

THE WEEKLY PRINT

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JUNE 12, 2023

A 33-year-old basketball exec rises in Phoenix

Inside Phoenix Suns' new CEO Josh Bartelstein's vision for the franchise

By **Tori Bergel**

When Josh Bartelstein took over as CEO of the Phoenix Suns organization in April, it looked like he was joining a franchise at the top of its game. A blockbuster midseason four-way trade had recently landed the Suns superstar Kevin Durant — fueling hopes that the team might actually win its first championship title in 55 seasons — while its WNBA counterpart, the Phoenix Mercury, was celebrating the long-awaited return of star player Brittney Griner — after nearly 10 months of detainment and imprisonment in Russia over drug charges.

Internally, however, the franchise was a

mess.

In November 2021, an exposé by ESPN, detailing instances of alleged racist and misogynistic behavior by franchise majority owner Robert Sarver throughout his nearly two decades with the Suns, led the NBA to conduct a 10-month-long investigation into the tycoon. The inquiry concluded on Sept. 13, 2022, hitting Sarver with a one-year league suspension and \$10 million.

Days later, amid public outcry, Sarver announced he would be selling his share of the organization, which would eventually go to businessman Mat Ishbia — and brother Justin Ishbia as an alternate governor — in

December for \$4 billion. The NBA approved the purchase on Feb. 6 — just three days before the Suns signed Durant.

But Sarver was apparently not alone in creating a toxic work environment. Suns personnel told investigators, and later ESPN, that Sarver's misconduct had led to mistreatment by other top executives, including CEO Jason Rowley, of lower-level staff that included instances of verbal abuse, retaliation and intimidation. Rowley eventually stepped down the same day the NBA approved Ishbia's purchase.

Bartelstein, who most recently served as assistant general manager of the Detroit

Pistons, inherited all of the unrest when he took over from Rowley, and has spent his first few weeks trying to avoid the mistakes of his predecessor.

"The focus initially has been on the people here and making it an amazing place to work," Bartelstein told *Jewish Insider* a month into his new role. "Literally I've met with every single person in the organization to hear about who they are, what they've done here and where they want to go, because it helps me shift and frame what this organization is going to stand for."

At 33, Bartelstein is one of the youngest CEOs in the league, but he is bringing a lifetime of basketball know-how and experience to the position.

Growing up in the upscale Chicago suburb of Highland Park, Ill., Bartelstein watched his father, sports agent Mark Bartelstein, work with dozens of professional athletes, dreaming of reaching the NBA like the clients he served.

"Watching how hard these guys worked every single day, I think my work ethic comes from my dad and [them]," Bartelstein told *JL*. "I knew I wanted to work in the sports space, and I knew if I did, the best way to get where I wanted to go was to be a really good person and work incredibly hard at it."

That drive led Bartelstein to the University of Michigan, where he played four years of college basketball, earning the position of team captain his senior year and helping the Wolverines reach the Final Four of the 2013 NCAA March Madness tournament, a feat they hadn't achieved in 20 years.

Though his playing time at Michigan was limited, Bartelstein's leadership and commitment to success were essential to the team, qualities that made him attractive to the Pistons. So despite not making it into the league as a player, Bartelstein found his way into the NBA as the special assistant to the Pistons vice chairman, Arn Tellem.

"My first job there was getting his coffee, emails, all the monotonous stuff. But my view was like, 'I'm going to do a great job of that and earn his trust.' If you earn someone's trust, they'll give you more and more responsibility," Bartelstein recalled. "My big break there came when we moved the Pistons from Auburn Hills to Detroit, in being part of that field team that really

moved the team downtown and having a large role."

It was the start of Bartelstein's own Cinderella story. For eight years, he worked his way up in the organization, going from Tellem's assistant to chief of staff, and then executive vice president of business and basketball operations before finally landing as the team's assistant general manager. Ishbia then sought him out to replace Rowley.

"When [Ishbia] bought the Suns, he was looking for someone to kind of run the operation, had both knowledge of business and basketball, and he requested to interview me from the Pistons," Bartelstein said. "We talked about our vision and where we think opportunity was and how we would build it, and what I stood for, and one thing led to another, and next thing you know, he offers me the job and I move [to Phoenix] with my wife and our 2-year-old dog."

Bartelstein knew vaguely of the new owner from his time in Michigan — Ishbia had a similar collegiate career on Michigan State's basketball team — but had never interacted with him directly. After meeting, the two ended up sharing similar goals for the organization.

"[Ishbia] has four main priorities: making this a great place to work for our employees, [creating] an amazing fan experience, impacting the community and winning," Bartelstein said of the four pillars Ishbia outlined for the franchise in his first press conference as owner. "So as he shapes that, my job is to kind of figure out within those four pillars, what is the process and systems behind it to bring those to life."

Heading into his third month on the job, Bartelstein has one main objective — to turn the organization into a family, a feeling that he first cultivated with the Pistons, and one that had been lacking under Sarver and Rowley.

"To me the biggest thing is how important relationships are. I told everyone my first day here, I don't like the term 'employee,' I think it's stale and cold. I want to know who the people are," Bartelstein said. "I don't take myself too seriously, I don't have all the answers. I'm a big believer in the kind of humility and self-deprecation that all helps, in the end, build these true

authentic relationships."

