

## **2020 WAJC Annual Meeting**

### **Report of the President**

**Phyllis Forbes**

**August 23, 2020**

Last year I began my remarks by saying I was honored to stand before you as President and I have to say I feel the same way this year. It has been an incredible privilege to serve our congregation. The commitment and enthusiasm of Rabbi Ilene Haigh and the Board of Directors, Shirley Gramling in our office and the committee chairs and members who have done so much this year is amazing. Last year I told you about me and my family and the journey we took that brought us to Shir Shalom. This year I want to tell you about you, who you are as a congregation and the journey we embarked on this past year.

Much of what I am about to say comes from what happened after March 2020 when the world really changed for everyone. Prior to that, we were making our way through our first High Holy Day celebrations and as a new President I gained a great appreciation for what goes into making our services so special and so beautiful. The Holocaust Torah dedication made the 5780 holiday celebration even more special. There was an additional issue, a crisis in our school when in August the Director left Vermont for another job, but luckily it was averted when Ronni Skerker stepped up to serve as director. Then, a wonderful group of congregants, including my husband, Richard, and me, left for Israel trying to understand the history and the future of a nation many of us call our homeland. Some happy holidays like Chanukah and Purim, rounded out those first few months, and then we were hit.

I came to understand the power of community as I watched and participated in the things we did to respond to the virus. Within five days we converted our entire program to a new technology, Zoom, and learned how to use this incredible tool to support us more through this time of need. That next week we called close to 300 people, in a couple of days, to make sure they were okay and to ask if they needed anything from us. The overwhelming responses we received, both in the telephone calls and messages to me afterwards was, "what can I do to help", to help someone else. It was more than heartwarming and uplifting. It was comforting that in the midst of these scary times, there were people there for each other. Whether they were sewing masks, shopping for seniors, or calling congregants, they gave us hope rather than despair.

We might have been reluctant to share our toilet paper, but we did not hold back on our empathy and love. We added more programs to make sure people felt that comfort. Twice weekly Shabbat services were expanded by off-week Shabbat gatherings. Rabbi Haigh brought us the liltig voice of Carly who added to the joy of our services. Monday noon club, teenager and millennial get togethers, civic action group for Every Voice Every Note, expanded Torah study and a new class of Adult Hebrew learners were also added to our schedule. We held our summer fun raiser on Zoom and from beginning to end we learned a lot and even managed to raise as much money as we had last year, maybe a little more. And maybe the best, though it's hard to pick, was the first online bar mitzvah that we held in July and watched Levi Halley read from the Torah, standing in the kitchen next to his proud parents and siblings. It was breathtaking.

Though we could not touch each other, we could not be in the same physical space, and we couldn't sing together, we could still share our pain, our worries and kvell over our joys. Our services became warmer when we would have expected them to become colder, more distant. We became closer even if we had to become even more isolated from each other. Even our Hebrew School experienced a significant uptick in student attendance.

We also completed a new contract with Rabbi Haigh who is perhaps the greatest blessing this synagogue can claim. We are so happy she will continue to provide wisdom and solace to our community who loves her so much.

That's what we did. Now I want to talk about you and the first thing is how do you support Shir Shalom?

This past year about 266 families sent us donations. We received \$230,000 plus \$90,000 for an education fund. The average donation was \$896. About half our donors give between \$100 and \$1,000 and about a quarter give more than \$1,000 a year. If we look at the families that we can consider members, meaning they participate in more than one event at Shir Shalom, the average was \$1,231 per family.

Where do we come from? Of the 266 families who made a donation, about 110 live fulltime in the Woodstock Area. These numbers are a little off because there are so many donations from MA and FL and we know many of those people are also from Woodstock or the surrounding area. But, of the ones we can identify as living in our "catchment" area, within one hour of Woodstock, 40% come from the Woodstock area itself defined as not more than 20 minutes away. Hanover and NH contributes almost 40%, Killington is our next largest group, 15% and North, including Randolph, contributes 7%.

Now, perhaps the biggest question? How many Shir Shalom Congregants does it take to change our lightbulbs? 92 volunteers (and two staff)! I want to thank each and every one of you. Your support, your enthusiasm, your dedication and your laughter keep us all going, and going strong.

- See List all the volunteers below

What can we expect this coming year?

