

Impacting Lives

For 90 years, Jewish Family Service responds to the needs of the community.

JOYCE WISWELL CONTRIBUTING WRITER

For a 90-year-old, Jewish Family Service (JFS) is pretty darn nimble. While its mainstay is providing services for older adults, mental health and substance abuse counseling, coordination of health care access and ensuring basic needs are being met, the agency can also act quickly to help out in times of crisis, be it helping those affected by the 2014 floods or last year's fire at Baptist Manor in Farmington Hills.

"It's part of our DNA," said Perry Ohren, MSW, who was first hired by the agency in 1991 and became its CEO in 2011. "While there is core stuff we do every day, we have the ability to be flexible and respond to what impacts people on an individual basis to meet their needs. We balance those two things, thanks to the generosity of our donors."



Perry Ohren

JFS staff, volunteers and others will gather on May 30 for a 90th anniversary celebratory event expected to attract at least 800 participants.

The basic mission hasn't altered much since 1928, when the Jewish Social Service Bureau was incorporated to promote "family welfare and welfare of children among the Jewish people of Detroit and environs." One major change, however, was expanding into non-sectarian services in 1983.

"When we started to diversify our funding and get some from government sources, my predecessors decided that to serve the Jewish community better, let's open the door wider, serve the whole community and repair the entire world," Ohren said. "Most people, whether Jewish or not, might reflexively assume JFS is for Jews. We are Jewish in our name, our history and our values, but we provide human and family services for people whoever they are. It's a challenge to let everyone know we are a non-sectarian agency."

Still, 85 percent of those JFS serves are Jewish, he said, adding that Detroit's percentage is higher than many.

For fiscal year ending May 31, JFS' budget is \$11.2 million; revenue sources include various grants, federal and state government funds, contracts with community partners for specific targeted programs, insurance and self-pay fees for certain services, and allocations (total of \$3 million) from the Jewish Federation. The agency has 114 employees.

"The fundraising part is a constant challenge," Ohren said. "The reality is that funders, whether the Federation or United Way or the government, sometimes change



Then: A counselor speaks with a young boy.



Now: Mentor Alan Simons and his mentee Jacob.



Then: Meals on Wheels volunteers prepare meals.



Now: A volunteer delivers meals to a thankful senior.



Then: Soviet Jews await the arrival of relatives.



Now: Members of 2015 citizenship class celebrate.



Then: Elderly adults received visits from volunteers.



Now: Technology helps seniors stay safe.



Then: Older adults share Chanukah candle-lighting together.



Now: Two young girls donating Chanukah gifts.

and those changes are sometimes abrupt. We are not going anywhere, but I do worry about various pots of \$100,000 here or \$500,000 there. What we will look like three years from now will be a little different from what we looked like three years ago, but our core will remain the same."

FAMILY AFFAIR

While the "Jewish" in the agency's name respects its origins, the word "Family" has additional meaning to some. Many of the 1,000 volunteers who help each year are related.

Erica Solway, 36, of Ann Arbor, for instance, learned about volunteerism from watching her mother, Nancy Solway, a current board member. When Erica was a teenager, she tagged along with her mother, a "Friendly Visitor" to a disabled woman named Lynn. Blind and confined to a wheelchair, Lynn lived at the Prentis Apartments in Oak Park, but a broken leg had temporarily put her in Menorah House in Southfield.

"I had to do community service for school, so I asked if anyone at Menorah House could use a visitor," Erica recalled. "I ended up developing a bond with a man named Othni and visiting with him weekly for a couple of years until I went to college. He died, but I still stay in touch with his family."



Erica and Nancy Solway

Her experiences at Menorah House fueled her career in geriatrics.

"I had never given it much thought before, but it really changed me, and I just ran with the experience," said Erica, currently associate director of the University of Michigan National Poll on Healthy Aging and who formerly worked on health and aging policy for the U.S. Senate. "It was pretty eye-opening to realize how much can be done to improve the care for older adults."

Now 66 and serving her second stint on the board of directors, Nancy Solway of Bloomfield Hills, said meeting Lynn in 1988 through the Friendly Visitors program had a major effect on her life.

"We were good friends from the day we met, and we visited for about 23 years until she passed away six years ago. It was a great relationship for both of us and a very special part of my life," Nancy said. "Being a part of JFS has influenced and grounded my life. It's a group I am proud and honored to be affiliated with."

Current board chair Suzan Curhan of West Bloomfield fondly recalls how her step-grandmother, the late Edythe Jackier, was an active volunteer.