Even with Ishbia and Bartelstein's positive new direction for the organization, growing pains seemed inevitable. Bartelstein spoke to *JL* ahead of Game 6 of the Suns' Western Conference semifinals series against the Denver Nuggets, which they would end up losing. Two days later, the Suns fired head coach Monty Williams, who had been with the team since 2019 and just last season won the league's Coach of the Year Award. On June 6, the Suns named Frank Vogel, who coached the Los Angeles Lakers to a championship in the Bubble in 2020, to replace Williams. Before the announcement, no reasons were given for Williams' ouster.

The Suns are rumored to be making a number of shakeups to their roster next season, including waiving all-star point guard Chris Paul, though Vogel recently told *Sports Illustrated* that no such plans for Paul are in place.

The Phoenix Suns are going through an identity crisis, but Bartelstein is working to fix it. ♦

In debut novel, Ruth Marks Eglash pens an ode to Jerusalem

'Parallel Lines' takes place against the backdrop of heightened tensions in the holy city

By Melissa Weiss

Ruth Marks Eglash's eldest children were teenagers during the wave of violence in late 2015 and early 2016 that saw dozens of Israelis killed by Palestinian terrorists. The longtime journalist, who was used to writing about the attacks for an adult audience, found herself having to explain the violence to her three children, the youngest of whom was 12 at the time.

One of her daughters "was traveling every day from where we live, from the suburbs, into the city center," Eglash told *Jewish Insider*. "This whole series of stabbing and shooting and vehicle attacks started happening in Jerusalem almost every day. And they were all near her school, which is right in the center of the western part of Jerusalem... And she was coming home and asking me, 'What's happening? Why was there a suspicious package? There was a *pigua*, a terrorist attack. We heard the ambulances, they wouldn't let us out of the building. What's happening?'"

The questions inspired Eglash, whose debut novel, *Parallel Lines*, hits bookstores tomorrow, to take off her reporting hat and approach a new way of writing, but one that hews closely to her instincts as a journalist used to bringing nuance and context to complex situations. *Parallel Lines* traces the journeys of three fictional teenage girls — one from a secular Jewish family, one from an observant Jewish family and one Muslim — amid the uptick in violence that kept Jerusalem on edge for six months.

"The idea for this book really came from the children asking me questions," Eglash explained. "When I thought about it, I thought, 'Here we are, we explain as journalists, we explain the conflict to our audience, which is mostly adults, but at the

same time, there are children involved here.' It's an adult conflict that is going on and on and on. It's an intractable conflict. There is no solution. No one's working to find the solution. And at the same time, there's another generation of young people growing up in the middle of it."

Eglash, who grew up in London before moving to Israel in 1994, has spent her professional career reporting the nuances of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, spending more than a decade at *The Jerusalem Post* in a variety of roles before joining the *Washington Post* as deputy bureau chief. She joined *Jewish Insider* in September 2021 as a senior correspondent.

She had been at the *Washington Post* for about a year at the start of Operation Protective Edge, which paralyzed the country during the summer of 2014, sending Israelis across the country — including in Eglash's neighborhood — into bomb shelters as Hamas fired thousands of rockets into the country. It was the first time, she said, she had to explain the conflict to two sets of audiences.

"On the one hand, I had these three young people at home, who were starting to become aware of Israel's situation, or of the conflict surrounding Israel. And on the other hand, I had this gig writing for the *Washington Post* and explaining to the world, essentially, what was happening in Israel. So it was happening in my home and it was happening outside, and I found at a certain point, I found it much easier to write a news story and explain what was happening here to millions of people around the world than I did explaining the conflict and what was happening to my kids, because I didn't want to start telling them things that I wrote in the newspaper because then they would be

scared to go out of the house."

Many of the scenes in *Parallel Lines* are drawn from Eglash's time in the field. "There were definitely parts of the book that I took from my experiences or stories that I reported on," she said. "When I mention some of the attacks that take place in the book, [they] were based on real-life ones that I covered for the *Washington Post*."

Eglash pointed in particular to the experiences of Nour, the Palestinian character. Some of the incidents Nour encounters "were based on things that young Palestinian women that I interviewed for the book told me. They shared with me some really shocking and sad stories about what it's like to be a young Arab woman living in Jerusalem."

The book covers a broad range of Israeli societal issues. Rivki, the religious teen, expresses interest in the secular world, a taste of which she gets through the stories of her sister-in-law, an office worker with a desk job, as she struggles with the fast-moving engagement of her older sister. The secular Tamar struggles with her classmates' antagonism towards the Arab community, at one point landing her at a protest that turns violent. And Nour, a Palestinian resident of Jerusalem, holds a desire to learn about her Jewish neighbors that is at odds with her brother's growing radicalization — tensions that are exacerbated when an American cousin comes to visit.

Though *Parallel Lines* covers sensitive issues, Eglash hopes that readers will take the nuance she introduces in the book into consideration when forming their own opinions about the conflict.

"I think it's really important to me that people who read it will read the narrative of the other side," Eglash said, "because I

know this conflict has become so polarizing. Everything's become polarizing today in this world. Every group has its narrative and no one wants to hear the other narrative. And that's why it was so important for me to have these three perspectives in the book together."

While *Parallel Lines* centers around three main characters, the story's arc makes it impossible to ignore a fourth looming figure: Jerusalem. "What's interesting about Jerusalem," Eglash explained, "is that everyone lives intermingled together."

