PRESIDENT’S ADDRESS to 2022 Annual Meeting

Four years and a pandemic ago, when I began down the path of Executive Vice President and then Congregational President, I really had no idea what was in store. Truly, who could envision the tumult of these times? I know that every president has their share of issues, characters, and situations to manage, and even so, each time I have written to the congregation there has been a major local, national, or world event for us to contextualize and work through.

Not to belabor the point, but the extent to which the last two years involved the word and action “pivot” was extraordinary. We have navigated the choppy waters of change in longtime staff positions at Kol Haverim. We have pulled together to decry major events that have shown the darkness of White nationalism and anti-semitism, insurrection at our nation’s capital, unjust war in the Ukraine, and acts of violence in synagogues, schools, and town squares. We have been immersed in the twin pandemics of systemic racism and COVID-19. Our lives have felt and been so much more complicated, and we have come through so much.

As frustrating and challenging as it was to have to socially distance, mask, have online religious school and services, and not see one another for long stretches of time, it also has proven something remarkable about the strength and resilience of our congregational community. We should be proud of having made this all work, and work so well. Our accomplishments would look pretty good even in normal times, and are certainly worth celebrating today.

Advances in safety and security in response to the events of our times have resulted in successful mitigation practices that made our building, our services, Religious School, and partnered SRECC safe and quite sound.

In addition to updated security systems in and around the building, our work with the Secure Community Network led to a series of trainings for our congregants and a full evaluative report that makes clear our good position and readiness for security matters. We cannot be too careful in this regard.

The technology donated and developed by Tom and Rabbi Kari Tuling to support our ability to reach congregants and their families during the pandemic not only allowed us to livestream services when no one could safely be together, but since then to continue that reach. For weekly services, b’nai mitzvot, holidays, special events and annual meetings we now can ensure that all of our congregants, no matter their distance or circumstances, can be connected and engaged. A pause here for yet another shout out for Tom—his contributions in these ways have been extraordinary and transformative.

I am thankful, too, for Rabbi Kari’s pastoral care during what has been a tough stretch for us all. She has been a rock. And her depth of commitment to learning and intellectual engagement is an example for us all; I share congratulations on her recent completion of the Spertus program with yet another graduate degree.

After last year’s retirement of Karen Trager and departure of Mandy Renert we saw their incredible legacy carry us through a tough Zoom year for the religious school and set the foundation for our new Religious School Principal, Dasha Baker. After a period of talented cantorial work both online and in-person from Lauren Bandman we have Kevin Mack joining us as our new cantorial soloist. And throughout Laura Bennett Weinstein has kept us steady with her accompanist work and creative verve.
with anthems and service music. As I’ve written before, Christine Carlson has been a force for good in not only holding down the office, but in seemingly bettering everything she touches and making us all feel supported. For those whose shoulders we stand on, and those ours brush against in carrying our wonderful congregation forward, professionally and joyfully, I am thankful.

Ensuring our future, we have seen some remarkable work on financial sustainability. Nate Z will soon present the details of our finances and budget projections, and the fundraising is making a great difference in our standing and outlook.

During Len Kaplan’s tenure as president we worked with the firm Mersky, Jaffee, and Associates to plan and rollout the Growing Together Campaign, and during my two years that effort entered its public phase and sustained impressive momentum. Howie will report later on the great fundraising success of the GTC, the Life and Legacy program, and the annual Circles of Giving program.

While I’m on praise and thanks, our board of trustees has done incredible work in leading us through these times of change and challenge, and I am so appreciative for each of them.

Lee Berger has been a fantastic executive board member and secretary, our parliamentarian and procedural sounding board, a highly able and reasoned mind, and one with skills that have been a blessing to that role and to his ongoing leadership of our taskforce on the strategic plan.

Allison Kaufman has been an extraordinary VP for Education over the last four years, not only leading us through the challenges of online religious education during the pandemic but also the changes in the religious school’s principals and teachers, of which there have been many during her time. Allison has been supremely dedicated to her role and has worked tirelessly on all of our behalf.

Nate Zaientz and Shawna Gale have done so much as Treasurer and VP for Congregational Relations, and we are lucky that they continue on in those roles, providing continuity and ongoing excellence.

Noah Bilmes, Renata Lantos, Debra Glass, and Marji Finkel, your energy, ideas, commitment, and contributions as leaders in our congregation have been generous and outstanding. I know that each of you will continue to be stalwarts in our community no matter the formal role, and I am thankful.

Marty Mantis, thank you for stepping back up as Brotherhood rep. Nate Rickles and Michael Mandell, thank you for extending your leadership commitment on the Executive Committee.

I can’t praise highly enough the work and counsel of my predecessor Len and my Executive VP Michele, who will be an awesome president. She has a no-nonsense, roll-the-sleeves-up, can-do approach that will get things done. Her support in these past two years in both our proactive and responsive efforts has made the work more fulfilling and enjoyable. And I dare say that we have not just brought our congregation through; we have made impressive and real gains in these last couple of years, and for those who have supported my efforts and worked alongside me in harmony I am thankful.

Lastly, Paige, Benjamin and Saul deserve a great deal of appreciation for not only their own contributions to committee and task force work and as madrichim, respectively, but also for their understanding of the importance we as a family place in service, and in Congregation Kol Haverim, and for putting up with all the time I have been away or attending to temple business. Our shared dedication makes me proud.
So too am I proud of the accomplishments we have all made together, as a congregational community, joined together as the Voices of Friends.

L’shalom,

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