

THE WEEKLY PRINT

UAE Jewish community opens the Moses Ben Maimon Synagogue; Wes Moore: Maryland should adopt Israel's public-service ethos; With Feinstein's retirement, Adam Schiff seeks to carry the torch of Jewish values; Nides aims to make Israel's Fulbright program the largest in the world; 'Ginny & Georgia' creator Sarah Lampert dishes on the hit Netflix show; Alfred Uhry won't let antisemites rain on his 'Parade'; and OneTable brought Shabbat to thousands of young adults. Soon, empty nesters will dine, too.

FEBRUARY 20, 2023

UAE Jewish community opens the Moses Ben Maimon Synagogue

The event at the Abrahamic Family House synagogue, attended by approximately 325 guests celebrating the landmark occasion with live music and food and the first prayer service to be held there

By Tamara Zieve

Standing majestically alongside a mosque and church of equal external dimensions, with common white-stone exteriors and arching architectural styles, yet each with its own unique twist and respective religious symbols, the Moses Ben Maimon Synagogue in UAE capital was officially opened to the local Jewish community on Sunday. On Thursday evening the larger Abrahamic Family House, of which the Moses Ben Maimon Synagogue is a part, was inaugurated.

"It was very much a family celebration," Rabbi David Rosen, the American Jewish Committee's international director of interreligious affairs and former chief rabbi of Ireland, reflected after returning to

Israel from Abu Dhabi on Sunday evening. "Joyous and quite chaotic."

Rosen, who also attended the launch and opening forum of the Abrahamic Family House complex on Thursday and Friday, told *Jewish Insider* that Sunday was "the day of the Jewish community in the Emirates to celebrate the first Jewish synagogue to be built in the UAE."

The event, attended by approximately 325 guests celebrating the landmark occasion with live music and food, included bringing a Torah scroll into the synagogue for the first time and affixing a mezuzah on a doorpost. Sunday also marked the first prayer service held in the synagogue as the afternoon prayer of *Mincha* was

recited. Children's activities for younger community members were on offer in the rabbinic residence of Rabbi Ben de Toledo and Rabbanit Yael de Toledo — the young couple who moved to Abu Dhabi from Jerusalem to help lead services at the synagogue. After the main gathering there was also an intimate *upsherin* — a ritual hair cutting tradition common in certain Jewish communities — for a local three-year-old boy from Saadiyat Island, marking another first of many celebrations at the site.

The words "amazing" and "historic" echoed throughout the synagogue, while long-time members of the UAE's Jewish community reminisced about how far they had come, one of them telling JI how she

used to bring two suitcases in from abroad to host Shabbat in the country.

At the front of the synagogue — hailed as the “first purpose-built synagogue” to open its doors in the Gulf in nearly 100 years — the Ten Commandments are written out in clear dark Hebrew letters on the cool stone walls, and two gold menorahs stand on either side of the wooden ark. Layers of geometric criss-cross lines rise up 30 meters to the roof, allowing light to filter in and giving a resemblance of a *sukkah* and wedding canopy.

Rabbi Yehuda Sarna, the chief rabbi of the Moses Ben Maimon Synagogue, opened the event and cantor Alex Peterfreund led the congregants through a series of verses. Sarna then invited Rabbi Levi Duchman, the first resident rabbi of the United Arab Emirates and head of Chabad in the UAE, to recite a Jewish prayer in Hebrew for the leaders and government of the UAE. The same prayer was also delivered in Arabic by Rabbi Yosef Hamdi, the leader of the small Jewish Yemenite community in Abu Dhabi that was rescued two years ago by the Emirati government. Hamdi’s 13-year-old son later sang a prayer himself, filling the synagogue with soulful Yemeni Arabic vocals. “Today is something special,” Hamdi told *Jewish Insider*. “For all the people of Israel.”

A hearty round of applause was given to the Abrahamic Family House’s Ghanaian-British architect, the award-winning Sir David Adjaye, who sat in the congregation with his family.

The crowd represented a microcosm of the multicultural society of the United Arab Emirates, a country of more than 200 nationalities living in the Gulf nation, according to government statistics.

“In one way or another, we are all on some kind of Abrahamic journey,” Sarna, who has been a driving force in the evolution of the Jewish community in the UAE, told the congregation.

“We have all responded to some kind of call bringing us here to the UAE. For each of us, our journey may have begun at a different point of origin. Participating in the ceremony today are Jews from Iran, from Yemen, from Europe, from Russia, from Ukraine, the U.K. and both Americas. Some of us have been here for decades and others

have just arrived,” he continued.

“Our experience of the journey has been different. Some people have held Jewish practice with friends and family in their homes, others have helped convene in hotels,” Sarna said, reflecting a common thread heard among congregants about having previously held prayer services in their homes. “We have succeeded in creating meaningful points of convergence in temporary spaces.”

“But now, we have a synagogue, the first purpose-built synagogue in the region in almost a century. Our journeys are all intersecting here,” Sarna said. “This is the point where we can gather the sparks of light, where we can weave different threads together. In the Hebrew language, the smallest word, the smallest unit of meaning has two letters. One letter alone carries no meaning. Each person here is a letter in the story of our community. This space has brought us together to join person to person, letter to letter, and journey to journey.”

For longtime Jewish residents of the Gulf nation, Sunday’s festivities were for many years an unfathomable occurrence.

Ross Kriel, president of the Jewish Council of the Emirates, told *Ji* the first synagogue in the UAE was in his home, when he moved to Dubai from South Africa 10 years ago. “So we’ve come from my living room to here in about 10 years, it’s amazing.”

“And now look at this extraordinary structure. It’s a monument obviously to tolerance but it’s a vision of our future. The Jewish people need to completely reimagine our place in the region,” Kriel asserted. “We need to be optimistic about our future and we need to think about our future, we need to plan it, we need to imagine it. Theodor Herzl, he knew what was coming — he saw the future,” Kriel said about the father of modern Zionism. “We need to see a future as well and be optimistic about it.”

“Everybody who lives in the UAE is wonderfully optimistic about the possibility for Jews, Muslims, Christians and people to come together with a shared vision, not just the children of Abraham but all of us, with a sense that our connection to God brings us closer to each other, that religion is a source of commonality and humanity rather than conflict and that we need to have a real profound optimism about humanity rather

than being negative and cynical,” Kriel continued. “And that comes from here and that’s being led from here, and we want to transmit that to the Jewish people and into the world. So that’s what we’re going to do from here.”

Shaikha Almazrouei, a Muslim UAE native and stem-cell researcher, said the Abrahamic Family House provides the country’s different communities a place to exchange thoughts. “There are a lot of similarities between Jews and Muslims, and it’s really nice, [that we’re] making a lot of friends also. I’m really glad that we have opened the door for each other.”

Yaara Segal, who until recently served as chief of staff at the Israeli Embassy in Abu Dhabi, returned to the country to witness Sunday’s event. Segal said the emotion felt by the UAE Jewish community with each historic moment that they live through is still felt keenly. “We cannot take these things for granted and thankfully we haven’t been. It’s inspiring and we are so grateful and appreciative of this new reality that is growing and growing in the UAE, and we’re feeling it across the region,” she told *Ji*.

Limor Seal, a British expat and member of the Abu Dhabi Jewish community, described the interfaith complex as “a testament to what the UAE is about. And the fact that they have a Ministry for Tolerance here — that just speaks for itself,” she said. Seal noted that she felt comfortable registering her young daughter as Jewish on her birth certificate in the UAE, but that she wouldn’t have done so back in the U.K.