The girls' stories are told in vignettes that don't intersect — much like how their communities, despite the interconnectedness of Jerusalem, are largely siloed from each other — until deep into the book. The book's title is a nod to Jerusalem's divergent communities: living alongside

each other, but never quite meeting.

During the writing process, Eglash had become a fan of the *Hunger Games* series. As she was reading the trilogy, she explained, "I was thinking, 'Oh my god, this is just like the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. And then I read an interview with [*Hunger Games* author Suzanne Collins], and she was talking about the price of conflict on young people. And I thought, 'Hers is like a dystopian tale of what happens in a world after there's been a war and it's divided into four quarters, and then they have this annual Hunger Games, but actually in Jerusalem, that happens now. That's what's going on. There's divisions.'"

The divisions play out in obvious ways: when, for example, Nour's brother is arrested by Israeli forces on charges of inciting violence, or when Tamar faces pressure from her friends over her growing romantic

relationship with an Arab classmate.

But in many ways, the three central characters voice the thoughts of many residents of — and visitors to — Jerusalem. In one scene, Nour, traveling on the city's new light rail, listens to the automated announcements at each stop, given in Hebrew, Arabic and English. "She's just wondering, is this her city?" Eglash said. "And how is it that other people refer to it and see it in a totally different way?"

Eglash has lived in Jerusalem for most of the last three decades — longer, she pointed out, than she lived in her native U.K. "The more I think and write about what happens here, the less I understand it," she said. "The more I go out and talk to people...you know, it's a mystery. It's an eternal mystery." ♦

JUNE 15, 2023

Cardin: 'One of my missions' is to help young lawmakers understand the U.S.-Israel relationship

Cardin: 'One of my missions' is to help young lawmakers understand the U.S.-Israel relationship

By Marc Rod

Sen. Ben Cardin (D-MD) reflected on Wednesday night on his career and his work supporting Israel and combating antisemitism in remarks to the Jewish Community Relations Council of Greater Washington.

The longtime senator, who has been in public office for nearly 60 years and will retire at the end of the current Congress, spoke to JCRC members who gathered at a synagogue in suburban Maryland to honor his career. Cardin's upcoming retirement is set to deprive the Senate of one of its most prominent pro-Israel stalwarts, as well as a leading figure in efforts to fight antisemitism.

"One of my missions in the United States

Senate is to make sure that young legislators understand why that special relationship exists, and the importance of Israel to the United States, and to make it clear that we will never tolerate the use of Israel as a partisan wedge issue," Cardin said.

In a question-and-answer session later in the evening, Cardin noted that there are many new lawmakers who are not familiar with the intricacies of the U.S.-Israel relationship, whom, he said, "we have to educate." He also emphasized that using Israel as a wedge issue "will only hurt... U.S.-Israel relations."

The 79-year-old senator said that the vast majority of his colleagues are "basically

pro-Israel" and want to find ways to work together.

"What gets confused is that because we disagree with a governmental policy does not mean that we don't love and support our country," Cardin said. "I disagreed with a lot of Donald Trump's policies. During the years he was president, I loved America. I disagree with a lot of Prime Minister [Benjamin] Netanyahu's policies. I love Israel and the importance of the relationship between the United States and Israel."

Cardin offered shoutouts in his remarks to several local lawmakers in attendance at the event, including State Delegate Joe Vogel, a young progressive Jew running for

Congress in Maryland's 6th Congressional District.

Cardin lamented a rise in antisemitism “that I never thought I would ever see in my lifetime,” which he said had been fueled by “leaders that are giving oxygen” to hate and the disinformation and conspiracy theories that drive people to commit antisemitic acts.

He emphasized the importance of a range of steps to combat such hate, including Holocaust education, greater enforcement and alliances with “like-minded groups.”

“And then lastly, we have to have accountability,” Cardin continued. “We have to make sure that we end the scourge of what we see in our community. Leaders

must speak out, we can never normalize or trivialize antisemitism. We must speak out.”

Cardin, who said he is “optimistic” about the future, also pledged to remain engaged after he leaves office in January 2025, including in supporting the U.S.-Israel relationship. ♦

JUNE 15, 2023

Claims Conference secures nearly \$1.5B in funding for Holocaust survivors from Germany for 2024

Organization's executive VP describes 'somber, serious, raw, emotional' negotiations with Berlin, leading to some \$535 million in direct stipends and nearly \$900 million for home care

By Judah Ari Gross

The article first appeared in eJewishPhilanthropy.

The German government agreed to allocate nearly \$1.5 billion dollars in direct compensation and home care services for Holocaust survivors for 2024, following extended negotiations with the Claims Conference, the organization announced Thursday.

The Claims Conference, formally known as the Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany, said the German Federal Ministry of Finance had also agreed to guarantee several existing programs for at least several more years, including a direct compensation program and funding for Holocaust education.

“This year we were very successful,” the Claims Conference’s executive vice president, Greg Schneider, told *eJewishPhilanthropy*, crediting the agreements to “a combination of presenting a tremendous amount of data, the political pressure that we bring to bear and the realization, which we make clear again and again, that these are the last few

years that the German government will even have the opportunity to help survivors.”

The German government did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

Under the agreements, the German government agreed to provide \$888.9 million in 2024 for home care services to survivors, including “an additional \$105.2 million in funding to address survivors’ increased needs,” the conference said. These services can include things like a care provider who helps with basic household tasks a few hours a week to full-time, live-in assistance. This funding, which goes through the Claims Conference, is paid out to hundreds of groups that provide home care to survivors around the world, including larger organizations like the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, which operates extensively in the former Soviet Union.

