



# The JSC Newsletter

Newsletter of the Cleveland Jewish Secular Community  
[www.jewishsecularcommunity.org](http://www.jewishsecularcommunity.org)

January 2010/5770

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## Community Calendar

**Sunday, Jan. 17.** Board Meeting

**Sunday, Jan. 24.** Ladies Day Out. See p. 6

**Friday, Jan. 29.** Shabbat dinner/Tu B'shvat celebration. See p. 2

**Friday, Feb. 19.** Shabbat dinner.

**Sunday, Feb. 21.** Board Meeting

**Sunday, March 7.** Purim party

## Peace on Earth, Good Will Toward...Jews?

In Lake Wobegon, so Garrison Keillor tells us, "All the women are strong, all the men are good looking, and all the children are above average." Cute. But in an article that appeared in *Salon.com* and was reprinted in numerous Tribune Company newspapers around the country, Keillor—he of folksy "A Prairie Home Companion" fame—wrote the following:

*"Unitarians listen to the Inner Voice and so they have no creed that they all stand up and recite in unison, and that's their perfect right, but it is wrong, wrong, wrong to rewrite "Silent Night." If you don't believe Jesus was God, OK, go write your own damn "Silent Night" and leave ours alone. This is spiritual piracy and cultural elitism and we Christians have stood for it long enough. And all those lousy holiday songs by Jewish guys that trash up the malls every year,*

*Rudolph and the chestnuts and the rest of that dreck. Did one of our guys write "Grab your loafers, come along if you wanna, and we'll blow that shofar for Rosh Hashanah"? No, we didn't.*

*"Christmas is a Christian holiday -- if you're not in the club, then buzz off. Celebrate Yule instead or dance around in druid robes for the solstice. Go light a big log, go wassailing and falalaing until you fall down, eat figgy pudding until you puke, but don't mess with the Messiah."*

Keillor has long enjoyed the reputation as a kind of latter-day Will Rogers. His wry humor is offbeat and often digs good-naturedly at his own Scandinavian, Lutheran roots. So it comes as something of a shock when he now rides in as Defender of the Christian Faith, a modern Crusader looking to battle the infidels. Unitarians, who had thought they belonged to the Christian community, cannot be pleased with Keillor's rebuke. Jews, whose radar will generally spot an anti-Semite many miles away, can add a new one to their list.

Perhaps somebody spiked his eggnog with a generous helping of nasty, but Keillor now reveals himself to be belligerent and bigoted. Like Bill O'Reilly, he seems to believe that "good Christians" are under siege in a "War Against Christmas." And the chief

assailants seem to be those stealthy Jewish songwriters who have contaminated Christmas with their anti-Christian “dreck.”

Of course, who can argue with Keillor? Facts are facts. Jewish songwriters must plead guilty to all these seasonal compositions: “The Christmas Song” (“Chestnuts roasting on an open fire...”, Mel Torme), “White Christmas” (Irving Berlin), “Let It Snow” (Sammy Cahn), “Sleigh Ride” (Mitchell Parish, lyricist), “Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer” and “Holly Jolly Christmas” (Johnny Marks), “I’ll Be Home for Christmas” (Walter Kent and Buck Ram), “Silver Bells” (Jay Livingston and Ray Evans), “There’s No Place Like Home for the Holidays” (Al Stillman, lyricist), and “Santa Baby” (Joan Javits). We’ll let Jews and anti-Semites alike delve into the Jewish roots of “Santa Claus Is Coming to Town.”

The online blog *The Jewish Week* (<http://jewish-politics-ny.com/2009/12/24/more-on-garrison-keillor-and-the-war-on-christmas/>) notes that the *Minneapolis Star-Tribune* printed a rejoinder by Steve Hunegs, the executive director of the Minneapolis/St. Paul Jewish Community Relations Council, who wrote, in part, “Mr. Keillor’s Christmas commentary is not the Garrison Keillor whose ‘Writer’s Almanac’ has often featured Jewish writers and/or themes often, movingly, on the Jewish high holy days. Still more: Keillor’s diatribe about Jewish composers is “not consistent with his usual deep knowledge of the relationship of music, culture, and Americana.”

Mr. Hunegs’s words are a lot more measured than Keillor deserves. If there is anything of Christian charity, universal love, or just minimal tolerance—much less humor—in Keillor’s remarks, it is hard to find it. One would hate to think that his mindset is what informs the good people of Lake Wobegon; if it is, it’s not a utopia any decent person would like to live in.

