenging the election results.

“That being said,” Hobbs, 52, explained, “I think that voters sent a strong message,

not just in Arizona but across the country, that they want leaders who are going to walk away from that and focus on the issues that really matter.”

Even as political observers had questioned her campaign strategy during the general election, which ranked among the most bruising of the midterms, Hobbs said she was always confident about her prospects. “I understand people’s concern,” said Hobbs, who faced scrutiny for refusing

to participate in televised debates, among other unorthodox tactics. “They were really scared about the outcome of this election.”

Lake, who embraced a number of extreme views, drew particular criticism from Jewish leaders and other political observers as she struggled to distance herself from several white nationalist and antisemitic figures associated with the fringe right.

Speaking with JI, Hobbs suggested that her Republican rival had shown she was unfit for Arizona’s top job when she posed with a Nazi sympathizer and endorsed an Oklahoma state Senate candidate who had claimed “the Jews” are evidence that “evil exists,” among other bigoted comments.

“It is not leadership to stand by and not speak out against antisemitic rhetoric or other actions,” Hobbs argued, adding that it is “incumbent upon anyone” to disavow hate — not least a candidate for statewide office. “That obviously doesn’t necessarily change behavior,” she clarified. “But it’s really important for leaders to set that kind of tone.”

Aside from the bully pulpit, Hobbs said she is committed to addressing a rise in antisemitic incidents, citing such efforts as strengthening hate crimes legislation, providing security funds to places of worship and working closely with law enforcement officials to thwart potential attacks.

“Every time there’s some big act nationally,” she said, “you can look back and connect dots and see, like, ‘Oh, yeah, this was something waiting to happen.’”

Hobbs, who rose to prominence as a frontline defender of Arizona’s presidential election results, expressed appreciation for what she characterized as robust backing from the sizable minority of Jewish voters across the Copper State. “Their support was important not just in this election, but in my previous election as secretary of state,” she said.

During her first campaign for statewide office in 2018, Hobbs, a former state legislator, competed against a Jewish Republican businessman, Steve Gaynor, who also entered the governor’s race this cycle but withdrew before the primary. “I really enjoyed strong support from the Jewish community,” Hobbs told JI, “something that I’ll continue to work on.”

Hobbs said the issues she hears about from Arizona voters are “pretty common,” and “don’t necessarily stay within the boundaries of religion or race or even party.”

“But the one thing that’s specific to the Jewish community is support for Israel,” she went on. “It is an important relationship for the United States, and Arizona has a really special relationship with Israel. We have a trade office there. For me, it’s really important to continue that support.”

For Hobbs, one area of mutual interest is addressing Arizona’s worsening water crisis through such measures as desalination, a technology developed by Israel. “I know the current governor has gone to Israel several times looking at that technology,” she said of Gov. Doug Ducey, a term-limited Republican. “That played a role in the big package that was passed through the legislature this last year, investing a billion dollars in new water infrastructure technology, augmentation and conservation.”

“Looking to innovation in places like Israel is going to be really important to securing our water future here in Arizona,” Hobbs said.

In the meantime, the incoming governor is facing one final provocation from Lake, who has refused to concede. The 70-page lawsuit Lake filed last week, which seeks to overturn the election results in Maricopa County and declare her the winner, alleges “intentional misconduct” and “illegal ballots” that “infected the election,” though it provides no firm evidence to support such claims.

The court hearing is tentatively scheduled for next Wednesday, if the case isn’t dismissed beforehand.

Hobbs, who has described the suit as “baseless,” declined to weigh in further during the interview with JI. “I think it’s probably better if I don’t comment on ongoing litigation, so I’ll just leave it there,” she said.

She was somewhat more forthcoming on the politically sensitive topic of Sen. Kyrsten Sinema (I-AZ), whose recent decision to switch her party affiliation from Democrat to independent has stirred controversy at the national level.

“I think that she has done the job the voters elected her to do and deliver results for Arizona,” Hobbs said diplomatically

of Arizona’s senior senator. “I don’t expect that to change just because she changed her party label.”

But intraparty machinations did not seem high among Hobbs’ immediate concerns, particularly as her opponent has shown no indication that she will accept the results before the inauguration early next month.