According to recent surveys, there are upwards of 200,000 Holocaust survivors around the world, with approximately 150,000 living in Israel and roughly 50,000 in the United States.

Schneider said that while there is an assumption that as time goes on and more survivors die, the amount of funding for such home care should diminish, the Claims Conference has found that at least for the next few years, as the remaining survivors age and require more assistance, the amount needed will, in fact, increase and then plateau, before beginning to drop off later this decade.

In addition to continuing the monthly pensions that the German government pays to Holocaust survivors who were put in ghettos or camps, Berlin will also provide annual payments to 128,000 survivors who do not receive such pensions as part of a so-called “Hardship Fund.” In total, these direct compensation payments amounted to \$535 million for survivors in 2024, according to the Claims Conference.

As part of this year’s agreement, the German government guaranteed that it would continue making these “Hardship Fund” payments, with an inflationary increase, through 2027. This will go mostly, but not only, to Russian-speaking survivors,

who were forced to flee their homes as the Nazis invaded. (Survivors of the Kindertransport or Jews who fled the Nazis in North Africa, for instance, would also be eligible.)

Under the agreement, recipients of “Hardship Fund” stipends will receive a one-time payment of €1,200 (approximately \$1,300) in 2024, with a €50 (\$54) increase each subsequent year through 2027.

Schneider said this aspect of the agreement was particularly significant as Russian-speaking survivors are generally the poorest and most likely to have health issues.

“Those Jews were not in camps or ghettos, but they lost everything. And even after the war, they mostly lived in the Soviet Union, where they were again persecuted because they were Jews and they were never able to accumulate any wealth and had worse health because of worse access to health care. And then even after the fall of communism... they came to the West with very little,” Schneider said. “And so today the greatest indicator of poverty and diminished health amongst Holocaust survivors is whether you’re Russian speaking. And it doesn’t matter if you’re in Israel, if you’re in Germany, if you’re in Brooklyn, or if you continue to live in Ukraine and Russia – there are deep pockets of tremendous poverty in those communities.”

In addition to these forms of direct and indirect compensation for survivors, the German government agreed to continue funding Holocaust education programs through 2027. This was a continuation of last year’s agreement, in which Germany agreed to provide €25 million (\$27 million) for Holocaust education in 2023, €30 million (\$32.5 million) in 2024, and €35 million (\$37.9) for 2025. Under this year’s deal, Berlin agreed to extend this program by two more years, increasing funding each year by €3 million (\$3.25 million).

Schneider said this Holocaust education program was driven largely by comments and concerns that the Claims Conference heard from survivors. In the past, Schneider said, the conference mostly received inquiries about pensions and stipends, which gave way to requests for home care as survivors got older.

“Today, the most common question I

get from Holocaust survivors is, who will remember us? Who will tell our stories?” Schneider said. “I hear all the time, ‘I’m the only person who remembers my shtetl. I was from wherever and nobody will remember that way of life, the town where we all spoke Yiddish and the atmosphere on Friday afternoon, the whole way of life. I’m the last person on the planet who remembers them and that whole world. That’s a huge responsibility on the shoulders of a Holocaust survivor and it is imperative on us to relieve that responsibility by taking it on for them.’”

Schneider said that funding will be paid out in grants to a wide variety of organizations and initiatives, from traditional efforts like research – “We are the largest funder of archives around the world” – and collaborations with large museums and memorials, to more innovative methods like social media campaigns, such as underwriting TikTok star Montana Tucker’s recent trip to Poland.

Schneider, who has worked at the Claims Conference for more than a decade, said the negotiations with the German government are held directly with its Finance Ministry, specifically through a designated state secretary – the equivalent of a deputy minister. This year, that was Luise Hölscher, who entered her office in January 2022 when last year’s discussions were already underway.

Schneider said the negotiations with the German government, which always include Holocaust survivors, are often emotionally charged and even macabre, dealing with harsh actuarial calculations about life expectancies and medical needs.

“I think grim is a good word,” Schneider said. “They are somber, they’re serious, they’re raw, they’re emotional. We have to speak about numbers. We have to speak about how many people will be eligible, about what’s the cost per person, what’s the cost of home care. There are a lot of numbers, but we are cognizant that this, ultimately, is never about numbers. It’s about people.”

This year, ahead of the direct negotiations, as Hölscher was new in her position, the Claims Conference brought her to meet Holocaust survivors in Israel, Poland and the United States and to visit Holocaust museums there as well.

“We brought the lead negotiator on their side and their whole team to meet with individual survivors and hear their stories, to sit by the bed of someone who needs a home care worker and hold their hand and listen to their story about their Nazi persecution,” he said.

“But at the end of the day, we also have to realize that the people we’re speaking to were not even alive at the time of the Holocaust. They take on a responsibility that is historic... but the individuals that we’re speaking with are certainly not guilty, of course, and they are ultimately part of the solution,” Schneider said. “And so it’s difficult. There are times when there’s anger and fist-pounding and eyes welling with tears, and there are times when it’s more business-like.”

Schneider said that while the negotiations often include deep discussions about the history of the Holocaust and presenting the experiences of survivors to the German team, the Claims Conference is always cognizant of the fact that “this is not an academic exercise to teach about the Holocaust.”