—Steve Shucard

## Enjoy Shabbat Dinner

The **January 29 Shabbat dinner** will be a Tu B’Shvat seder. The holiday welcomes the warming of the earth and the rebirth that occurs as spring beckons (somewhere far from Cleveland!). We will sample a variety of fresh and dried fruits, nuts, and seeds along with four glasses of wine.

Stephanie Spear, founder and executive director of EcoWatch ([www.ecowatch.org](http://www.ecowatch.org)), will be the guest speaker. Her topic will be “Easy and Affordable Ways to Adopt Sustainable Lifestyles.”

Ms. Spear has been working on environmental issues for more than 20 years. EcoWatch is a non-profit grassroots environmental organization that encourages individuals, businesses, and governments to adopt sustainable lifestyles, business practices, and policies. She is also president of Expedite Renewable Energy, a company that helps businesses invest in renewable energy and energy efficiency projects.

The meet-and-mingle portion of the evening begins at 6:15 with the program following promptly at 6:30. (**Please note the earlier start time.**) Dinner will be at 7 p.m., and the feature presentation will be at 8 p.m.

All JSC Shabbat dinners are held at the First Unitarian Church, 21600 Shaker Blvd. (east) in Shaker Heights.

### ??? What to Bring ???

**Names A to K and S to Z** — side dish for 10-12 people

**Names L to R** — dessert for 10-12 people

If bringing a guest, be sure that your food contribution feeds more people.

Please list ingredients on an index card and pre-slice the food you bring if slicing is required.

Chicken, challah, wine, drinks, and all serving utensils are provided.

**RSVP by Wednesday, January 27**, to Lynn Salzbrenner (330-463-0149, [lynnsalzbrenner@gmail.com](mailto:lynnsalzbrenner@gmail.com)).

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JSC members and guests were treated to a very special evening for our December Shabbat and Hanukkah program. **Rifke Feinstein** began the evening with a new Shabbat program, including the lighting of the menorah for the eighth night. She then read a Hanukkah story that explained the origins of the holiday and a secular interpretation of events. Thanks to **Eunice Berko, Marcia Rosenthal, and Ellen Schwartz**, who fried over 600 latkes for our hungry crowd, the dinner was exceptional.

The evening's speaker was Ahmed Fellague, a retired engineer, educator, and participant in interfaith panels. He described some of the Muslim traditions and pointed out how Muslim terrorists are in violation of the Koran.

### **The Road to Morocco**

**Dorothy Werblow and Nora Kancelbaum** recently returned from a trip to Morocco. *Dorothy wrote the following account of the trip, with assistance from Nora.*

On October 29, Nora Kancelbaum and I left on our trip to Morocco with a great sense of excitement and not too much knowledge about what to expect. We were both surprised to learn about the long history of the Jews in Morocco and about the many similarities between traditional Judaism and the practices of Islam. The Jews have been in Morocco since biblical times. They were artisans and traders before the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem and settled all over North Africa. Our trip leader, Mohammed, included the Jews in his

description of Moroccan history in each city we visited.

We arrived in Casablanca, where we visited the new King Hassan II Mosque with its enormous ablution (washing) rooms and Turkish baths surrounded by broad marble plazas, cedar wood carved cornices and doors, and mosaics everywhere. Casablanca still has a Jewish population of several thousand. They have left the other areas except for a few scattered around the country.

On the next day, we went overland to Essaouira, which is on the Atlantic coast. It is a fascinating city, with upscale beach clubs at one end and fishing boats unloading their catch at the other. (Orson Welles made the movie "Othello" here in 1952 and stayed in our hotel. Portraits of him were etched into the dining room's mirrored wall, and two doors from our room a sign read "Suite Orson Welles.") One evening we went to an Andalusian music festival, where Mohammed told us the singer was a very popular Jewish woman. The next day we had lunch in the home of a local family. This was the first of about six visits to various people's homes throughout the country. Visiting with people in their homes gave an insight into the average person's life. Some of the local women are part of a co-op that processes argan nuts, which are grown only in that area. They sell these nuts to tourists and also ship them to customers all the Middle East.

We visited the Jewish cemetery and then the "old" Jewish cemetery. Some of the graves are more than 500 years old. At one time, a very large Jewish community lived in Essaouira. We climbed the wall of the old city fortress, where cannons were mounted facing the ocean to guard against invaders.