In conversation with JI on Wednesday, Hobbs broadly derided the “so-called leaders who continue to mislead” their supporters “into believing there is widespread fraud.”

“They have to tell them the truth, and until that happens, I worry about where we are,” she added. “I think voters sent a strong message to these folks in the last election, but they’re being misled, and it’s just really, really unfortunate.”

Meanwhile, Hobbs believes she prevailed because her campaign stayed true to itself, despite growing skepticism that her approach was potentially misguided.

“At the end of the day,” she said, “we ran a campaign that I can be proud of and say that it was true to me as a person, and the kind of campaign I wanted to run and the way that I want to govern.” ♦

Arab fashion struts into Saudi Arabia

Modest Fashion Week comes to Riyadh, which aspires to compete with Dubai as a contemporary world center of style

By Rebecca Anne Proctor

The article first appeared in The Circuit.

In shimmering gold headscarves, embroidered capes and floor-length leather coats, models from more than 25 fashion labels will take to the catwalk this week at the Saudi capital's swank Al-Faisaliah Hotel.

The event, which opens Thursday, is the first time that the Modest Fashion Show, a growing biannual display of couture designed for Muslim women, will be staged in Riyadh, where black robes, veils and *hijab* head coverings are more familiar apparel. The three-day lineup of designers, held previously in cities such as Dubai, Jakarta, Indonesia and London, is aimed at a growing Islamic market around the world that is estimated to be worth more than \$300 billion.

"For us, modest fashion is not a trend," Ozlem Sahin Ertas, CEO of the Istanbul, Turkey-based Modest Fashion Weeks organization, told *The Circuit*. "It was always big but it had no global platform for us to come together and speak out through our fashion. We believe in democratizing fashion, making it more inclusive and diverse."

Apparel and footwear purchases by Muslim consumers grew by 5.7 percent last year to \$295 billion, with Iran, Turkey and Pakistan ranked as the top spenders, according to the State of the Global Islamic Economy Report 2022. The market is forecast to grow to \$375 billion by 2025. With close to 2 billion adherents, Islam is the world's fastest-growing religion.

Fashion shows have been held in private for years in Saudi Arabia, but the events now coming to Riyadh and other cities have been made possible by the conservative Islamic kingdom's easing of rules governing women since 2016 that included lifting the

requirement for head coverings and a ban on driving. Dolce & Gabbana staged its first fashion show in the historic desert region of AlUla earlier this year and other prominent brands are also holding events as Saudi Arabia vies to become a hub for both Arab and international fashion.

Though it has gradually become the personal choice of women across the Gulf Arab states whether to wear traditional Islamic dress, neighboring Iran still enforces the covering of women's hair, a practice that has sparked widespread protest and led to violent clashes with government forces. The demonstrations in which thousands of women have marched with their heads uncovered started in September after the arrest by the country's morality police of 22-year-old Mahsa Amini for allegedly wearing her headscarf too loosely. She died three days later in police custody. The women's movement was further galvanized by Iranian rock climber Elnaz Rekabi, who came under public criticism for taking off her hijab in October at the International Federation of Sport Climbing's Asian Championships in Seoul.

The better-known side of the international fashion world that often flouts the region's adherence to modesty was on display at Arab Fashion Week (AFW) in Dubai, which emerged more than 10 years ago as a Middle East hub for designer and luxury products. Major brands such as Chanel, Dior, Gucci and Louis Vuitton anchor the glittery Mall of the Emirates and the city's other commercial palaces.

Chanel went so far as to take over a small island off the coast of Dubai to show off its 2014 "Cruise Collection," designed by creative director Karl Lagerfeld. Guests arrived on traditional wooden boats for the event which presented a modern twist on the Arabian Nights theme with models

parading in tunic tops, harem pants and Aladdin slippers.

The UAE and surrounding Gulf states are also beginning to embrace lesser-known brands closer to home, emblemized by the wide range of designers from across the MENA region at AFW, staged at the Dubai Design District, known as d3.

"The event is great," Ibrahim Shebani, a Libyan designer who founded the label Born in Exile, told *The Circuit*. "The buzz, media, we meet plenty of press, network like crazy. For a young Arab brand, it's the only way we can show our collection to press, influencers, industry people and buyers."