“This is about getting results that have an effect on hundreds of thousands of people’s lives,” he said. “So it’s important that we emerge with an agreement. And this year, it was a very, very significant agreement that will have a deep impact.” ♦

AJC forms new task force to help White House implement antisemitism strategy

At organization's Global Forum in Tel Aviv, Israeli leaders discuss country's future and relationship with U.S. and world Jewry

By Judah Ari Gross

The article first appeared in eJewishPhilanthropy.

The American Jewish Committee will form a new task force to monitor and assist the White House as it implements its recently released national strategy to combat antisemitism, AJC CEO Ted Deutch announced on Monday.

Speaking onstage at the AJC Global Forum in Tel Aviv, Deutch said the organization planned to draw on the “experts and the incredible talent we have in our 25 regional offices around the United States of America to ensure that every one of the items in the national action plan is followed through on [and] to make sure that the timelines in the national action plan are carried out.”

Last month, the White House released its long-awaited U.S. National Strategy to Counter Antisemitism, made up of more than 100 concrete policy proposals, from increasing “learning opportunities in rural libraries and museums” about Jewish American history to organizing workshops in the Department of Homeland Security on countering antisemitism and better assisting Jewish communities.

“Our task force will ensure that when we return to Global Forum next year, we will be able to celebrate the implementation, not just the existence of the national action plan, but the very concrete actions that will be taken by the federal government, by state and local governments, by our staff around the country who will work with businesses and nonprofits, with sports leagues and cultural institutions, who will work with nonprofits, our intergroup partners, our interfaith partners, all to ensure that the White House action plan becomes a reality

in ways that will keep the Jewish community safe, secure and strong,” Deutch said.

Deutch also hailed his organization for developing many of the aspects of the White House’s plan with its “Call to Action” last year.

AJC did not immediately provide additional details about the task force, namely who would lead and serve on it.

Deutch made the announcement as part of AJC’s Global Forum, which launched on Sunday with some 1,500 people in attendance. The conference has featured speeches and onstage interviews with top Israeli leaders, including a short video address by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in which he thanked AJC for its efforts on behalf of Israel. Leaders from around the world also participated in the conference, including the prime minister of Lithuania, Ingrida Šimonytė, who flew in for the event, and Moroccan Foreign Minister Nasser Bourita, who sent a video message.

Israeli President Isaac Herzog stressed the need for dialogue and understanding between Jews in Israel and Jews in the Diaspora. “I believe part of the problem is a lack of understanding of what Israel is all about,” Herzog said, offering his initiative – *Kol Ha’am* — Voice of the People – which he launched in April as a possible solution.

Referring to Israel’s domestic situation, Herzog said he hoped that the country’s elected officials would reach a compromise on the judicial reforms. “These are critical days and I sincerely hope that the leaders and the elected officials will take the right decisions, because the people of Israel want a wide agreement, a consensus on the core issues without, of course, hurting the basic rules of democracy and the independence of the judiciary,” Herzog said.

In his onstage interview with Deutch,

Opposition Leader Yair Lapid stressed the need for Israel to remain a democracy, in light of what he described as efforts by the current government to weaken the country’s democratic norms with its proposed judicial overhaul. “If we will not be a democracy, we will not be. It’s existential,” Lapid said. “Israel was founded as a democracy. This is the source of our power.”

Israeli Minister of Strategic Affairs Ron Dermer, who is primarily focused on the relationship with the U.S. and Israel’s efforts against Iran, was not asked about the current state of Israel’s domestic politics. However, while he denied that Israel no longer had the same democratic values as the United States, Dermer said that Israel had made itself indispensable in *realpolitik* terms.

“Israel is the most important partner for the United States,” Dermer told Deutch. “The attack against Israel [that you heard] for many, many decades was that to support Israel was against American interests. Now you don’t hear that attack anymore. Now the attack that you hear is that we no longer share values, which is also not true. But it’s a totally different argument because states actually move together based on their interests in the long term.”

“I wish we were in a world where it was values that determine relationships between states because Israel would be the world’s superpower,” Dermer continued. “But we don’t live in that world. We live in a world driven by interests. And the new story about Israel is that Israel matters. We matter to the United States and we matter to Europe and we matter to Asia and we matter to Latin America because of the power of our technology, because of the power of our security and because partnerships with Israel are in the interest of those countries,” he said.

On Monday evening at the conference, AJC gave the inaugural David Harris Award to seven international antisemitism envoys: Ambassador Deborah Lipstadt, from the U.S.; Katharina von Schnurbein, from the European Commission; Felix Klein, from Germany; Lord John Mann, from the

United Kingdom; Eddo Verdoner, from The Netherlands; Fernando Lottenberg, from the Organization of American States; and Rabbi Andrew Baker, from AJC.

David Harris, the longtime CEO of AJC who retired last year and presented the award on Monday, said that while

antisemitism is “bad news, it’s good news to know that there are people who represent powerful institutions and governments who are ready to wage the fight alongside AJC and others, who have the courage the will the determination to say never again.” ♦

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New hotel aims to become center of Jerusalem diplomatic activity

Jewish Insider was given an exclusive look at The Theatron Hotel’s central feature: an expansive presidential duplex, replete with a panoramic view of southern Jerusalem and a private infinity pool on the roof

By Ruth Marks Eglash

According to legend, when asked about appropriate parking arrangements for the Jerusalem Theater when it opened its doors in 1971, the city’s famed Mayor Teddy Kollek, who held office from 1965-1993, responded with a dismissive hand wave and the standard Israeli phrase: “It’ll work out.”