We toured Rabat, Meknes, Volubilis, and Fes. Volubilis was a Roman outpost

for 200 years until the third century. It has been half excavated, and we saw bedrooms with mosaics depicting Roman mythology on the floors and places used as bathrooms. Because it was cold, the servants would warm the seats for people. There was also a *vomitorium*.

The Fes *medina* (old walled city) has 9,000 streets and 5,000 donkeys. The streets are so narrow, twisted, and steep that it is too difficult for carts to traverse, so the donkeys and their handlers are an important part of the Fes trucking industry. We stopped at a tannery, a ceramic workshop, and a rug showroom and did our best to make way for the loaded donkeys while not getting lost from our group. The *souk* was so narrow we had to press ourselves against the wall to let them go by.

We saw the first building in the Jewish *medina* from the 14<sup>th</sup> century and a synagogue from the 17<sup>th</sup> century. When we left Fes, we rode through Efrain, where we learned that before Camp David, Menachem Begin and Yassar Arafat had met there at King Hassan II's palace. The next day was a long drive through the High Atlas mountains on our way south to the Sahara and to our tent camp, where we would spend the next two nights.

The dunes are beautiful, the camel ride was painful but enjoyable, and the camp was definitely basic. We had no running water and no electricity. It was up early and to bed immediately after dinner. We had only one small candle in our tent. The night was cold, but heavy blankets kept us warm. We woke in the middle of the night, and the stars and moon were so bright and beautiful that it was one of the highlights of the entire trip.

We were in the Sahara for seven days and finished our trip in Marrakech, which is the "hot" city for ex-pats and celebrity tourists. During our days in the desert, we visited many Berber homes, a one-room school, a farm, and a residence for high school boys who were preparing for the university. We rode through the High and Middle Atlas

Mountains with steep, perilous curves, visited both Dades and Todra Gorges, had henna tattoos applied to our hands, neck, or legs, and harvested alfalfa with the women in Tineghir.

Our last night before Marrakech was in Ouarzazate. This city is the Hollywood of Morocco. Several large movie studios provide a major source of employment for the locals, who serve as extras as well as bit players in the movies—for example, "Lawrence of Arabia," "Jewel of the Nile" and "Babel"—that are made there.

In Marrakech there is a 12<sup>th</sup> century *casbah* (fortress-style residence) that has been named a World Heritage Site and is being restored. Marrakech also has a wonderful pizza shop that made everyone happy, including our trip leader; it is his favorite restaurant on these trips. Sometimes a taste of home is just fabulous. Every night the huge square turns into a festival. There are fortune tellers, amulet makers, escargot booths, restaurants that appear like magic, dancers, snake handlers, acrobats, and all kinds of entertainers who catch a few coins from the audiences circled around each of them. (Note from Nora: During one evening's dinner entertainment, the dancers picked Dorothy to get on the stage to dance with them, and then a snake handler put a snake around her shoulders! She was quite a hit.)

When we returned home, Nora and I googled for more information about the Jews in Morocco. Our trip leader painted a rather idyllic picture of their history, but life for the Jews has been a "mixed bag" over their several-thousand-year history in Morocco. They lived peacefully with the Berbers and even intermarried or converted many of them. No one seems to know for sure, but there have been many Jews among the Berbers.

When the Arabs invaded at the end of the seventh century, the Jews began to have some trouble. There is a *mellah* (Jewish quarter) in each city. *Mel* is the word for salt, and Jews were salt traders among other occupations. Sometimes, over the years, they were forced to live in the *mellah*, and sometimes they were less restricted. Many Jews came from Andalusia, in southern Spain, during the expulsion years that culminated in 1492. The Moroccan Jewish community is said to have flourished over the long expanse of its history, though its fortunes weren't quite as benign as our trip leader indicated.

Morocco has always been a liberal Islamic country, its main branch being Sunni Malikit. The country's leaders are trying to keep radical Islam from taking a strong hold on the population. It is common to see women who are veiled, wear head scarves, or dress in Western style walking in the *medina*. King Hassan II was quite traditional, but his son, Mohammed VI (since 1999), is trying to move the country into the 21st century. He travels almost every day, visiting various places in the country and opening various projects. The king and the parliament are trying to bring education and income to the poorest parts of the country.