“They should do this in Europe,” Pierre-Alain Avoyer, an Italian Swiss Roman Catholic who has been living in Abu Dhabi for 13 years, said of the Abrahamic Family House initiative. “It’s frightening what’s happening there. It’s so secular they want to make religion disappear. It’s aggressive secularism.”

Avoyer described the Abrahamic Family House as an “awareness-building tool,” and an important center of education for children — “more than a place to worship — that’s how I see it,” he said.

“I’ve been welcomed by the Jewish community — and I say this very sincerely — in a way which surprised me,” Avoyer said, having first been introduced to the religion by his Jewish wife.

Rev. Johnny Moore, president of the Congress of Christian Leaders, flew in for the Abrahamic Family House inauguration from Washington, D.C., after having spent several years traveling in the Middle East fostering relationships between Jews, Muslims and Christians. Referencing the

shooting of two Jewish individuals in recent days outside a Los Angeles synagogue, Moore said, “and here we are in the United Arab Emirates, people walking around with *kippahs* and this synagogue is as packed as any synagogue I have been to in my entire life. People are praying for Israel and praying

and blessing the UAE, it’s extraordinary and it’s history I couldn’t miss.”

Fittingly, the service ended with a rendition of the Jewish prayer for peace, *Oseh Shalom*, ringing out through the beams of the instantly iconic structure. ♦

FEBRUARY 23, 2023

Wes Moore: Maryland should adopt Israel’s public-service ethos

The former nonprofit CEO also pledged to do more to combat antisemitism following a surge in bias incidents

By Gabby Deutch

In his first-ever “State of the State” address on Feb. 1, newly sworn in Maryland Gov. Wes Moore pledged to create a service-year program for recent high school graduates to work in public-service jobs.

If he finds a way to make it work, it would be the first state-level service-year program in the nation. In part, Moore said he is motivated by programs like AmeriCorps and the Peace Corps, although those are meant for people who are a few years out of high school. But Moore also draws on inspiration from outside of the United States.

“These aren’t pie-in-the-sky ideas. These are evidence-based concepts, and you look at how there are best practices around not just the country, but around the globe,” Moore told *Jewish Insider* in a recent interview. “Israel has long had a well-planned model for youth engagement.”

Moore, a Democrat, made the service-year program — which would offer job training and mentorship to participants — a keystone of his gubernatorial campaign. He told *JI* that seeing the success of a similar service ethos in Israel, where young people are required to either serve in the military or

do a year or two of national service, proved to him that it could be done.

“It’s also how so much of [Israel’s] national leadership, whether it’s political leadership, business leadership, philanthropic leadership, community leadership, comes from that training and comes from that background,” Moore explained. “The thing I’m hoping to also model is the success that we’ve seen for so many people in Israel who have had a chance to participate from their military service.”

The former nonprofit CEO and Army veteran said his own military experience, as a paratrooper in Afghanistan, taught him to look beyond partisanship and other markers of identity to find common ground.

“When I was leading soldiers in combat, I never asked them, ‘What’s your political party?’ It never came up. It didn’t matter,” said Moore. “We had one job and one goal, and my mission was to be able to unify our unit around that singular goal. And so that’s very much the approach that I also want to take to leading the state.”

Moore has long had close ties with Maryland’s Jewish community, and more than a decade ago he traveled to Israel with

the Baltimore-based Harry and Jeanette Weinberg Foundation. In December, weeks before taking office, he told a meeting convened by the Jewish Community Relations Council of Greater Washington that he hoped to “be very aggressive” in promoting trade between Israel and Maryland. He told *JI* that strengthening Maryland’s ties with Israel is one aspect of how he’d respond to rising antisemitism in the state, noting that he hopes to “think about ways we can continue to expand our deep and unbreakable bond with Israel.”

Moore’s proposed budget for the 2024 fiscal year includes \$5 million in additional funding to law enforcement to combat hate crimes, and \$1 million available to public and private schools to address and prevent hate crimes. The proposals come as Maryland’s Jewish community, particularly the heavily Jewish Montgomery County outside of Washington, D.C., has faced a recent surge in antisemitic incidents.

“We’re watching not just a higher frequency of attacks, and when I say attacks, I mean both these physical and also these psychological, these attacks of intimidation that we’ve seen against the

Jewish community,” Moore said. “We’ve seen not just a higher level of propensity but also the intensity, they’re more brazen. And I think that the thing that we have to be able to show is that hate does not and will not have a home in our Maryland.”

He called for “not just using the power of the purse,” referring to the proposed spending on hate crime prevention, but also “thinking about legislation around things like access to firearms and weapons, about how that becomes a core component when we’re thinking about public safety, and getting these illegal guns out of our neighborhoods and out of our communities.”

In 2022, the Montgomery County Police Department reported 55% more anti-Jewish bias incidents than the year before. The words “Jews Not Welcome” were written in December on the entrance sign at Walt Whitman High School, a Bethesda school with a large Jewish population, and schools in the region have also reported increased antisemitism graffiti and comments.

Maryland Del. Joe Vogel, a Montgomery County Democrat, introduced legislation this month to establish a state Commission

on Hate Crimes Response and Prevention. When asked about it, Moore did not directly comment on the proposed commission.

“I’m excited to work in partnership with the legislature to be able to ensure that we have laws that really do respond to the rise of antisemitism that we continue to see,” Moore said.

Moore’s proposed budget includes a cut to BOOST, a state voucher program that allows parents to use state funding to send children to parochial schools, including Jewish day schools. The budget does not eliminate the program entirely; Moore has pledged to allow students who are already receiving funds to continue to do so, and he said he will visit some of the schools where many students receive BOOST funding.

“There will be a continual educational process for me,” he noted. “These are all still Maryland students, and so as we go through the process of really thinking through the best way to ensure that every single family is getting everything that they need, I feel like for me going in and honoring a commitment to continue to listen and learn, visiting schools is an important part of that process.”

But he remains firmly committed to keeping Maryland on the path to getting rid of BOOST in a few years.

“The focus that I have, the focus that our administration is going to have, is making sure that we are creating and developing world-class public schools for our students,” Moore said. “It’s nothing against the [private] institutions, because I also know that individuals should be able to afford or allow students to attend those schools. I think that’s perfectly fine. I think the thing that we want to be careful and cautious on is when we’re talking about the utilization of taxpayer dollars towards that.”

Maryland’s legislative session lasts until mid-April. In Moore’s December remarks to the JCRC, he pledged to travel to Israel on one of his first overseas trips as governor. Brittany Marshall, Moore’s senior press secretary, told JI that the governor has “no specific international travel plans at this time.”

“The governor is currently focused on delivering a successful legislative session in partnership with our legislature for the people of Maryland,” Marshall added. ♦

FEBRUARY 17, 2023

With Feinstein’s retirement, Adam Schiff seeks to carry the torch of Jewish values

“Her Jewish values are ones that I deeply share,” Schiff told JI shortly after Sen. Dianne Feinstein had revealed she would not seek reelection

By Matthew Kassel

With the long-awaited announcement of her retirement earlier this week, Sen. Dianne Feinstein (D-CA), 89, marked the official conclusion of a historic era of Jewish representation in California.

It wasn’t so long ago that the country’s most populous state had two Jewish

senators, Feinstein and former Sen. Barbara Boxer (D-CA), who stepped down in 2017. The Democratic duo had served together for almost a quarter of a century.

But as that period now comes to a close, the lone Jewish Democrat vying to claim Feinstein’s seat, Rep. Adam Schiff (D-CA), sees a chance for some continuity after

Feinstein, the longest-serving senator from California, leaves office at the end of her fifth and current term in 2024.