Fast forward to today: After more than five decades of serious parking problems around the city’s beloved cultural institution, a new 700-space lot has finally opened across the street, with a handy pedestrian bridge taking theatergoers right inside the complex.

While the lot is certainly convenient for those attending shows and a godsend for area residents, it is the entire new development that sits above the car park – across the street from the theater – that looks set to change the face of Talbiyeh, an upscale Jerusalem neighborhood where some of the Israeli capital’s most prestigious institutions are located.

The Theatron, a 99-room luxury hotel, which includes 26 sprawling suites, as well

as three adjoining apartment complexes that benefit from the hotel’s services and amenities, partially opened last week.

Jewish Insider was given an exclusive look at the new hotel’s central feature: one of two 320-square-meter presidential duplexes, replete with an expansive living room, a dining room featuring a balcony that gives way to a panoramic view of southern Jerusalem and a private infinity pool on the roof.

Built by the Hassid Brothers Group, a Jerusalem-based developer, and managed by luxury French multinational hospitality company Accor as part of its MGallery Hotel Collection, the self-contained presidential suites are also directly accessible via private elevator from a secure area in the underground parking lot. It’s a feature that will make it attractive to those responsible for securing world leaders and other top officials visiting Israel.

“This is a very special place and a very special area,” Sharon Hassid, of the Hassid Brothers Group, which spent 13 years developing and building the project, told

Jl. “It is very urban and very Jerusalem-like, there’s a lot of nature, cultural sites and points of interest nearby.”

Hassid, whose father, Tzion, heads the company, pointed out such attractions as the theater, which is reflected in the interior design of the hotel; the Hansen House, a former leper colony that now hosts outdoor concerts and events; the Museum of Islamic Art; the Israel Democracy Institute, and the Presidential Residence, which sits just around the block.

Also nearby is the official residence of the prime minister, as well as Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s private residence, which is currently being used as his formal residence, and other commercial and culinary centers such as Emek Refaim and the First Station Compound, which are all within walking distance.

“Tourists, especially Israeli tourists, who come to Jerusalem want the classic Jerusalem vibe,” Hassid said. “If you go to the Old City, it is very tourist[y] and you don’t get to see what it’s really like to live in Jerusalem, the real flavor of Jerusalem.”

According to Hassid, who is developing three other similar hotel/apartment suites complexes in the city, the company's policy is "only to build in Jerusalem."

"We really believe in this city and, thank God, we've had some really good results," he said.

Another draw at The Theatron Hotel is Sheldon Ritz. The former deputy general manager in charge of special delegations at the King David Hotel, the South African-born Ritz, who moved to Israel 30 years ago, plans to utilize his contacts and his experience to make sure that Theatron is the hotel of choice for all VIPs visiting the capital.

Last week, a team from the U.S. Embassy toured the facility and gave it a stamp of approval as a possible location for visiting delegations, said Ritz, who left the King David Hotel during the pandemic and became general manager at the Vert Hotel in Jerusalem in 2021, before being hired to

oversee the launch of the Theatron.

"When I became general manager of the Vert Hotel, I sought to get embassies and government ministries to use that hotel," Ritz, 55, told JI. "I kept my relationship with the embassies and even managed to bring Jared Kushner and Ivanka Trump to that hotel for lunch."

Now he is turning his attention to the Theatron, which opened some of its rooms last week and hopes to be ready with most of its one- and two-room apartment suites within the next two months. The presidential suites should be completed by the end of the year, said Ritz.

"At this stage, we want all the agencies and embassies to come and see the hotel," said Ritz, who is in the midst of planning an official launch party on June 20. "I think what sets this hotel apart is that it is in Talbiyeh far from the maddening tourist crowds and also because all the suites are directly accessible from the parking lot,

which is paramount for security."

Another selling point, according to Ritz, will be the service.

"We will be very focused on service, because that is what will make or break this place," he said, highlighting that he handpicked many of the staff himself. "We will be commanding pretty high rates, and people will not want to pay if they don't get top service."

Ritz, who oversaw the visits of five U.S. presidents to Israel during his decades at the King David Hotel, added that he plans to take into account the budget limitations of foreign government embassies — rooms at the Theatron range from \$600-\$1,200 — but that he is aware that having such delegations stay in the hotel will boost its reputation.

"You can lose up to half a million dollars during a presidential visit," he pointed out. "But you get spin-off from it for years to come." ♦

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Zvika Krieger brings traditional texts, radical self-expression to Berkeley's Chochmat HaLev

Krieger, who joined the Jewish Renewal community last year after a stint at Meta, discusses his religious outlook and journey to the rabbinate

By Esther D. Kustanowitz

The article first appeared in eJewishPhilanthropy.

Growing up in Los Angeles, Zvika Krieger had a traditional Orthodox Jewish upbringing, but his journey into spiritual leadership is an unusual one that includes a Jewish day school education as well as the discovery of Burning Man as a place for Jewish prayer and connection.