While we were in the Sahara area, the king was touring various towns. It was fun watching the crowds of students lining up waiting for him to arrive. There were the usual helicopters and army personnel around and trucks loaded with carpets to be laid at the venue.

(Note from Nora: We discovered many similarities between Jewish and Muslim rituals. For example, during a mock Muslim wedding, the imam prepared a wedding contract called a *kateb*, which is similar to our *ketubah*. Orthodox Jews pray three times a day; Muslims pray five times, and the fourth time in the afternoon sounds similar to our *maariv* (meaning "west"). And then, of course, there's the halal, the dietary rules—Muslims eat no pork.)

## Thanks to Christmas Volunteers

*Nora Kancelbaum, co-chair of our Community Service Committee, wrote the following item:*

My thanks to our Christmas Jews (as opposed to Shabbos *goys*) who volunteered at Montefiore Home on December 25: Renee Lipson, Eileen Kless, Annette Solomon, Jerry Weiss, Gil Winer, Dietz Ziechmann, and me. We took residents to a concert performed by Norman Tischler on sax and clarinet, with piano accompaniment by Moss Stanley. I found it to be much more fun than bingo.

## Shelter Thanks JSC

*Ginny Galili, Executive Director of the Hebrew Shelter Home, has written the following letter acknowledging the gifts that JSC members contributed:*

"On behalf of the clients who will benefit from the gifts, paper products and personal hygiene items at this difficult time in their lives, we thank the Jewish Secular Community of Cleveland for your very generous donation. Your thoughtfulness enables us to make a difference in the lives of our clients.

"The Hebrew Shelter Home's goal is to help Jewish women, children, and men move into permanent housing with a solid sense of belonging in our Cleveland Jewish Community. We welcome you, your family and friends to visit our website, [www.hshcleveland.org](http://www.hshcleveland.org). It provides valuable news and resources for friends like you and for those seeking assistance.

"As a result of your wisdom and sense of communal responsibility, we are able

to move forward to create a comprehensive and effective response to the growing number of Jewish families and individuals in need of emergency and temporary housing.”

### **The Social Scene**

Clear your calendar for **Sunday, January 24**. It's going to be Ladies' Day Out and the Ensemble Theater will be performing "Jerry's Girls" at the Cleveland Playhouse. The show features the music of Jerry Herman. The performance begins at 2:00 p.m., with dinner at a restaurant (TBA) to follow.

Contact Marcia Rosenthal (440-423-1718, [sunchoke@sbcglobal.net](mailto:sunchoke@sbcglobal.net)) or Eunice Berko (440-720-0606, [euniceberko@yahoo.com](mailto:euniceberko@yahoo.com)) right away to reserve your tickets. The price is \$18 and you can make out your checks to "JSC."

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On December 6, a large contingent of JSCers had brunch at Nighttown, then attended Jeffrey Siegel's "Keyboard Conversation" at CSU. The program consisted of works by Chopin and was followed by a dessert reception.

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Andy Gross tells us that a performance of "Ain't Misbehavin'" to benefit CSU will take place at the Bolton Theater on **Sunday, February 21**, at 7 p.m. You can reserve your tickets by calling Ginger Williams of CSU Theatre Arts at (216) 687-2113 in the weeks before the performance. She may be able to arrange for you to pick up tickets at her desk in the Playhouse rotunda the evening of the show. The price is likely to remain \$10 per person.

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Your ideas for programs and activities are always welcome. Email Eunice ([euniceberko@yahoo.com](mailto:euniceberko@yahoo.com)) or Marcia ([sunchoke@sbcglobal.net](mailto:sunchoke@sbcglobal.net)) with your suggestions.

### **Member Briefs**

The JSC welcomes **Miriam Wachsman**, a dyed-in-the-wool Clevelander. Having grown up in Cleveland Heights, Miriam now lives in Mayfield Heights. A friend of JSC members Bev Feingold, Harriet Goldberg, and Marcia Rosenthal, Miriam joined our Community after attending the October Shabbat dinner at which her brother, Phil Resnick, was the featured speaker. (Phil made a fascinating presentation on "The Insanity Plea: A History of Reform, Revenge, and Rationalization.")

During her working career, Miriam worked as a marketing researcher and for many years was an employee with the Veterans Administration. Her husband, Bob, also worked at the VA after a career with the women's fashion firm Bobbi Brooks. Among the things that keep Miriam busy these days is her volunteer work at Schnurmann House.