Jacob Abrian, the Lebanese-born founder and chief executive of the Arab Fashion Council, which stages Arab Fashion Week, says the new interest in homegrown Middle Eastern designs is a major shift from accustomed preferences for expensive clothes from the fashion capitals of Europe and the U.S.

"One of the obstacles we used to face was that regional consumers only wanted to buy brands imported from the West and there was little attention placed on regional emerging brands," Abrian told *The Circuit*. "This has changed immensely over the last five years. In 2022 consumers in the Middle East are more supportive of regional designers."

AFW, started in 2015, aspires to be a regional landmark on the international fashion industry calendar. Its catwalk shows, networking sessions and business huddles attract young designers in the region who have struggled to participate in international shows in London, Paris, or New York.

Organizers are working to arrange representation from each of the 22 member nations of the Arab League to create a Middle East fashion infrastructure that would

position the fashion industry as a main pillar for growth of the regional economy. The council envisions categorizing the countries into three industrial clusters, with Arab North African states leading the raw materials and textile group; Jordan, Egypt, Lebanon and Iraq leading the garment manufacturing group; and the Gulf countries representing the marketing and merchandise group.

Revenue from the fashion industry in Dubai is projected to reach \$4.6 billion this year, according to Statista, an 11 percent increase from 2021, driven by customers in China, Japan, South Korea, India and Indonesia. The great purchasing power of Gulf customers alongside a flood of international residents to Dubai since after the COVID 19 pandemic anchors the industry.

"Dubai used to be a place where brands would come, make some quick money and leave," said Lori Rhodes, founder of Red Letter MENA, a marketing and communications consulting firm specializing in retail and fashion. "The growth of the luxury market here made the fashion much more relevant and gave an opportunity for homegrown brands to take advantage of selling to consumers all over the world from here," she told *The Circuit*.

"There is an important local fashion voice that needs to be expressed," said

Hatem Alakeel, a Saudi designer who founded The Luxury Brand agency. "There need to be platforms to show regional fashion and bring the community together," he told *The Circuit*. Alakeel added that the fashion industry has to develop a stronger professional system, including apprenticeships for young designers to work with established Arab houses. "Many of us don't have the education and I am one of them," he said.

Other brands among the 35 represented at AFW included Iraqi Mena Talal and Iranian designer Mohammad Amin Pour Eskandarian, demonstrating Dubai's pull for designers from around the region, particularly from poorer countries and areas in conflict. Eskandarian, who showed his Zardouz collection in Dubai amid the ongoing women's protests in Iran, creates genderless designs that feature sweeping dresses with hoods and layers of fabrics that are meant to reflect a society in transition.

The latest edition of AFW also presented the designs of sustainable start-up brand Atelier Forger, led by Syrian-born Tarek Abou Samr. His chic casual style is made by abiding to the principle of "slow fashion," focusing on the environment and supporting local businesses. The fashion industry has been identified as one of the major contributors to global warming through its massive waste of water in factories, cheap

synthetic materials that pile up in landfills and wide use of toxic dyes.

While noting the progress that was evident in the Dubai shows and the work of Saudi Arabia's Fashion Commission, Alakeel said the Arab fashion industry has a lot of work to do before it can compete with major global players. "We have come a long way, but we still don't have the infrastructure and know-how needed to further grow the scene."

Growth across the region has also been limited by political turmoil in Syria and Lebanon, once centers for the region's textile industry, that has led many Arab designers to source material and manufacture their products in India and other more stable areas with low labor costs.

Ihab Jiryis, a Palestinian designer, said AFW is key for any Arab fashion designer wishing to reach an international audience. Jiryis's designs are replete with references to political conflict and the struggles that Palestinians endure. Jiryis's latest collection is called "Dialogue with Death." Featuring highly embroidered floor-length gowns and dresses in vibrant shades of red, black, green and purple, the Dubai show culminated with a series of white garments, evoking resurrection.

"I don't need to say anything," he told *The Circuit*. "My designs do the talking." ♦

This Berlin-based group is reexamining Jewish texts through art

*“The main goal is to engage in contemporary Jewish discourse, *lishma*, or for its own sake,” Shiur’s founder said.*

By Daniela Cohen

The article first appeared in eJewishPhilanthropy.

In one of Elliot Safra’s most distinctive Hanukkah memories, he remembers standing with others in “this enormous space” in a contemporary art museum in London, when the lights shut off and everyone began a breathing exercise while walking.