We are engaged in a rather serious redefinition of our Hebrew School to enhance our curriculum and respond to the challenges of online education. We engaged a consultant to help us and we also started a new education committee, composed mostly of current parents, to guide these reforms. The first reform the committee will be working on is to purchase some additional outdoor equipment for our youngsters so they can play near the synagogue in a safe environment during this pandemic and afterwards.

We will be reorganizing our administrative services. Shirley is retiring and we are in the process of selecting her replacements. The new staff will have more responsibility and be able to support our Rabbi and me even more. We will launch a new database after the High Holy Days that will allow us to contact each other more easily and reduce the burden on the office manager and the Treasurer. This will also enable us to have a new Website with some additional features. The new Communications and Technology committee will be helping us design that website. And helping us to figure out how we can communicate with you, all of you, better. After the database is installed, you will be receiving a letter

asking you to confirm your data and for some more data – like whether you want your yahrzeit to be by the Hebrew or the English calendar and whether you want to be in a member’s directory.

We are conducting two surveys, one as part of the education reform with the parents of school children, already sent out, and the other with the whole community which will happen after the holidays. The community survey is focused on what you want from your synagogue, how can we better use our facilities and what do we need to do to improve them. After the survey, we will be conducting some focus groups as well. We will be starting a new committee for welcoming newcomers, we will be expanding our adult education, and we hope to start perhaps some study groups, one on the issue of racial justice and the other on comparing Torah to other religious texts. We have a plan for maintaining and upgrading our facilities and are prioritizing the work.

I have to admit that being President has heightened my sense of humor. I am constantly surprised at the number of opinions we have on any issue and that any issue has a number of opinions. I love getting phone calls from you and want to encourage more of them but what I love is that I can almost tell what the call will be like from seeing the incoming number – some of you begin with lovely, warm, openers filled with gratitude and appreciation, which I love, and then the real issue is revealed. Some of you begin differently, but I believe all of those have ended on a better, higher note.

Attendance has been increasing at almost all of our events and the warmth of our Shabbat services and gatherings is both palpable and delightful. It seems the word is getting out that we’re doing something special. I feel it and I hope you feel it.

*Phyllis Forbes*  
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August 23,2020

## List of Volunteers 2020

Will Adler  
Jen Anderson  
Carol Anderson  
Rachel Benoit  
Tom Beck  
Aaron Berman  
Ilan Berman  
Tom Beck  
David Blank  
Shari Borzekowski  
Joe Borzekowski  
Sue Brown.  
Mike Brown  
Leone Bushkin  
Arnold Cohen  
Alison Dagger  
Bobbie Dagger  
Jaclyn Dagger  
Jen Daks,  
Carolyn Dashef  
Paula Dorr  
Shmuel Dorr  
Corinna Dodson  
Sharon Earn  
Marge Elsberg  
Lois Fein  
Barry Feinberg  
Susan Feinberg,  
Heidi Fishman  
Jay Flaster  
Jen Flaster  
Norm Frates  
Pam Goldman  
Hannah Forbes  
Leah Heaney-Forbes  
Micah Heaney-Forbes  
Richard Forbes  
Marlene Gavens  
Sarah Glass  
Oliver Goodenough  
Dan Gottsegan  
Nicole Johnson Gottsegan  
Sarah Goldfine  
Walter Golub  
Dan Gottlieb

Jordan Gottlieb,  
Dan Gottlieb,  
David Gouchberg  
Karen Gouchberg  
Zecil Gravitz,  
Catherine Heron  
Elikzabeth Hirsh  
Jeff Hirsh  
Judy Intraub  
Rachel Kahn  
Jeffrey Kahn,  
Peggy Kasden,  
Jeff Kahn  
Helene Linn  
Jeanie Levitan  
Holly Levison  
Sandy Marmar  
Antoinette Matlins  
Stuart Matlins  
Lori Malloy  
Jason Rickles,  
David Rosengarten  
Michelle Rosengarten  
Joshua Zecher Ross  
Lisa Miller-Ryan  
Natalie Salmore,  
Barbara Sirotkin  
Leslie Silberberg  
Susan Silberberg,  
Neva Schindler  
Roni Skerker  
Art Skerker,  
Laura Schneider  
Robert Steinberg  
Alice Stone  
Gary Stoloff  
Jennifer Stralka  
Crole Trachtenberg  
Howard Trachtenberg  
Sarit Werner  
Richard Wndish  
Carl Wulfestieg  
Sue Wulfesteig,  
Ruth Zamenhof