“Her Jewish values are ones that I deeply share,” Schiff, 62, told *Jewish Insider* on Tuesday, shortly after Feinstein had revealed she would not seek reelection. “One of the passages that I use to guide my life

and my politics comes out of Micah: 'What is required of us but to do justice, to love mercy and walk humbly with thy God.' This is what Sen. Feinstein has done."

"She was a trailblazer," he added, citing her past activism on gay rights and gun control, among other issues. "Is a trailblazer."

The 11-term congressman, a former state senator who represents a Los Angeles-area House district, launched his first bid for the upper chamber in late January, weeks before Feinstein went public with her plans. He emphasized at the time of his announcement that he had sought her blessing in advance, even as she had been widely expected to retire.

His competitor, Rep. Katie Porter (D-CA), a Democrat from Orange County, became the first challenger to enter the race last month, adding early pressure on Feinstein, who in recent years has faced mounting scrutiny over her mental acuity and fitness to serve.

In a statement posted to Twitter on Tuesday, Porter, 49, thanked Feinstein "for her leadership" and said she "has had a remarkable career" as a former mayor of San Francisco who would later become the first Jewish woman sworn into the U.S. Senate. "She created a path for women in politics that I am proud to follow."

The field is almost certain to grow in the coming days as Rep. Barbara Lee (D-CA), a veteran Bay Area congressman, filed paperwork on Wednesday to run for the seat. The 76-year-old Democrat, who would be the first Black woman to join the primary, intends to formally announce her campaign before the end of the month, according to a spokesperson.

Speaking with JI, Schiff, a prolific fundraiser who rose to national prominence as the manager of former President Donald Trump's first impeachment trial, expressed confidence about his position in the race, which is shaping up to be among the most hotly contested of the next election cycle.

"I think I have the strongest track record of actually making progress on issues that people care about: championing democracy, fighting for an economy that works for everyone, bringing back resources to my home state of California," he explained. "It sets me apart."

Earlier this month, Schiff, until

recently the chairman of the powerful House Intelligence Committee, notched a conditional endorsement from Rep. Nancy Pelosi (D-CA), who said she would back him if Feinstein chose not to run. "In his service in the House," the former House speaker said, "he has focused on strengthening our Democracy with justice and on building an economy that works for all."

A spokesperson for Pelosi's office confirmed in an email to JI that her endorsement is now operational but said there is "nothing new" to add "at the moment."

In addition to Pelosi, several members of California's Democratic congressional delegation, including Reps. Mike Levin, Ted Lieu and Eric Swalwell, have lined up behind Schiff's campaign.

Feinstein's office did not respond to a request for comment about whom, if anyone, she intends to support.

Owing to California's partisan makeup, the seat is expected to remain in Democratic hands. But the primary results could point more broadly to prevailing voter sentiment as the party seeks to defend its slim Senate majority in a number of consequential matchups across the country.

Among the three candidates who are poised to compete in the race, Porter and Lee are seen as progressive standard bearers, with Schiff, an establishment Democrat, claiming the moderate mantle, if not always in substance than at least in style.

The congressman, however, suggested that such distinctions may be reductive. "We're all progressives," he insisted to JI, before adding a semantic distinction. "The reason why I think Speaker Pelosi endorsed me, and so many California House colleagues have, is that they have confidence in my ability to represent well the constituents up and down the state of California and to deliver results, to deliver *progress*," he explained. "This is what they're counting on me to do."

In recent weeks, Schiff, who is affiliated with the centrist New Democrats Coalition, has indicated that he is now seeking to join the Progressive Caucus, where Porter and Lee are currently members. The effort, he claimed, has been in the works for a while. "I had talked to the leadership of the caucus about doing it last session," he said. But the

Trump impeachment and his subsequent role investigating the Jan. 6, 2021, attack on the Capitol, he explained, "absorbed most of my time."

"I look forward to joining the Progressive Caucus," he told JI. "I think my voting record is very consistent with the caucus."

A spokesperson for the caucus declined to comment on Schiff's status as a prospective member.

Porter, for her part, has voiced skepticism of her opponent's move. "I am a member of the Progressive Caucus," she told a reporter last month, before bluntly adding: "He is not."

Notwithstanding such tensions, Schiff's supporters maintain that his background and profile have drawn interest from a diversity of voters. "He strikes me as somebody who's got really broad appeal to Democrats across the party," Jesse Gabriel, a Democratic state assemblyman in Encino who has endorsed Schiff's campaign, said in a recent interview with JI. The congressman, Gabriel argued, "has been a fighter" on key issues of importance to several constituencies.

During a meeting in Sacramento on Tuesday, Schiff found a largely receptive audience while meeting with state lawmakers of varying Democratic persuasions, according to Gabriel, who helped organize the event.

The assemblyman expects that Schiff will receive "broad support" from California's Legislative Jewish Caucus, which Gabriel chairs, in addition to the wider Jewish community, which represents an estimated population of nearly 700,000 Jewish adults, the majority of whom identify as Democrats or lean Democratic, according to the American Jewish Population Project.

Schiff, who details his family's Jewish-immigrant roots in his memoir, *Midnight in Washington*, published in 2021, "has a very strong base in the Jewish community," said Raphael Sonenshein, the executive director of the Pat Brown Institute for Public Affairs at California State University, Los Angeles.

As if to underscore that point, Gabriel said he had recently been amused to learn that Temple Isaiah, a Reform synagogue in the Bay Area town of Lafayette founded by his grandparents, had served as the location for Schiff's bar mitzvah 50 years ago. "It was

a nice little touchpoint,” Gabriel said.

“I’m very proud of the support I have from a lot of Jewish leadership up and down the state,” said Schiff, who notched an endorsement this week from Darrell Steinberg, the Jewish mayor of Sacramento. “I think the work that I’m doing to combat antisemitism, to hold to account social media platforms, like Twitter, that have seen an explosion of bigotry and hate, is really important to the Jewish community — and to, really, all Americans.”

Schiff, a former member of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, has long been viewed as a staunch supporter of Israel who is well-versed on Middle East policy. Previously, he has won backing from a range of pro-Israel groups, including Democratic Majority for Israel, J Street, the Jewish Democratic Council of America and AIPAC.

At this juncture, it remains to be seen if those groups, and perhaps others, will jump into next year’s open primary, where the top two vote-getters, who are both likely to be Democrats, will advance to the general election.

Rachel Rosen, a spokesperson for DMFI’s political arm, which has backed Schiff and Porter in past elections, had no updates to share on Wednesday. “We are watching the Senate race closely,” she told JI via email.

In a statement to JI earlier this week, Tali Degroot, J Street’s national political director, said the group is “excited to see that at the moment, all of the main contenders” are, like Feinstein, “currently JStreetPAC endorsees,” including Lee. “Of course there’s a long way to go until 2024, and we look forward to meeting with all of the candidates in this race in the weeks ahead.”

Notably, Feinstein first accepted J Street’s endorsement in 2012, lending some early credibility to the fledgling liberal advocacy group, which had launched five years earlier. More recently, J Street has sought to position itself as a left-wing foil to the bipartisan AIPAC.

While she is viewed as a solid pro-Israel voice in the Senate, Feinstein has not shied away from expressing criticism of Israeli policies and leadership over the course of her long tenure.

With well over a year until the election, Schiff believes “it is too early to know what role the different pro-Israel organizations

will play in the race.” He emphasized, however, that he has long had a positive relationship with such groups. “I think organizations across the spectrum recognize the work that I have done to improve the U.S.-Israel relationship,” he told JI, “and appreciate the strength of my voice” and “the breadth of knowledge I bring to working on these issues.”