“All of a sudden, it made Judaism a tactile and physical experience for me rather than just an intellectual one,” Safra told *eJewishPhilanthropy*. “And I thought that was very powerful ... assigning kind of physicality and experiences to things that are sometimes just rote or intellectual exercises.” The event, put on four years ago and called “Light in Darkness,” was one of the earliest offerings from Shiur, a nonprofit that gives people opportunities to engage with Jewish text and practice in multidisciplinary and often unexpected ways.

Safra has been involved since Shiur’s inception, hosting the first informal event of around 10 people in his living room, and is a volunteer member of Shiur’s executive leadership team.

Founded by filmmaker and artist Micki Weinberg in Berlin in 2018, Shiur means “lesson” or occasionally “measurement” in Hebrew and is related to the Hebrew word *sha’ar*, or “gate.” Shiur’s multiple meanings convey the initiative’s purpose of re-examining the world through different mediums.

The organization breaks paradigms in another respect as well. It doesn’t have an operating budget — instead planning events and funding them on an ad-hoc basis. Nor does it have a paid staff, though

it is hoping to hire one soon and to have an annual budget. The organization has received funding from the German Ministry of Interior, the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, the Jewish Agency for Israel and other donors.

“The main goal is to engage in contemporary Jewish discourse, *lishma*, or for its own sake,” Weinberg told eJP. Shiur “is not about bringing Judaism to others,” Weinberg added. “It’s about making Judaism.”

Weinberg has studied Jewish texts in both traditional and non-traditional settings. He spent time learning at the Mir, a prominent Haredi yeshiva in Jerusalem, and also studied in a graduate program at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem with a focus on intertextuality in ancient Jewish literature. Following his studies, Weinberg found the Jewish programming he attended in both Europe and the U.S. limited.

“Jewish programming was often almost exclusively oriented towards dating, community, identity, or some other agenda – which oftentimes results in watered down Jewish content and an infantilization of the audience,” he said. “At Shiur, we trust our audience’s ability to engage in high level discourse and complexity, just like they do in their professional life.”

Weinberg wanted to give people the chance to engage with primary rather than secondary sources. At the same time, he was interested in film and art, and was particularly drawn to transgressive thinkers who questioned widely held assumptions. These two areas started to intersect, he said, when he invited people at the synagogues he was involved in to art events, and artists to the synagogues, until Shiur began to “carve out” its own space, he said. For Weinberg,

Berlin – a city where Jews by necessity are rebuilding their community without the preexisting structures present in other places – provided an ideal setting for this type of experimentation.

Key to Shiur, says Weinberg, is the concept of “entanglement” put forward by feminist theorist Karen Barad, a professor at the University of California, Santa Cruz. “Space, architecture is just as important as what you’re reading there. The space shapes our interpretation. Who you’re with shapes how you see things,” he said. “And it’s entangled, it’s the other way around, too – the discourse that we have is going to shape the way we experience space, sound, music, art.”

Weinberg now publishes a weekly newsletter, the basis for Shiur’s weekly virtual gatherings, which grew to 150 people during the pandemic. Participants engage in text-based discourse around a “multiplicity of content in art, literature, philosophy, cinema and more,” Weinberg told eJP, with various guest speakers including academics and contemporary artists. The focus is on amplifying marginalized voices, he said, “to uplift the sparks that we have not benefited from.”

For example, a November 2021 program called “The Ballad of High Noon” featured Yazidi artist and activist Sedat Oezgen. Together, participants discussed the texts sent out in the newsletter, which included the work of scholar Gershom Scholem, an essay by Marxist activist Rosa Luxemburg, and a graphic novel by Will Eisner. Participants were invited to try drawing three very different sketches of a person in their lives and re-interpret them, an activity that reflected Bertolt Brecht’s idea of challenging the concept of a “legitimate

sketch.”

“This virtual Shiur was particularly special, as we are prioritizing collaborations with the Yazidi community, who are today contending with what the Jewish people experienced after the Roman conquest of Judea – they have an oral tradition and many laws that simply do not work in diasporic and post-genocide conditions,” Weinberg told eJP. “Through the virtual Shiur, the Yazidi participants were able to experience how we interpret and reinterpret our traditions, whilst directly engaging their narrative with our tools. We gained a great deal of insight from the input of the Yazidi participants, and Sedat in particular.”