"It speaks to the heart and soul of who we are," said Curhan, 56. "We are such a dynamic group and passionate with different views that come to the table. We are not perfect and there is a lot that



Suzan Curhan

continued on page 38

Join The Celebration

JFS' 90th Anniversary Event on Wednesday, May 30, features a talk by Jeannette Walls, author of *The Glass Castle*, a captivating memoir of her youth spent in dire poverty because of her parents' alcoholism and mental illness. Tickets for the event, which is chaired by Andi and Larry Wolfe, are \$36, two for \$50 and \$10 for students. The program begins at 7 p.m. at Congregation Shaarey Zedek in Southfield. For tickets or sponsorship information, call (248) 592-2339 or visit jfsannualevent.org.



Introducing **jhelp**

Jewish Detroit's New Resource for Connecting You to the Help You Need

If you or someone you know could use some assistance, the Jewish community is here to help. One call or visit to jhelp.org is all it takes to connect you to the resources that can make a difference.

JHELP is for: Children, Teens, Families, Seniors and Others in Need

Our Services Include:

- Older Adults
- Planning and Finances
- Food
- Career Services
- Transportation
- Housing
- Mental Health
- People with Disabilities
- Holocaust Survivors
- Health & Wellness
- Victims of Abuse

We are here for you.

1-833-44J-HELP jhelp.org

Made possible by The Jewish Fund, the D. Dan and Betty Kahn Foundation and the Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Detroit.

POWERED BY



Jewish Federation
OF METROPOLITAN DETROIT

continued from page 37



Senior Director of Family Life and Wellness Erica Saum role plays as she leads an ASIST workshop on suicide awareness and prevention.

remains to be done, but we will not be stagnant.”

The agency’s responsiveness is one of the things that attracted



Debbie Feit

Debbie Feit of Farmington, who has been its communications manager for the past three years after a career in advertising.

“This is the first nonprofit I’ve worked for

and making that transition has been very satisfying to me, even if my role is a small one. It has been fascinating to see just how much we do and have evolved over the years,” said Feit, 50. “You don’t have to be Jewish and if we can’t help you, we will refer you to someone who can.”

That’s a message JFS, which helps some 14,000 people each year, works hard to deliver.

“Oftentimes the perception is, ‘JFS isn’t for me. It’s for a poor person on the other side of town,’” said Ohren, 55, of Huntington Woods. “We are not just for someone who is disenfranchised; we are there for people going through all sorts of problems or transitions or challenges. You can be the wealthiest person in Detroit and still benefit from our services. Though we were founded to help people who didn’t have two nickels to rub together, that is simply a piece of what we do. We are there for people when they are going through something, and that in some ways is a well-kept secret.”

LOVING SUPPORT

Michele and Michael Colton of Franklin have each volunteered



Michael and Michele Colton

their time — and hearts — through JFS’ Mentor Connection.

“I was a mentor to two young men,” said Michael, 63, whose own father died when Michael was just

11. “I think it’s essential, and it became personal for me. I have three sons of my own and it was a rewarding experience parenting them. All three are grown so I had that Jones I had to feed.”

He attended one of the teen’s bar mitzvah years ago and still keeps in touch with the young man, who is now in college. “We had lunch about nine months ago and he is blossoming,” he reported.

Michele, 56, had a more challenging time with her mentee, an independent-minded teen from Pontiac. “I saw her every few weeks for five years. Toward her later years, I was hoping to have a real impact, but, by the end, I was amazed that she graduated and was not pregnant,” she said. “She seemed to care about me, but she wanted to hang out with her friends, and I ended up being more of a support system to her grandmother.”

These days, Michele has befriended two senior citizens through JFS. She plays Scrabble weekly with a 92-year-old woman in hospice and takes a 77-year-old shopping each week and is in the

continued on page 40

JFS Historical Highlights



One of the agency’s first buildings was on Second Avenue in Detroit.



The agency added family therapy.



JFS established group homes for the elderly.



Resettlement of Soviet Jews was a major JFS project.



In 2014, JFS mobilized quickly to help those devastated by flooding.

1928

- The Jewish Social Service Bureau is incorporated to promote “family welfare and welfare of children among the Jewish people of Detroit and environs.”

1930s

- The first Homemaker Service Program in Michigan is started to serve children in homes with an ill or absent mother.

1940s

- The agency’s focus with children shifted to foster care and residential treatment of children, services to unmarried parents and adoptive couples.

1950s

- Department of Services for the Aged is created; group home for teens started.