Two of the Wachsmans' three sons live in Ohio; David resides in South Euclid, and Ron lives in Toledo. Bruce calls Memphis home.

The JSC is thrilled that Miriam has chosen to join us.

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It pays to advertise. New member **Paula Stone** was looking through the Synagogue section of the *Cleveland Jewish News* when she spotted the JSC's website. Her interest aroused, she contacted Lynn Salzbrenner and attended her first Shabbat dinner and program. The people all seemed friendly and the intellectual content of the JSC programs appealed to her.

What really sealed the deal for her, though, was a small but significant incident. While Paula was listening to a band play at Lyndhurst Home Days, our Shabbat setup leader, Judy Herzog, came up to her to say hello. Judy had seen her only once before, recognized

her, and took the trouble to greet her. That small gesture was all Paula needed to know that she was “home.”

Paula is a home-grown Clevelander. The adjective fits her perfectly, too, because she is an amateur horticulturist, active in the Lyndhurst Garden Club, and a member of the Greater Cleveland Orchid Society. She grew up in University Heights and was a student at Flora Stone Mather College when Western Reserve University and Case were merging to become Case Western Reserve University. She received her Master’s degree from John Carroll University.

Retired from her career as an elementary school teacher and reading specialist, Paula worked in the Cleveland school district for over 30 years. She hasn’t lost her love for her work though, and now volunteers as a reading tutor at Adrian School in South Euclid.

Paula is a great addition to the JSC’s member rolls, and the the JSC is so glad to welcome her.

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The *Cleveland Jewish News* published a letter co-written by Ruth Fazio and member **Tybee Zuckerman**. Click <http://www.clevelandjewishnews.com/articles/2009/12/18/opinion/letters/doc4b2a77d965da8205825781.txt>. to access the letter, which takes issue with the Jewish organizations Peace Now and J Street.

\* \* \*

Tibey Elfman, aunt of **Bobbie Varble**, passed away on December 15. Bobbie was the primary caretaker for the last three years. Services were at Berkowitz-Kumin, and the interment was at Mount Olive cemetery. Our thoughts are with Bobbie and her family.

\* \* \*

**Dr. Roy Berko** was inducted into the Brush High School Wall of Achievement in November. The honor is given to those who have displayed outstanding achievement in areas such as leadership, service to the community, service to Brush High School, humanitarianism, creativity, courage, and careers that have benefited others. The school, which is over 80 years old, has so honored only 31 of its graduates.

### **Men’s Discussion Group**

You are cordially invited to the next meeting of the Men’s Discussion Group on **Wednesday, January 20**, at 7:30 p.m. at the home of Harvey Schwartz, 607 Sturbridge Dr., Highland Heights.

For more directions/information, call or email Harvey (440-449-4418, [eschwa7500@yahoo.com](mailto:eschwa7500@yahoo.com)).

The group met at Steve Shucard’s home in December and discussed the question “Why Are You a Secular Jew?”

### **2010 CSJO Conference: A Call for Proposals**

The 2010 CSJO Annual Conference will take place at Ursuline College on May 28-31. The Program Committee consists of **Lois Gross, Allen Guth, Jim Mayer, Kathe Mayer, and Lynn Salzbrenner, and Hans Leander**.

Please send your proposals for topics and presenters to Hans Leander at [hanslean@oceanisl.com](mailto:hanslean@oceanisl.com). (preferably from the greater Cleveland area). The conference theme will be “Four Creative Decades with Roots in a Glorious 100-Year History, 1910 – 2010” (referring to the CSJO and secular Jewish schools).

### **Mah Jongg, Anyone?**

Want to have some fun, socialize, and relax? How about joining a mah jongg group? If you’re interested, call Sharon Shucard (330-425-3234).

## JSC Leadership Contacts 2009 - 2010

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\*Member of JSC Board of Trustees

### The JSC Mission

*The Jewish Secular Community, affiliated with the Congress of Secular Jewish Organizations and the International Federation of Secular Humanistic Jews, is a non-profit cultural and educational organization whose purpose is to:*

- ✧ *Encourage Jewish identification in a non-theistic setting that draws inspiration from the traditional Jewish sources and values*
- ✧ *Educate adults in the history, culture, and tenets of Judaism*
- ✧ *Celebrate and observe Jewish holidays and life cycle events*
- ✧ *Contribute to the betterment of our society through social action and volunteerism*
- ✧ *Provide a link to a world-wide community of secular Jews.*