Since then, Weinberg said that Yazidi have been regular participants in Shiur events.

Shiur’s reach extends beyond Europe. Craving intellectual stimulation and social connection during the pandemic, Hannah Geis decided to join a virtual Shiur event from New York, and enjoyed the conversation and connection with people in different parts of the world so much that she started attending every week.

“I felt like the two hours that I spent with

this community were a breath of fresh air,” Geis said. “I had food for reflection, and I just felt energized by having those conversations with such a diverse group of people.”

Geis also attended a live event in Mexico in early 2022, a Shabbat dinner held at a vegan restaurant. “There were some traditional components like kiddush and challah. But then we also had a text-based conversation around the theme,” she said. “And so, we looked at different sources of some of them Jewish, some of them not, and we discussed at the dinner table.” Live Shiur events have taken place in many other locations, including Greece, Portugal, Spain, England, Germany, and the U.S.

Some events give participants a perspective on current affairs. A recent Shiur offering in Berlin featured Iranian exiles singing Persian protest music, and attendees explored texts by Theodor Adorno, Kabbalistic sages and other sources.

“We questioned the notion of reification, where sometimes a protest song can actually be counterproductive because what it does is it commodifies protests and it turns it into another product,” said Weinberg. “And also, in Jewish discourse, this idea of not

attempting to represent our world as if it is in a morally perfect way. Sometimes, by presenting a situation that seems correct, we actually are undermining. We oftentimes need to provoke a response rather than dogmatize an answer.”

In Safra’s view, Shiur has attracted people who would not normally be engaged in Jewish discourse. “I think it has brought non-Jewish participants into open Jewish discussion that is not politicized or Zionistically oriented and made them interested in Judaism as a religion and as a culture,” he said.

For Geis, who was raised in an ultra-Orthodox environment where Jewish texts were seen as “untouchable”, participating in Shiur has been empowering.

“It’s not an all-or-nothing approach to text,” she said. “The message is always that you can find beauty everywhere in life in all sorts of sources, whether it’s contemporary art or philosophy, literature, cinema, Jewish, non-Jewish texts, religious texts, secular. And I felt like it made me more open to them, because I wasn’t expected to just take them literally or accept them necessarily, as dogma.” ♦

DECEMBER 13, 2022

University of Haifa awards honorary doctorates to Bill Clinton and John Sexton

Sexton and Clinton were both honored for their international activities

By Ben Sales

The article first appeared in eJewishPhilanthropy.

A ceremony that felt at once formal and intimate honored two former presidents for their work building enterprises across the globe — one a former leader of New York University, and the other

the former leader of the free world.

The two men, John Sexton and Bill Clinton, received honorary doctorates from the University of Haifa at an hourlong event last night at New York University, in an auditorium across the street from Manhattan’s Washington Square Park. Ron Robin, the University of Haifa’s president,

said a global perspective also inspired his school, which he said was Israel’s most diverse university, and which is located in a city historically known for good relations between its Jewish and Arab populations.

“Building a shared society [and] creating global networks are really the only way to face the environmental, social and health

crises that affect us all,” Robin said. “Our goal is to create a new, pluralistic and inclusive Israeli middle class that will rise to the environmental and human challenges of the region and the world.”

Sexton and Clinton were both honored for their international activities. Sexton presided over NYU at a time when it opened up outposts worldwide. It now has three campuses that grant degrees — in New York, Abu Dhabi and Shanghai — as well as a dozen more campuses worldwide, from Madrid to Sydney to Tel Aviv. His doctorate was given “for pioneering the global network university, promoting cross-cultural sensitivity, and offering students and faculty opportunities to engage in innovative research.”

Clinton received the doctorate in recognition of his activities as president and of his work at the Clinton Global Initiative, his family foundation that focuses on climate, public health and economic development. His doctorate was given for his “promotion of democracy, advocacy of human rights, and humanitarian assistance,” and for “improving the lives of millions around the globe.”