1960s

- Beginning of group therapy
- In response to the Detroit riots, the Housing Relocation Program is created to move Jewish families from the inner city to subsidized housing near Jewish facilities.
- Volunteer services formally organized as an entity within the agency.

1970s

- Kosher Meals on Wheels is initiated with the NCJW and the Jewish Federation apartments.
- JFS defines poverty as a continuing issue in the Jewish population and expands financial assistance services.
- Staff undertakes training in family treatment and offers services that combine marital therapy, child-parent therapy and treatment of the complete family unit.
- Group apartments for the elderly are established; the program offers congregate housing and support services.

1980s

- In-home respite care started.
- JFS establishes the Skillman Project to work with issues of neglect and physical and sexual abuse of children.

1990s

- Endowment campaign to fund WINDOWS, the agency’s domestic violence prevention and treatment program (formerly Skillman); opening of kosher shelter called “Safe Place” in conjunction with NCJW; Reva Stocker lecture series begins.
- Transportation starts with one vehicle and three drivers.
- Resettlement of 7,000 Jews from the former Soviet Union.

2000s

- Creation of Project Chessed, providing access to medical care for uninsured Jewish adults.
- Emergency financial assistance in the face of the economic downturn.
- Gave group apartments for the elderly (Coville Apartments) to JSL.

2010s

- Emergency assistance during the flood of 2014.
- Focus on teen mental health; introduction of suicide prevention trainings.
- Health care navigation.
- Wellness offerings such as walking group, book club, guest speakers, diabetes management.

Ongoing

- Serving Holocaust survivors; in 2016, JFS received a grant that marked the first time in history that the U.S. federal government provided direct funding for survivor services.
- Responsiveness to community needs.

THERE'S A BETTER WAY TO TRAVEL.

Let us show you the benefits!

888-426-8999 | PentastarAviation.com | [Twitter](#) [Facebook](#) [YouTube](#) [LinkedIn](#)

Private Jet Charter | Aircraft Management | Advisory Services
Aircraft Maintenance | Avionics Services | Interior Services | Executive Terminal

©2018 Pentastar Aviation.

AROUND-THE-CLOCK INDIVIDUAL CARE. SO WHEN IT'S TIME TO REST, YOU CAN REST ASSURED.

Having a safe, comfortable place with highly trained medical staff nearby and activities to keep you engaged can go a long way in reducing the amount of time you spend worrying. That's why we're here. *Schedule a visit today.*

SKILLED NURSING AND SO MUCH MORE

41795 Twelve Mile Road
Novi, MI 48377
248-509-0925
novilakeshc.com • [Twitter](#) [Facebook](#)

A Trilogy Senior Living Community

“We are not just for someone who is disenfranchised; **we are there for people** going through all sorts of problems or transitions or challenges.”

— PERRY OHREN, JFS CEO

process of helping her move to subsidized housing.

“They are so supportive and loving when you visit them; they think it is so amazing someone would take time out of their day to spend time with them,” Michele said. “They light up when they see you. To me, it is more than throwing them in the car and taking them to the doctor. An hour a week is nothing, but you do have to realize that you become important to that person.”

REASONS TO BE PROUD

Providing services to older adults and their caregivers is among the “zillion things I am proud of,” Ohren said. “Helping people age in place in their homes is not rocket science, but it really does take a qualified social worker to help people navigate. JFS is very attuned to the fact we are all getting older. A subset of that is Holocaust survivors, and we are helping more than 500 of the maybe 1,000 in the community. There couldn’t be anything more important that JFS does.”

Ed and Francine Gold, who live in Bloomfield Hills, have each served



Francine and Ed Gold

on the board during their 51-year marriage, as has their son Lorne, 49, of Huntington Woods.

“I am one of the old dogs,” said Ed, 77, who was board president in 1988 and still attends the

occasional meeting. “When I started my relationship with JFS, Sam Lerner was the head and he was an institution in the Detroit Jewish community — a wonderful man and a great leader. Sam retired when I was in office and finding a replacement for him was no easy task, but we had a lot of qualified candidates and got Alan Goodman [CEO from 1989-1998], who was terrific.”

He added, “JFS is very special because it’s hands-on, dealing with real people having real problems. That’s what drew me — the fact that we could actually affect the daily lives of people in our community. You can’t work at JFS without having a good ‘*neshamah*’ — a good heart and true feelings for people who are having problems and need help.”

#GETCOVERED

#heretohelp

JFS health care navigators are ready to help people find the best health insurance for their needs.