For her part, Porter has largely pursued a mainstream Democratic lane on Israel, even if she is more widely recognized for her combative approach to congressional hearings, where her prop-laden interrogations have frequently gone viral.

Lee’s Middle East policy positions, on the other hand, have often run to the left of the the pro-Israel consensus. During her tenure, for instance, the congresswoman, an anti-war icon who assumed office in 1998, has signed on to legislation that would place restrictions on U.S. aid to Israel and was among a small group of House members who voted against a resolution condemning the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement, among other things.

Still, Jewish voters who live in her district, which includes Oakland and Berkeley, stressed in recent interviews with JI that Lee has always maintained close and courteous relationships with the Jewish and pro-Israel community. “She sees herself as being pro-Israel,” said Moses Libitzky, a Jewish activist who has engaged with Lee on issues relating to Israel. “What that looks like from my perspective and her perspective might be a bit different. But she’s very willing to talk about it, and I respect that.”

Last February, Lee and Schiff were both among a select group of House members who accompanied Pelosi on a high-profile national security delegation to Israel as well as Germany and London.

In the interview with JI, Schiff said he has no immediate plans to visit Israel as he embarks on his campaign. In recent years, the congressman said, he had traveled to the region while serving as chairman of the House Intelligence Committee, a position he no longer holds with Republicans now in the majority. Late last month, Schiff was ejected from the body altogether by House Speaker Kevin McCarthy (R-CA), in a belated act of retribution for past Democratic votes to expel controversial GOP members from

their committees.

“Now that I have been removed from that committee by Mr. McCarthy, I won’t be traveling under those auspices,” he said of his trips to the Middle East. “But I want to continue to be deeply engaged on issues affecting Israel.”

Recently, he has joined a growing number of Democratic colleagues who, by varying degrees, have raised alarms over Israel’s new governing coalition led by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. Since he assumed office in late December, the longtime Israeli leader has drawn scrutiny for partnering with controversial far-right figures who have promoted an overhaul of the judicial system that critics have derided as anti-democratic, among other things.

“I am deeply concerned about the composition of this new governing coalition and the participation of some of the more extreme voices within Israeli politics,” Schiff said. “I want to do everything I can to support strengthening our democracy at home and make sure that our allies around the world continue to further their own democracies.”

Despite his unease with the direction of Netanyahu’s government, the congressman said the U.S. and Israel will have no trouble finding common cause.

“The American people, I think, share a great many of the same values with the citizens of Israel — a love of democracy, a cherishing of the rights and freedoms of the individual,” he said. “The United States and Israel need to continue working together in our mutual national security interests but also to further our shared values.”

He expressed optimism, meanwhile, that Israel will eventually overcome its internal divisions. “Israel is going through a difficult time,” Schiff reasoned, “just as we went through a difficult time during the last administration.”

To help smooth tensions, Schiff said the U.S. can, among other things, “continue to encourage other countries in the region” to normalize relations with Israel through the Abraham Accords. He also underscored his support for a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, even as he acknowledged that the prospects for negotiations may seem distant.

“I more than understand the pessimism

because it seems like we have moved farther away from that solution in the last several years than closer to it,” he said. “I just don’t see an alternative.”

In keeping with Feinstein, a longtime

supporter of the two-state solution who has also warned of its imperilment, the congressman suggested that he would not avoid tough conversations on such issues if he is elected to the Senate. “I would love to

carry on her legacy in any way I can,” he told JI, “because I think we share very much the same values and the same ideals of public service.” ♦

FEBRUARY 22, 2023

Nides aims to make Israel’s Fulbright program the largest in the world

Sender Cohen, chief investment officer of Schusterman Interests, will replace Shira Ruderman, executive director of the Ruderman Family Foundation, as Fulbright Israel’s new chairperson

By Ruth Marks Eglash

For more than 75 years, the Fulbright program has enabled hundreds of thousands of American students, scholars and professionals to study or conduct research in academic institutions abroad, and brought the equivalent number of top-notch academics from around the world to the United States. Now, U.S. Ambassador to Israel Tom Nides is aiming to put the Jewish state at the pinnacle of this flagship cultural and educational exchange initiative by making its program the largest in the world.

“Israel already has one of the largest Fulbright programs, but we can easily double the numbers,” Nides told *Jewish Insider* in an exclusive interview this week. “My goal is for Israel to have the largest Fulbright program in the world.”

Founded by U.S. Sen. J. William Fulbright, a Democrat from Arkansas, in 1946, the Fulbright program supports some 8,000 students, scholars and professionals from more than 160 countries annually, providing them with grants to work, study or conduct research in a wide variety of academic and professional fields.

“I’ve been a big believer in the Fulbright

program since I was a deputy at the State Department, because I realized how beneficial it is,” Nides said. “It’s a program where ultimately these individuals come back to contribute to their communities, and there’s been Nobel Prize winners, Pulitzer Prize winners, top scientists and doctors who have come out of this program.”

Nides, who began his posting in Jerusalem in November 2021, continued: “When I got here, I just said to myself, ‘Why don’t we have the biggest program in the world in Israel?’ The bilateral relations are already so strong; this will make them stronger.”

Working together with the Fulbright teams in Israel and in the U.S., Nides said they have already secured the necessary funds (U.S. covers 60% of funding, Israel 40%) that will enable the current number of participants to double from 60 (30 Israelis to the U.S. and 30 Americans to Israel) to 120.

In addition, the U.S. envoy revealed to JI that Sender Cohen, chief investment officer of Schusterman Interests LLC, will take over from Shira Ruderman, the executive director of the Ruderman Family Foundation, as Fulbright Israel’s new chairperson.

Cohen told JI that he was “very excited to dig in.”

“I’ll do anything to help strengthen the relationship between the United States and Israel,” he said. “I love the new expansion plans; there are a lot of really creative ideas, both bilaterally between the U.S. and Israel, as well as in the region.”

Cohen also said he believes Nides’ goal to make Israel’s program the largest was a realistic one.

“I mean, most other Fulbright-affiliated countries are not the export engines of brain power that Israel is,” he observed. “If Israel can be the second-largest exporter of brain power in the world, then having one of the largest Fulbright programs in the world seems to just complement each other.”

Anat Lapidot-Firilla, executive director of Fulbright Israel, said that plans were already underway to increase the number of participants and that there was no shortage of qualified applicants in Israel.

“We have the capacity in terms of talented people and with the new funds, we can send new people, which will contribute more and make more to making an impact on Israeli society and also by exchanging

knowledge with the U.S.”

Lapidot-Firilla, who has served as executive director for the past eight years, told JI that the Israeli program, which started in 1956 and has grown from 20 to 30 participants, was also expanding and diversifying the fields of study, as well the types of programs available.

“The more Israeli scholars coming to the United States and who are being exposed to American universities in the subjects that they’re interested in and then returning to Israel only strengthens the bilateral relations [between Israel and the U.S.],” Nides said. “And, quite frankly, the more Americans there are who come to Israel and

learn in Israel and then go back to the U.S., it only makes them stronger advocates for Israel in America.”

“This is not just a people-to-people exchange,” he concluded. “It’s an intellect-to-intellect exchange.” ♦

FEBRUARY 23, 2023

‘Ginny & Georgia’ creator Sarah Lampert dishes on the hit Netflix show

Season 2 hit the streaming service at the beginning of January, quickly becoming one of its most popular series of the new year

By **Tori Bergel**

Moving to a new town is never easy, so when Sarah Lampert left Canton, Mass., for nearby Newton in the fifth grade, her mother sent in popsicles for the entire school to help break the ice. That moment inspired a nearly parallel scene in the first season of Lampert’s hit Netflix show, “Ginny & Georgia.”