The event had the expected trappings of academic formality. A procession of people in gowns and hoods walked slowly

down the aisle behind a group of bagpipers playing “Hava Nagila.” Clinton and Sexton’s robes both featured custom embroidery by Israeli artists. The speech introducing Sexton, by Katherine Fleming, president and CEO of the J. Paul Getty Trust and a history professor at NYU, included a lengthy quotation in Greek.

“Lest I have not yet been pretentious enough, allow me to invoke Marcus Aurelius,” Fleming said, drawing a laugh. Her Greek quote from his writings, she said, means, “What injures the hive, injures the bee,” an adage she said speaks to Sexton’s “commitment to others.”

And yet, the two honorees did not appear constrained by the gravity of the occasion. Both praised the University of Haifa and each other — and deprecated themselves. Recalling an NFL game he attended with Barbra Streisand and Dan Rather, Sexton described himself as, in the words of his son, a “comma person,” because at the time he had to be introduced as “John Sexton, comma, the dean of NYU law school.”

Clinton stood up to give a speech directly after receiving his honor, and was gently told to take a seat. When he was asked soon afterward to return to the lectern, he said, “The last time I tried it, it didn’t work out so well.”

Both Sexton and Clinton delivered sincere messages as well. Sexton paid tribute to his late wife, Lisa Goldberg, the former president of the Charles H. Revson Foundation, who died suddenly in 2007 and who, he said, “did everything according to the doctrine of *tzedaka*,” or charity. As president of NYU, he said, he was “representing a common enterprise of talented men and women who chose to join an enterprise of hope and progress for the world.”

Clinton was presented with his robe by Tova Sagol, of the Israeli philanthropic family of the same name, as well as the artist Marina Abramovic, and was introduced by the philanthropist and real estate developer Eddie Trump (no relation to the former president). In his speech, Clinton recalled seeing an interfaith group of NYU students travel to New Orleans to help in the recovery effort after Hurricane Katrina.

He also praised the artist who embroidered his robe, Batia Shani, because he learned that she first met him at the funeral of former Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, with whom Clinton worked closely before Rabin was assassinated.

“I will treasure this for the rest of my life,” Clinton said. “I loved him very much, and I miss him still.” ♦

DECEMBER 14, 2022

Jewish camps, challenged by inflation and staffing shortages, hope to get back to normal

Among the 300 day and overnight camps FJC serves, enrollment is almost back to where it was in 2019.

By Esther D. Kustanowitz

The article first appeared in eJewishPhilanthropy.

After three years spent in the shadow of COVID-19, the future looked bright as 800 camp

professionals and supporters gathered for the Foundation for Jewish Camp Leaders Assembly in Atlanta last week.

Among the 300 day and overnight camps FJC serves, enrollment is almost back to where it was in 2019 — and many camps

have exceeded their pre-pandemic numbers. The field as a whole is on its way to closing a \$150 million budget gap that resulted from camps remaining closed in 2020.

But some challenges have festered — while new ones have appeared. Staff

recruitment and training remains a challenge. And ongoing inflation means that most families will see significant tuition hikes when they sign up for next summer.

"We don't want camp to get so expensive that it's unattainable for families," Jeremy Fingerman, FJC's CEO, told *eJewishPhilanthropy*. "So there's a lot of effort and a lot of conversation around trying to address affordability to raise additional scholarship funds."

A preview of data from FJC's annual census of camps, due out in 2023, shows that, at least in one respect, numbers have returned almost to where they were in 2019, which was a record year for Jewish camp in terms of attendance. Day and overnight camps across the sector had a total of 182,000 campers and staff in 2019, and after a dip in 2021, camps reached 95% of the 2019 number last year. Most camps are tracking behind 2019 in terms of camper registration for summer 2023, but 40% are exceeding 2019 levels.

The pandemic's legacy is still apparent in some camps' physical footprints. In 2021, FJC — whose annual budget ranges between \$16 and 20 million — gave out grants to nearly 50 camps for capacity expansion totaling \$3.8 million — which camps matched with local donations. The money was used for temporary expansions to dining rooms and other communal structures, which enabled those camps to serve an additional 4,317 campers, resulting in almost \$16 million in increased tuition revenue in 2021.

For example, Camp Morasha, in Lakewood, PA, had planned construction of a new outdoor covered sports arena in 2021 that would enable the camp to safely and comfortably serve more campers. Due to supply chain disruptions, the project was not completed until summer 2022, when the camp had a record enrollment, serving more than 1,400 campers.