After a two-year stint at Meta, where

he served as its first director of responsible innovation, he was chosen to serve as the spiritual leader for the progressive, Berkeley, Calif.-based Chochmat HaLev. A trans-denominational Jewish Renewal synagogue, Chochmat HaLev attracts congregants of different ages and experiences to its services and programs, using study, ritual, meditation and the arts to connect them to Torah, Kabbalah, traditional texts, contemporary commentary and the lived experiences of its diverse community. Krieger is in rabbinical

school at ALEPH: The Alliance for Jewish Renewal and is also seeking private rabbinic ordination, but even once he gets *semicha*, don't call him a rabbi: The term doesn't resonate with him and he doesn't intend to use it, he told *eJewishPhilanthropy* in a wide-ranging interview.

This interview has been edited for length and clarity.

Esther Kustanowitz: You've had quite

the journey to Jewish leadership. How does your Orthodox upbringing inform your work at Chochmat HaLev, which is an entirely different kind of Jewish practice?

Zvika Krieger: I grew up Orthodox, but went surfing before school, to punk rock shows in Hollywood, to raves out in the forest to dance to electronic music but wearing my kippah, and making sure I'm home in time for *Shacharit* (morning prayers). There's no reason why you can't do all those things. I still keep strict Shabbat and still keep kosher, and I pray three times a day... [Growing up,] I was deeply immersed in *Tanach* (the Hebrew Bible), *Gemara* (part of the Talmud) and *halacha* (Jewish law), through the Orthodox lens. But it gave me agency in my own Jewish journey. I could look into the sources and come to my own conclusions, rather than relying on gatekeepers who layer their own agenda on top of the text or tradition. It made me feel empowered when it comes to ritual, ceremony and marking lifecycles and milestones.

EK: *You describe yourself as a "subversive ritualist and radical traditionalist," held jobs in journalism, with the U.S. government and tech companies, and tackled issues ranging from Middle East politics to climate change and responsible innovation. What professional description best describes your work?*

ZK: Whenever a new opportunity comes my way, the first question I ask is, where can I make the most impact, help the world and advance the causes I care about? But the second question is, where can I learn the most? [In] the world that we're living in, where challenges are so multimodal, you can't just have a government solution, or just a private sector solution, or an NGO or civil society solution. You need to be able to see things from multiple different perspectives... A throughline in most of my career is innovation and challenging the status quo of stodgy traditional organizations that have brought me in to shake things up, to challenge conventional wisdom. Whether that's the U.S. military or the U.S. State Department; the World Economic Forum; or an 80,000 person

company like Meta, I've always been the intrapreneur or entrepreneur [who brings] a new perspective. My latest version of that is Judaism, the oldest institution of them all. While I was at Meta, I was also in rabbinical school.

EK: *You might be the only person who can say that. Did you experience any overlap of skills or experience?*

ZK: What I was learning in rabbinical school around pastoral counseling and spiritual guidance was very relevant to the work that I was doing at Facebook, where I helped product teams surface ways in which their products might potentially harm people. My job was actually to bring complexity into the conversation, rather than reduce [it] to false binaries. That was directly informed by the work that I was doing in rabbinical school — learning about not telling people what to do, but helping them tap into their own sense of inner wisdom. There are denominations of Judaism, where the job of the rabbi is to tell you what to do. But that certainly isn't the type of rabbi I am training to be.

EK: *So now you're Chochmat's spiritual leader, but you're still working on your path to rabbinic ordination.*

ZK: I'm not your typical ALEPH rabbinical student — I have many years of yeshiva learning — so it's really been a bit more of a DIY journey. One of the reasons I love ALEPH is their ability to accommodate people from different backgrounds. I'm also in the process of getting private rabbinic ordination from Rabbi Art Green. Both should be done next year. But the title has so much baggage: people have so many assumptions and expectations around what a rabbi is and I often don't align with those expectations, so I tend to not use that word. I promised myself when I started rabbinical school, that I would never become a synagogue rabbi — famous last words. When Chochmat came calling, it's just such a unique community, and such a perfect match for my unique eclectic theology and approach to living Jewishly that it was just too good an opportunity to pass up.

EK: *You said that more traditional organizations bring you in to challenge conventional wisdom, and that the latest example of that is Judaism. How does that manifest for you?*

ZK: I put on my product designer hat when I took this job and interviewed 50 to 100 people who are not inspired by the current offerings of the institutional Jewish world. They want a Judaism that is deeply progressive, but also substantive, deeply rooted in our ancestral wisdom, our lineage, our tradition, our rituals, our ceremonies. A lot of progressive Judaism feels thin to them... There's a sense of spiritual meaning and depth that people are not getting from the current way that Judaism is taught or practiced in many communities... Historically, the people who have had access to our deep wisdom and lineage and tradition and texts tend to come from more of a culturally conservative worldview. So to get connected to the deep wisdom and the richness of our tradition, you have to do it through a culturally conservative lens, which I don't think is inherent to the tradition, I think it's something that's actually layered on... I feel really blessed to have had access to it and to be able to be that bridge for people. I also think that people are looking for a Judaism that is fun, joyful and embodied, that it's not just cerebral, but something that you can have embodied experiences through and connect deeply to community. There's a graying of the line between what has historically been considered sacred and profane; you can bring a levity and an irreverence and and subversiveness to the practice that I think really resonates particularly with millennials and Gen Z, but with a lot of GenXers and Boomers, as well.

EK: *What is your relationship to philanthropy, personally and for Chochmat HaLev? And how is everything at Chochmat being funded?*

ZK: A lot of my relationships, members of Chochmat and our donors come from the tech world. People in Silicon Valley, who have made a lot of money, and were driven to create these products that are having a questionable impact on the world, are realizing that they're really hungry

for meaning... Silicon Valley has been so good about creating products that people want to use. How do we turn those tools and mindsets to spirituality and meaning and community... People are really hungry for meaning and connection, and they're looking for it in all the wrong places... People want things that are deep, and substantive, with this ancestral lineage behind them.