Like the real-life move made by Lampert, 35, who now lives in Los Angeles, the show’s first season sees the arrival of Georgia, Ginny and Austin Miller to the fictional town of Wellsbury, Mass. The similarities end there. Georgia, a vivacious 30-year-old single mother, moves to Wellsbury in an attempt to flee her past and create a better life for her 9-year-old son Austin and 15-year-old daughter Ginny, who herself is dealing with the challenges of high school while figuring out her own identity.

Now in its sophomore season, which dropped on Jan. 5, Ginny & Georgia’s central family is no longer new to the neighborhood, but still faces plenty of drama; Ginny is struggling with her mental health and

coming to terms with her mother’s crimes, while ghosts from Georgia’s past—including her son’s father fresh out of prison and a private investigator from Season 1 who’s still looking into the death of her recently deceased ex-husband—keep showing up to haunt her in the present.

The second season of “Ginny & Georgia,” though it has only been available for less than two months, has hit a number of milestones. As of Tuesday, the season has continued into its seventh week on Netflix’s top 10 most-watched list in the United States, also appearing on the most-watched lists of 45 other countries (Season 1 only recently ended its run, having been in the U.S. top 10 for the past six weeks). On Feb. 7, Season 2 broke into Netflix’s all-time most popular list, edging in at No. 10 among the streamer’s English-language TV series with 504.8 million hours viewed within its first 28 days.

The success of “Ginny & Georgia,” Lampert said of her first pilot, is “otherworldly.” Lampert, who also serves

as an executive producer and writer on the show, wrote the pilot for a writing class she was taking in between working as a manager of development in reality TV. Thanks to her boss at the time, that script ended up in front of Netflix, where Lampert connected with showrunner Debra J. Fisher. The two pitched a fuller concept of the show to Netflix, which was immediately picked up for a 10-episode first season.

“On one hand, it’s this global phenomenon that everyone is relating to across the world, and then on the other hand, like nothing about my life has actually changed,” Lampert told *Jewish Insider*. “I’m still in the same apartment with my dog. So it’s surreal.”

At its core, “Ginny & Georgia” is a show about the complex mother-daughter relationship between its eponymous characters, a dynamic that Lampert has always had an interest in showcasing on screen.

“For me, it’s just one of the most important relationships that you can

have,” Lampert said. “Young girls and their mothers, it’s just such a unique relationship. Like, oftentimes, I don’t want to generalize, but oftentimes teen girls and their moms almost have a fraught relationship for a number of years in that kind of teenhood period — and I definitely had that with my mom. And now that I’m an adult, my mom’s my best friend...I think that for me, just seeing, you know, my bond I have with my grandmother, with all the women in my [family], with my whole family, family is just really important to me. So for me, it’s that mother-and-daughter relationship, but it’s also the sister-brother relationship. The twins across the street [from Ginny, Georgia and Austin in the show], their relationship with their family.”

“Family is big for me, and I don’t think there’s a more pure love than a familial love,” she added. “But it also can be toxic, and I think that’s explored in the show too. So yeah, I just think family relationships are always dynamic and complicated and worth exploring.”

Lampert grew up in a very tight-knit family in the Boston suburbs, many aspects of which seeped into the fabric of “Ginny & Georgia” — Season 1’s “Sophomore Sleepover” was a real event at Lampert’s high school, and the neighborhood club Georgia tries to join in Season 2 mirrors one that existed in her hometown. Despite certain character and setting parallels — Abby Littman is very loosely based on one of Lampert’s real-life friends, while Wellsbury is an imagined town combining Newton and Lexington, Mass. — the show is largely a work of fiction.

“For the most part, these characters, the inception of them, is a real work of imagination and then the building out of them across the two seasons is a real group effort from the writers room,” Lampert said. “I think that it’s really important to include all of the other writers in the building out of these characters, to make them as deep as they are, as truthful as they are, and ultimately, to give those experiences a sense of truth.”

Still, every writer consciously or not leaves traces of themselves in their work, and the same is true for Lampert. While she maintains that the Miller women are not inspired by her and her mother — if she had

to choose, Lampert feels they most resemble Ellen and Maxine, Georgia and Ginny’s best friends and neighbors — there are traces of the other’s personality that they share.

In Lampert’s case, Ginny’s penchant for writing mirrors her own, whereas when it comes to her mother and the show’s dynamic yet deeply flawed matriarch, their connection shines through in their shared devotion to family.

“The element of Georgia that my mom does have, is this overwhelming love for her children in a way that she would do anything for us,” Lampert said. “My mom is so fierce with her love of her kids and really so involved in our happiness...she’s just always going one step above and beyond for her kids, and so I think that element did find its way into Georgia.”

Having characters that, despite their excessiveness at times, are also relatable, is why “Ginny & Georgia” has reached audiences beyond the typical demographics most teen-oriented shows see.

“I think at its level, it’s just so grounded in relationships and in human connection, and I think that that’s what is resonating,” Lampert said. “On one hand, you have this wild show, it’s super pulpy, it’s super propulsive, you have absolutely insane things happening outside the realm of reality, but at its core, it’s really grounded in the emotion of these characters and in real situations and real struggles that people face that don’t always get airtime, and so people connect with that.”

In between sex talks and shocking murder scenes, “Ginny & Georgia” tackles a lot of difficult topics, including mental health, race, body image and abuse. To ensure every conversation is handled with care, the show works closely with Mental Health America and has an on-site psychiatrist, both of whom weigh in on every script and cut.

“Ultimately, it’s really just about listening to everyone in that writers room, and everyone really showing up and pouring themselves into the show. Because I think in order to make, even just entertaining TV, you can’t shy away from the light and the dark, the good and the bad, the funny and the sad, because that’s life,” Lampert said.

One identity that Lampert felt was important to highlight, without delving too

deeply into religion, was her own Jewish faith. Canton, where she grew up, did not have a large Jewish community, but she recalled the “Jewish pride” her mother surrounded her family in during that time.

“There was only like one other Jew in my entire class in elementary school, and my mom came in during Hanukkah with a hot plate and made latkes for everyone in my class, and taught everyone how to play dreidel,” Lampert recalled. “She made it seem so cool to be Jewish, like all of my friends thought it was like the coolest thing ever, and I didn’t even kind of realize that the rest of the world didn’t always share that opinion.”

Once the family moved to Newton, which has a large Jewish population, Lampert’s mother continued to make Judaism feel special, putting together Passover plays every year that got the whole family involved.

“I was raised Jewish, so I think it’s an inextricable part of myself that I’m proud of, and it was important to me to make characters in ‘Ginny & Georgia’ Jewish,” Lampert said. “It was important for me to have that be a part of the show, even if it wasn’t a main element of the show.”

In Season 1, it’s mentioned briefly that two members of Ginny’s friend group, “MANG,” Abby and Norah, are Jewish. In the Season 2 episode, “Latkes Are Lit,” there’s an entire scene — during which the song “Paamon” by Israeli artists Noa Kirel and Italy Galo is showcased — where MANG and their mothers are celebrating Hanukkah with a latke party they throw every year.

“There’s not more said about it other than that, but it’s just a presence. And it’s a positive presence in the show that just exists,” Lampert said. “My favorite line from Season 1 is when Ginny is surprised that Norah is Jewish, and she’s like, ‘Yeah, *Baruch Atah Adonai*, bitch.’”