Now some alterations that were intended to be temporary have become permanent, and as camps get back to 2019 volume, there is demand for additional capacity expansion projects like adding bunks and staff housing, or reconfiguring outdoor spaces.

"The more people that experience Jewish camp, the better and stronger our Jewish future will be," Fingerman said. So when local health restrictions required

reconfiguring dining halls, "rather than restrict [the number of campers], we came up with this clever way [to] expand in either a temporary way, through tents, or some camps went to eating in two different shifts. And lo and behold, they actually found it was better, because it wasn't quite as loud as the dining hall, and they gave more breathing room, and kids ate more. There's things that they're learning all the time."

But while attendance has picked back up, staffing has not. One way camps made up their 2020 budget shortfalls was by laying off approximately a third of camp professionals.

While the layoffs helped save money, Fingerman said, they created a fresh problem: there now aren't enough assistant directors or program directors in the staffing pipeline. In addition, camp closures in 2020 meant that 2021 saw twice the number of first-time staffers, leaving a hole that local federations and other community organizations have tried to fill through incentive programs and experimental efforts.

For instance, The Jewish Federation of Cleveland's Mandel Myers Fellowship encourages local Jewish college students to work at Jewish overnight camp by providing them with professional and leadership development training, Jewish learning and networking opportunities, and a college scholarship for up to \$5,500. The program is funded by a \$1.8 million grant from the Jack, Joseph and Morton Mandel Supporting Foundation and a grant of \$150,000 a year for three years from the David and Inez Myers Foundation.

FJC also gave grants to 10 camps to train their supervisors to manage staff in more effective and meaningful ways throughout the summer. This included giving clear and timely feedback on job performance and setting reasonable and clear standards and expectations. Five camps received additional funds to hire extra professionals to help with oversight, training and community care, all of which gave counselors a better working environment, he said.

FJC gave some camps — such as Ramah of the Rockies — money to hire additional staff, allowing the camp to rotate staff members in shifts. While this didn't give counselors additional compensation, the

camp found counselors returned from time off more refreshed. FJC also provided staff members with extra leadership development programming.

"The staff satisfaction levels at that camp were highest they've ever been, in part because it gave the counselors time to breathe, some more time off and then time for additional learning and training as opposed to just being flat out all the time," Fingerman said.

Several camps are also partnering with Hillel on joint recruitment, Fingerman said. The plan involves getting camp alumni involved in their campus Hillels, and getting students at Hillel to work at camp over the summer.

Another effort involved FJC giving some camps small grants to increase compensation and benefits for staff, but based on the results of the forthcoming census, Fingerman said, these benefits did not make a difference for most recipients.

"It didn't seem to drive satisfaction levels or intended return rates," he said. "So we've come to the conclusion [that] there needs to be a certain base level of financial compensation, but there are other factors that may be valued even more than the dollars."

Being part of a named fellowship program, he said, could be the kind of "resume enhancer" that helps students convince their parents that spending the summer at camp will help them professionally.

And while campers may be returning, their parents could have trouble paying for them. Camp tuition in 2022 was set in August or September 2021 at an increase of about 3% over the previous year's fee. No one anticipated that inflation would rise to 8% by the summer of 2022, when supplies and food had to be purchased, in part using tuition dollars that no longer covered costs. This year, prices are up as well. So last summer's five-point gap, combined with continuing inflation, mean that summer 2023 tuition is likely to be 6% to 8% percent higher than it was last year.

Local efforts are trying to reduce those costs as well. A new \$10 million gift from the Jerry and Paula Gottesman Family Supporting Foundation will endow the One Happy Camper program, which provides

grants of up to \$1,000 to families of new campers, in a section of northern New Jersey. “We’re hoping other communities will follow that lead and find local, strong supporters that will do that. But that’s a great jolt, and a great help for that community,” Fingerman said.

As they had into summer 2023, many camps are well on the way back to a pre-COVID normal. But given the disruptions of the past few years, Fingerman said, they’re also realizing that old formulas may not guarantee success.

“I think there’s going to be more

experimentation that bodes well for the robustness of the field, the buoyancy of the field moving forward,” he said. “And now I think you’re going to see even more energy around innovation, around experimentation and imagination.” ♦