EK: *Explain more about how you observe these seekers and what they want.*

ZK: Whether it's my *drashas*, the classes that I teach, gathering people for small groups and being able to do that work not just at a cerebral level, but creating space where people can actually go deep... a space where people can deeply feel their emotions, the embodiment technologies of Judaism of prayer, singing and dancing — having these prayer services where you're not just sitting there with a prayer book and mumbling the words, but you're actually feeling it in your body, and you're dancing, you feel that energy coursing through the room, and you leave that cerebral intellectual space, and enter a more somatic embodied space. People are yearning for that, because we were just sitting at their computers all day, it's like, how do I get into my body? People say I don't want to talk about God, or learn about God, I want to experience God... And we have the technology to do that in Judaism.

EK: *How does your approach differ from mainstream Jewish offerings?*

ZK: A lot of the institutional Jewish world [says], "Here's what we offer, why aren't people coming?" instead of "What do people want?"... For example, one thing I've heard consistently from people, is that so many people are working from home and they're lonely, missing the relationships that they used to have at the office. People are looking for meaning in their work, particularly in Silicon Valley, where hundreds of thousands of people were laid off in the past six months. People are realizing, "This thing that I've been pouring my heart and soul into, it can be gone in an instant; I need to find meaning elsewhere, or ways to infuse my work with meaning." In response to that demand, we

are prototyping a soulful coworking space at Chochmat, where people can come during the day. It's not a Shabbat prayer service, or a young professionals happy hour. In the morning, we have a check-in and an intention-setting; in the afternoon, we're going to have a check-out, and you can share what happened during your day. We have opportunities for 15-minute meditation sits, have a spirituality discussion over lunch, or if you want to have coffee with folks during the day to make new friends. I'm not saying, bring spirituality into the workplace. I'm saying, bring spirituality into the way that you work.

EK: *You credit Burning Man, an annual self-created, pop-up desert community, as part of your road to the rabbinate. How?*

ZK: A lot of people use the term "once-a-year Jews" to refer to people who only go to synagogue on Rosh Hashanah or Yom Kippur. But there's a whole other class of once a year Jews, which is people that the only Jewish experience they have is Shabbat at Burning Man, once a year we have 1,000 people who show up for that service. The camp that I co-lead is called Milk and Honey. People would say things like, "Rabbi, where can I come to your synagogue, this is the first place that I've ever felt like Judaism really speaks to me," and I was like, "I'm not a rabbi, I don't have a synagogue." Something clicked for me: these people are not being served; they are looking for spiritual depth, where they can bring their full authentic selves and don't have to leave part of themselves at the door. One of the core principles of Burning Man is radical self-expression — people want to be able to have a place where they can talk about sex and polyamory and psychedelics, and get access to deep ancestral wisdom and prayers and liturgy and meaning and feel like God is present there and that you can connect to God. Those things aren't paradoxical. They're actually core to spiritual practice.

EK: *How are you intersecting with Jewish philanthropy?*

ZK: Chochmat is funded primarily through dues and donors. We have a pretty healthy membership base, which has been

steadily growing post-COVID. My goal is to make Chochmat self-sustaining... People in the institutional Jewish world hear about the work that I'm doing, [and say] "Jewish foundations will never fund this work. It's too provocative, too out of the box." But the numbers speak for themselves. We've tripled the number of people coming to Friday night services at Chochmat over the past year, 200-300 people praying, singing and dancing, some staying until midnight for "heartspace," a progressive spin on this Hasidic tradition of a *tisch*, sitting around a table singing, chanting, eating and drinking, sharing Torah and having guest speakers on topics like Judaism and polyamory, or Judaism and psychedelics. That's been funded by the San Francisco Federation. In conversations with foundations, I often say, "Don't think about whether this resonates for you. But there's lots of people, many of whom you've probably never met, whom this does resonate for."

EK: *Who is the average Chochmat HaLev congregant?*

ZK: One of the things I love about Chochmat is that it's such a wide range of people, people who alternate between going to Chochmat and the Orthodox synagogue in Berkeley; people who are not even Jewish, who come regularly and are members or serve on our board, and all across the spectrum. [Some] grew up traditional and left, explored Eastern or other types of spirituality, and then came back in their 20s, 30s, 40s, even 50s and 60s. And so it's a full range... People want deep intergenerational connection; a lot of millennials and Gen Z tend to be either geographically distant from their families of origin, or philosophically, theologically, and culturally distant from their families of origin. Chochmat has really cool elders, who have been on their own journeys, and have a lot of wisdom to share.

EK: *Are any innovative elements of Chochmat's activities exportable to other contexts?*

ZK: I see Chochmat as an incubator for things that can be scaled across the country. A lot of communities study what we do... A lot of the funding that I've received has been

to capture case studies, so that we can then share with other communities around the country and scale it, which is the Silicon Valley mindset of prototype, test, iterate and

scale. Chochmat is not for everyone, I'm sure there are lots of Jews on the Upper West Side or in suburban New Jersey who would not resonate with the kind of Judaism that I'm

trying to build. But I can tell you, there are lots who are resonating; Chochmat is part of a broader movement that's brewing. ♦