Lampert said she is open to exploring both Abby and Norah’s Jewish identities in possible future seasons of the show. Separate from “Ginny & Georgia,” she also revealed that she’s in the process of writing her own feature-length Hanukkah movie.

“I have it all laid out, and I’m writing it like on spec, which means for free, like there’s no one attached to it. I don’t want anyone reading it until it’s done, and then I’ll

take it out and try to sell it, because I have it all in my head,” Lampert said. “I really want to write like a modern, really fun, kind of raunchy Hanukkah movie to be in the zeitgeist.”

As far as the future of “Ginny & Georgia,” there’s no word yet on if the show will be renewed for a third season. Both Lampert and Fisher have mentioned in interviews that they have storylines mapped out through Season 4, but beyond that, and

whether those ideas will make it onto the screen is still yet to be seen.

“I can tell you that the very first scene of ‘Ginny & Georgia’ that I thought of, was this idea of Ginny walking down the hall in high school and everyone whispering about her because of her mother. Ultimately, I took that out, and that wasn’t in Season 1 or Season 2, but I think that was a real point of inspiration for the creation of the show and probably where it’s headed in Season 3,”

Lampert said.

“Logically looking at where we left off at the end of Season 2 with this public arrest, everyone in the town has just seen Georgia be put into this cop car for murder and driven away, and I think we’re faced with these big questions of: How is she going to get herself out of this one? What more is going to be revealed? And how is this going to impact Ginny?” ♦

FEBRUARY 23, 2023

Alfred Uhry won’t let antisemites rain on his ‘Parade’

‘Parade’ hits Broadway as antisemitism is soaring. ‘The story has haunted me all my life,’ the celebrated playwright told JI

By Matthew Kassel

For the veteran playwright Alfred Uhry, the trial and lynching of Leo Frank, a Jewish factory manager who was hastily convicted of raping and murdering a 13-year-old girl more than a century ago in Atlanta, has long been a source of morbid fascination.

“The story,” he told *Jewish Insider*, “has haunted me all my life.”

So much so that Uhry, an Atlanta native who has explored his Southern Jewish roots in several plays over the years, ultimately chose to dramatize Frank’s infamous case in a chillingly rendered musical, “Parade,” that briefly debuted in 1998 and is now returning to the stage in a highly anticipated Broadway revival, set to premiere next month.

The show, which previously won two Tony Awards, centers on the relationship between Frank and his wife, Lucille, as he finds himself scapegoated through a fatal miscarriage of justice so egregiously antisemitic that it would precipitate the creation of the Anti-Defamation League. Decades after its initial run, the updated

musical is no less timely, Uhry observed, amid a recent profusion of antisemitic attacks and conspiracy theories, which the decorated book writer hopes to expose with his revival.

“Unfortunately, it has a lot of resonance right now because all of this antisemitism seems to be in the air,” Uhry, 86, said in a phone interview last month from his apartment on the Upper West Side. “It’s always burbling underneath, but it seems to be bubbling up right now — and this addresses that.”

Even more than 100 years after Frank was abducted from a prison cell and hanged by a bloodthirsty mob in 1915, his harrowing tale still serves as a stark and uncomfortable reminder, Uhry suggested, that some age-old hatreds may never entirely fade away.

As if to underscore that point, a small group of neo-Nazi demonstrators gathered outside the Bernard B. Jacobs Theatre in Manhattan on Tuesday night to heckle attendees who were lining up for the musical’s first preview before it opens in

mid-March.

The dozen or so masked protesters, some of whom held posters identifying with the National Socialist Movement, a neo-Nazi group in Florida whose logo features a swastika, distributed antisemitic fliers and accused Frank of pedophilia while criticizing the ADL, according to video footage and photos posted by spectators on social media.

In a phone conversation on Wednesday afternoon, Uhry, who attended the preview, said he was largely unfazed by such efforts, even as he expressed concern that the show had been targeted for its association with Frank.

“It was disturbing, but it’s happened before with ‘Parade’ in other iterations,” he told JI somewhat wearily, hesitant to describe instances where the musical has, he said, provoked street protests from similar groups as it has toured the country in previous years. “These people are sick,” he emphasized. “It makes us even more determined to present our show to the

world.”

“It’s amazing that after all these years,” he added, “it still raises all this fear and hatred.”

His comments were partly echoed by Ben Platt, a Jewish actor and Tony Award winner starring as Frank, who said in a video posted to Instagram after the performance on Tuesday that the protests had only underlined the necessity of “telling this particular story and how special and powerful art and, particularly, theater can be.”

The show’s producers released a similar statement condemning the protesters. “The big thing we’ve seen in the past 20 hours is that this is a story as urgent as ever,” Alex Levy, a co-producer of “Parade,” told JI by phone on Wednesday. “For many Jews, and certainly even beyond the Jewish community, it’s a forgotten episode in the history of antisemitism,” he said of the Frank case. “There are lessons to be learned from it.”

Scheduled to run for five months, “Parade,” which concludes in early August, joins another high-profile Broadway production focused on the Jewish experience through the prism of antisemitism. Tom Stoppard’s moving, semi-autobiographical play, “Leopoldstadt,” which opened last fall, presents a richly layered intergenerational portrait of a family of assimilated Viennese Jews who are forced to reckon with their increasingly precarious standing in pre-Holocaust Austria as the Nazis rise to power.

But while “Leopoldstadt” pivots on a sort of biographical amnesia experienced by Stoppard, a British playwright who belatedly discovered he was Jewish after a cousin informed him that his grandparents had all died in the Holocaust, “Parade” extends in large part from Uhry’s intimate relationship with a gruesome story he has never had any trouble remembering.

Just a generation removed from the murder of Leo Frank, Uhry, born in 1936, holds an unusually personal connection to the case. His great uncle owned the pencil factory where Frank worked as a superintendent and where he was accused of murdering a young teenage employee, Mary Phagan, despite an absence of convincing evidence to support the charge. Meanwhile, Uhry’s grandmother was a

social acquaintance of Frank’s widow, whom he remembers meeting as a boy.

“I knew who she was, Miss Lucille, and I went in and shook hands,” Uhry said of his solemn if perfunctory encounters with his grandmother’s canasta partner. “But she didn’t mean much to me.”

The story of her husband’s lynching, on the other hand, “was always with me,” Uhry added, though he acknowledged that the subject was never openly discussed among friends and family members while growing up. “If somebody mentioned Leo Frank, people would get up and walk out of the room,” he told JI. “They didn’t want to talk about it. It was too horrible to contemplate.”

Uhry, however, detected the foundation for a compelling narrative long before he began his storied career in theater. “As soon as I got old enough, I got on a bus by myself and went to the library and looked it all up and talked to my family about it,” he explained. “It was interesting and scary and all those things — and it seemed theatrical to me, even as a kid.”

The nascent dramatist was then a long way from realizing that vision, which first coalesced around the original installment in his celebrated “Atlanta Trilogy,” dealing broadly with Jewish life in the South in the first half of the 20th century. The play “Driving Miss Daisy,” for which he is best known, won a Pulitzer Prize in 1988 and became a better-known movie starring Morgan Freeman and Jessica Tandy. Uhry, who adapted the screenplay, was awarded an Oscar the following year.

Arriving as the third and final part of his trilogy, “Parade,” which had long been gestating, was in some ways the culmination of Uhry’s effort to harmonize his conflicted relationship to a story he had understood to be off-limits as a child in Atlanta.

Still, turning it into a musical, a potentially sensitive decision given the painful subject material, wasn’t Uhry’s idea, he claimed. Instead, it came from Hal Prince, who led the original production.

In an early conversation with Prince, who died in 2019, the legendary stage director had asked Uhry if he would divulge how he came up with “The Last Night of Ballyhoo,” which precedes “Parade” in the trilogy and is “about Jews who were kind of unhappy or just uncomfortable being Jews in Atlanta” in

the late 1930s, according to the playwright.

“I said, ‘I guess a lot of it came from the Leo Frank case,’ and he said, ‘You know, I sort of know about that, but exactly what was it?’” Uhry, who was then in his 50s, continued. “I told him, and he literally put his glasses on top of his head and he said, ‘That’s a musical.’”

“I went, ‘Oh boy,’” Uhry said. “It’s pretty steep territory.”

Thinking big, Prince, whose credits included “West Side Story,” “Fiddler on the Roof” and “Cabaret,” among other hits, sought to enlist Stephen Sondheim as the musical’s lyricist. Though he initially expressed interest in the job, Sondheim had recently concluded a heavy project of his own, and he ultimately passed rather than doubling down on another intense story. Next, Prince suggested they recruit a young man in his 20s, Jason Robert Brown, a little-known colleague of Prince’s daughter who “turned out to be the man for the job,” Uhry recalled.

“He really got it,” said Uhry. “He really listened to me. We talked for about six months before he wrote anything. I told him what it was like for a Jewish boy to grow up in the South and love the South and be scared of” the Ku Klux Klan, which saw a resurgence after Frank’s death. “It was a very conflicted place to be, for me, and he listened to everything, and he didn’t write, he didn’t write, he didn’t write, and I thought, well, this is just an exercise in futility.”

Then, he got a call. “I went over to his apartment and he played me two songs and they just knocked me out,” Uhry said. “We were on board, and we wrote it.”

The original show, whose short-lived run at the Vivian Beaumont Theater at Lincoln Center lasted just two months, was panned by the *The New York Times* and dogged from the start by financial troubles thanks to a foundering producing partner, the Canadian company Livent, that filed for bankruptcy shortly before “Parade” made its debut. The musical closed in February 1999 after 84 regular performances. “It really wasn’t finished,” Uhry sighed.

To his continued disappointment, the musical, despite subsequently claiming a pair of Tonys, struggled to locate another equally august home in the ensuing years, even after Uhry and Brown had fine-tuned

the piece during a successful if pared-down run in 2007 at London's Donmar Warehouse.

By the time it returned to New York City fully staged for the first time in nearly 25 years last November, Uhry had not looked at the "Parade" script in about 15 years, he admitted. The show, which was rapturously reviewed during a limited seven-performance run at New York City Center in Manhattan, starred Platt as Leo Frank alongside Micaela Diamond as Lucille. Both actors are, along with Michael Arden, the director, continuing with the follow-up revival that began previews on Tuesday, which Uhry described as the unexpected but welcome fulfillment of a longstanding ambition to redeem the show.

"It came up out of the blue," he said of the revival. "What I would call it is, really, a dream come true."

In a first for the show, the two leading actors are both Jewish, a feature that Uhry seemed to recognize more as an amusing bit of theater trivia than a meaningful claim to historical authenticity. "It's like, do you have to have a Jew playing a Jew or a drunk playing drunk or whatever?" he said in the interview with JI, casually stepping into a heated debate over Jewish representation in the entertainment industry. "I think that's basically ridiculous, myself," he asserted. "A good actor is a good actor."

Still, he allowed, "it certainly doesn't hurt to have these two be Jewish and to intuitively understand things about being Jewish," much in the same way he feels that Arden, who is from the South, brings a useful perspective to the musical that non-Southerners might not possess. "It helps," he said. "It doesn't mean that only Jews should play Jews. I don't believe that at all. But this is just an extra little fillip. It's a nice little thing to have happened."

Jewish or not, Uhry left no doubt as to whether the casting is to his liking. "I think God sent me Ben Platt on a silver platter," he said of the actor, who has previously appeared in "The Book of Mormon" and "Dear Evan Hansen," among other productions. "He got it. He asked me some questions. He's got a good director. And he just intuitively knows how to do it. I don't have to tell him much of anything."

"He's also, I didn't even realize this because I'm such an old fuddy-duddy, a big

star!" Uhry exclaimed. "He's exactly right for this part, and so is Micaela. That doesn't always happen."

As for his own connection to Judaism, Uhry said he grew up "very, very Reform" and was largely dissociated from religious traditions in Georgia. "I never went to a bar mitzvah. I had Christmas trees and Easter egg hunts," he told JI. "Being Jewish was sort of like having a club foot. It was something you endured. There was just no ritual involved, and it was just dreary. I missed out on a lot."

"My own particular set of Jews happened to be the German Jews who came to Atlanta before Atlanta was named Atlanta," he explained. "I don't know how they exactly got there, but they did get there. So being first, they thought themselves better than all the Eastern Jews who came a couple of generations later, and they thought of themselves pretty much first as Southerners, maybe second as Americans and third as Jews. But this just kind of rubbed it in their face, because for the Frank case, Jews were just Jews."

It wasn't until he moved to New York as an adult that Uhry acquainted himself with an array of rituals and came to feel a stronger sense of affinity for his Jewish roots. "I didn't know," he said, "how lovely a Seder is." He also took a couple of trips to Israel in a broader effort "to learn to be sort of proud of being a Jew," he said. "I certainly didn't have that."

The actor Joshua Malina, who is preparing to step into a leading role in "Leopoldstadt" next month, recalled traveling to Israel with Uhry and "a group of theater people" led by the producer Manny Azenberg, he told JI, some 10 or 15 years ago. "I got to know him," he said of Uhry. "He's a wonderful writer, and I am very eager to see 'Parade.' I'm happy for him."

Uhry, who has seen "Leopoldstadt" and said it "hits hard," believes his musical shares some fundamental commonalities with Stoppard's play, at least as far as the Jewish characters are concerned. "I don't know that much about Viennese Jews, but they were the *crème de la crème*, they were the least Jewish Jews there were, and my antecedents were all German, but it was the same thing," he said. "They weren't so rich and fancy, but they prided themselves on

not acting like Jews. Yiddish was something to be laughed at."

The context, of course, is entirely different for each of the works. "You've got to realize how these people felt in 1913, 1915 — 50 years after the Civil War," he said of the Southerners who targeted Frank. "They were defeated. They were occupied territory. There were a lot of veterans alive who had lost a leg, lost a farm, who believed in the cause whether the cause was right or not. They were defeated, they felt vanquished and they felt wronged, and antisemitism wasn't really a huge issue."

"I mean, I don't have to tell you that antisemitism was always there," he added. "But they sort of ginned it up. The newspapers and politicians worked it up for this case, and as a result, the Ku Klux Klan, which was formed in the 1860s after the Civil War, was this mild, polite thing turned out with the robes and the hoods."

"This case, if you stuck your finger in the water, the ripples just went on and on and on," he mused.

Uhry clarified that his musical is by no means an attempt to exonerate Leo Frank of murder, even as the reserved Jewish businessman, who was born in Texas and grew up in Brooklyn, is now widely viewed as unlikely to have committed the crime. In 1986, Frank was posthumously pardoned by the Georgia State Board of Pardons and Paroles, which made clear that it was not acknowledging his innocence but instead recognizing "the state's failure to bring his killers to justice" in "an effort to heal old wounds."

"Did him a lot of good," Uhry scoffed.

Frank was lynched, at the age of just 31, after his death sentence was commuted to life in prison. In 2019, the Fulton County district attorney said a new panel would re-examine the Frank case.

"There's a possibility, a very teeny one, that Leo Frank could have done it, although every bit of research says he didn't and that the sweeper did," Uhry said, referring to a janitor at the National Pencil Company who is portrayed in the musical by Alex Joseph Grayson. "We don't know, so we didn't try to solve it. We didn't try to say who was guilty or not guilty. We just presented it as was."

The show "just deals with America," Uhry told JI, summing up its ethos. "This

happened in America.”

With the musical's premiere fast approaching, Uhry said he is not currently working on any other plays and is in no rush to do so as he spends more time with his children and grandchildren. “It's time to put on the brakes a little bit,” said Uhry, whose wife died a few years ago. As both a Tony and Oscar voter, he is also availing himself of unfettered access to free Broadway shows while streaming more new movies that he can “begin to watch” on his computer.

“Life is pretty good,” he said in the phone conversation, as Gershwin's “Rhapsody in Blue,” his ringtone of choice, chimed frequently in the background. “I don't get lonely.”

There is one idea for a TV show he is tentatively developing with a “young friend” who used to be his assistant and is now a writer for the “Jimmy Kimmel Live!” in Los Angeles, he said, but declined to provide more details. “Bad luck to talk about it,” he said.

In the meantime, Uhry remains gratified that his long-suffering musical has at last found the platform he feels it deserves, made significantly more prominent, it seems, by the group of neo-Nazi detractors whose protest this week incidentally contributed to a wave of media coverage about the production.

“Somehow or another,” he said, “the timing is right for ‘Parade.’” ♦

FEBRUARY 21, 2023

OneTable brought Shabbat to thousands of young adults. Soon, empty nesters will dine, too

As the world emerges from the pandemic, people are ‘looking for ways to connect on their own terms — in their own homes, in their own community,’ OneTable CEO Aliza Kline said

By Lauren Hakimi

The article first appeared in eJewishPhilanthropy.

When Regina Lopata Logan, a 74-year-old professor at Northwestern University, moved from the Chicago suburbs to the city, she no longer lived close to many of her friends.

“I love where I live; however, it's really hard to make friends as an older adult, because people have their friendship groups,” Lopata Logan said. “If you don't belong to a temple or synagogue or church or a mosque, and you don't have little kids, and you don't have a dog, it's really hard to meet people in your neighborhood, so it's really hard to make friends.”

Lopata Logan is also seeking spiritual connections. She was born into a Jewish family, but her mother stopped practicing Judaism when Lopata Logan was a child. “As I've gotten older I've felt the need for spiritual community and connection with

a shared history even though I don't know that much about the practice of Judaism and the observance of holidays,” she said.

Lopata Logan isn't alone in seeking greater community. Her daughter works as a director of impact and learning at OneTable, an organization that has served as a platform for 80,000 Shabbat dinners since its founding in 2014. While OneTable has been filling that need for young adults for nearly a decade, it is now expanding its demographic reach.

For years, the organization has served people ages 21-39 by offering them a platform to connect, funding to host dinners and resources such as recipes, invitations and Jewish religious resources. Now, the organization is expanding: In response to the loneliness many empty nesters feel when their children no longer live with them, OneTable plans to offer a platform for older adults, too.

“The idea of having a Shabbat table is

a great entrée for me, sort of low stakes and yet something that could be very, very meaningful,” Lopata Logan said.

“We've received a lot of requests over the years — ‘When do I get OneTable for me, OneTable for me, OneTable for me?’” Aliza Kline, the CEO of OneTable, said. “And those ‘me's are a lot of different types — parents, grandparents, teenagers, families with young children. The population that was most recurring was empty nesters, older adults — the parents of our users.”

“Especially after the pandemic, many people's affiliations waned or completely faded away. Now, they're looking for ways to connect on their own terms — in their own homes, in their own community — but they're getting stuck,” Kline said. She pointed to the 2021 Study of Jewish LA, which found that 25% of Jewish adults ages 55-64 in Los Angeles were “minimally involved” in the Jewish community. That percentage was even higher for people 65 and older.

Kline recognizes that a lot of Jewish philanthropy is guided by the goal of encouraging young adults to marry other Jews and raise their children Jewish. “OneTable’s historic funders are, by and large, really motivated by the young adult piece,” she said. “And so this is an expansion for us; we are looking at new conversations with new funders or different ways of relating to existing funders.”

OneTable is still looking for funders to support Shabbat dinners for older adults. According to a letter addressed to funders, the cost of launching the new initiative is \$500,000.

Details of the program for older adults are still being discussed, including exactly which older adults will be eligible. One letter OneTable addressed to funders uses the age range “55-64ish.”

“We’re describing it as adults without kids at home. Probably, it’s 55-plus, but it’s really not all the way through 80-plus,” Kline said. “I’m using empty-nester language intentionally because we know there’s an explicit shared experience of being used to having Shabbat dinner with kids, and then they’re gone. It’s actually somewhat parallel to being a 25-year-old and moving to a new city without your family nearby.”

Barbara Waxman, an expert in the study of aging, says she’s a “huge proponent” of OneTable expanding to older adults, and she can see herself taking advantage of the resource. “What OneTable is offering is the chance for people to get beyond superficial

small talk,” she said.

But Waxman, 60, thinks the organization should focus on “stage, not age.”

“It could be empty nesters. It could be people on a growth journey. It could be people who are going back to school, or who’ve gotten divorced. It could end up getting people of similar ages, but my point is, age alone is not really the qualifier that is going to define how I connect with someone.”

“People are not attracted to being labeled by their age,” she added.

Lopata Logan said she’s hopeful that OneTable will be able to offer its resources to people of all ages.

“We’re empty nesters, too; we’ve just been empty nesters longer than someone who’s 60,” she said. “I really hope that there’s not an upper age boundary; I’m not exactly sure why there would have to be.”

Kline also said that, while OneTable offers hosts ages 21-39 \$10 per guest to help with the costs of holding a Shabbat dinner, they’re not sure if they will offer this funding to older hosts, who may be less likely to need it.

“In general, people in midlife and better have more resources than younger people,” Waxman said. “But when you’re trying to target a population that wants more connection, I think that there are a good number of those people who are on a limited budget.”

OneTable will be testing out the new program in Florida with The Jewish

Federation of Palm Beach County, among other locations.

Susan Shulman Pertnoy, the chair of the Palm Beach Jewish federation’s board, says she’s excited for people in her community to start hosting Shabbat dinners as soon as OneTable gives the OK. “A quarter of people in our community are between 50 and 65,” she said. “We are a community where a lot of people come from somewhere else and then move down here and don’t have their families established here, so everyone wants to meet new people.”

Shulman Pertnoy said she’d love to host a Shabbat dinner herself through OneTable. “I just think it’s a great idea,” she said.

Kline says that in the next six months, she hopes to test the program in at least three cities so that by summer, the program can launch in earnest.

To advertise the new program, Kline says she plans to use Facebook. She also plans to hire participant-facing staff in their 50s and 60s. “For OneTable, we may have a brand partnership with Baked by Melissa, but for this one, I’m hoping for maybe UrbanStems or The New York Times Wine Club,” she said, citing a cupcake brand, a flower delivery service and a wine subscription service.

As OneTable expands its offerings to older adults, it hopes to engage more younger adults at the same time. In 2022, 43,300 young adults engaged with OneTable. “This coming year, we hope to grow by 65% in the number of young adults we engage,” Kline said. ♦