

# Re: Development Publication



Since the 2019 Strategic Plan identified "financial sustainability" as a core need for our synagogue, Congregation Beth Shalom has been supported by grants from the following:

The Community Investment and Tourism Fund (CITF) of Allegheny County; the Gaming Economic Development and Tourism Fund (GEDTF) administered by the Redevelopment Authority of Allegheny County; Harold Grinspoon Foundation's Life and Legacy™ program; Jewish Federation of Greater Pittsburgh; the Nonprofit Security Grant Program (NSGP) managed by the Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency (PEMA); the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency (PCCD); the Pittsburgh History & Landmarks Foundation (PHLF); The Shear Family Foundation; The L. Harold and Mary Kirkell Memorial Foundation; the Ruth Ganz Jewish Education Endowment Fund; The Tepper Foundation through Jewish Federations of North America; Keystone STARS Continuous Quality Improvement Award; the Pennsylvania Office of Child Development and Early Learning (OCDEL); and the Redevelopment Assistance Capital Program (RACP) of Pennsylvania.



October 2024 / Tishrei 5785  
Issue 3



## Spotlight on Congregation Beth Shalom Members Jessica Hammer and Chris Hall

By Rabbi Andy Shugerman

**ANDY:** Tell me a little bit about how you found Beth Shalom.

**CHRIS:** We came to Pittsburgh for the first time eleven years ago, because Jess was exploring a job at CMU that of course she ended up getting. But as part of that, they brought us out to visit Pittsburgh and see what it would be like to live here. And I distinctly remember we chose a hotel at the base of the big, steep Negley Hill over Shabbat of Passover. That was an experience. We looked at the map and thought: ok, it's maybe a mile away, we can walk to *shul* [synagogue]. Then we walked up this 45 degree incline.

**JESS:** We get to the top, looked at each other, and said: what are we doing?!? What is Pittsburgh? I don't understand.

**CHRIS:** We did barely make it to Beth Shalom that day, but the idea was to do a little tour of different *shuls* [synagogues]. That didn't happen.

**JESS:** We made it. Actually, the thing that impressed me the most is that the synagogue was so much into being part of a Jewish community as opposed to one where people who go to different *shuls* don't talk to each other and certainly don't celebrate together. That's something that really made me want to be a part not just of Beth Shalom, but of the Pittsburgh Jewish community.

**CHRIS:** And we were looking for a place that was seriously egalitarian, and that was serious about the many different ways to be Jewish, meaning not just Jewish practice, not just *shul*, not just learning, not just Jewish education for children, but serious about all of the above. Without saying, well, we're the social justice *shul*, or we're the traditional prayer services *shul*. And I think that's partly an effect of scale, that Beth Shalom has a large enough and committed enough member community that it can accomplish all of those things. But I also think there's just an ethos of taking all parts of Jewish life with great seriousness that I appreciate.

**ANDY:** How have you experienced Beth Shalom as a part of the Pittsburgh community, or even as part of the Conservative Movement as a whole?

**CHRIS:** To me, Beth Shalom is sort of like the central hub of my Jewish experience. It's like this return to home and then connects me to the larger Jewish world as well.

**JESS:** The SULAM program [a lay leadership development curriculum through United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism] really made us feel like there was a place for us to contribute in making the *shul* not just what we wanted it to be, but clearly what the *shul* wanted itself to be. I remember the first Rosh Hashanah that I came to *shul* with Ada. She was the only baby there. We knew that we wanted to be part of Beth Shalom for the long run. That meant getting young families involved, making sure that there's going to be a next generation of membership, but also making sure that there's going to be a next generation of leadership. I really have to point to Chris – he picked up that vision of helping Beth Shalom grow in a way that people already wanted and aligned with his interests. So he's been taking on these sort of leadership roles in running Derekh and the adult education program. I took on some major new responsibilities at work in 2021 and stepped back from a lot of *shul* stuff as a result. But before that I was on the rabbi search committee and religious services committee. I also ran a large piece of the strategic planning and a bunch of the design activities that we did together. And early in the pandemic, I ran a community support phone tree Chris and I set up to check on all of our members, especially our elderly members. All of those things were enabled by the *shul*, making very clear that even though we were new to Pittsburgh, we were new members and we were younger people in the community, that the institution was welcoming us to bring our input to what Beth Shalom could be.



Rabbi Andy Shugerman is the Development Director at Congregation Beth Shalom and can be reached at [rabbiandy@bethshalompg.org](mailto:rabbiandy@bethshalompg.org).

**CHRIS:** I definitely feel like Beth Shalom is very eager to see things happen, and I feel like I have often had a ridiculous idea and been able to get something to happen at the synagogue because of it. A specific example is Pride Shabbat. I saw a gap that we did not have a Pride celebration in June. And partly, I think, I succeeded through my own ignorance that I didn't really know who the right person to ask for permission was. So I did it. And the synagogue really got behind me. I give great credit to Rabbi Adelson and the executive director Rob Menes. This could have been a controversial thing to have our first LGBTQ event at the synagogue, but it's not a big deal. And that was awesome, just a great experience.

**JESS:** I think it really made a difference to the *shul*. Chris got the big pride banner, and I remember him coming home one day and saying, Jess, this lesbian couple stopped me on my way into the synagogue, and they said, "we saw that banner, and we knew we were welcome here. We knew that we could belong to this *shul*." I think, first of all, that's a real attestation to this willingness to try new things. But also, I feel there are *shuls* where they don't want kids in the *davening* [services] because they're going to make noise, or they don't want queer families because we don't know how to accommodate them. I feel Beth Shalom, to its great credit, is working on bringing down these barriers and making every Jew feel welcome. And Beth Shalom is home, right? It is committed to being a home for the Jewish people of Pittsburgh - period, full stop. Yes, there are still things we can work on and there are a lot of things I know we could do better, but I believe in us as a community that learns.

I grew up in an Orthodox community, and my whole life, I *davened* [prayed] behind a *mechitza* [barrier for gender separation]. I never had the chance or the expertise to lead *davening*. And I remember this really formative moment, in the process of choosing to leave Orthodoxy, where Chris and I were visiting a Conservative *shul*, they hold up the Torah scroll and they sing, "*V'Zot HaTorah* [This is the Torah]." And I started to cry because I said, oh, when they hold it up, you can actually see the writing. Right? You can actually say "Zot [this is it.]" I remember I turned to Chris and I said, "We're going to have a child someday, and our child is never going to know the feeling that I just had. She's going to be a full member having full participation in Jewish life, and that's part of how we ended up at Beth Shalom. But part of the reason I knew we wanted to invest and commit is that with that backstory, I imagined it for my daughter, but I never imagined it for myself. And Rabbi Adelson and Sheldon Catz, Religious Services Chair, invited me not just to lead *davening*, but to lead *davening* on Yom Kippur. But I said, "I can't do that. I don't know how." And they said, "It doesn't matter. Do you want to do it? If you want to do it, we will make you able." Rabbi Adelson sat with me and annotated the whole service and helped me learn the *Nusakh* (melodies) to be able to do it. So leading Yom Kippur *davening*, or leading any *davening*, is something I thought that I would never be able to do. Doing so for Beth Shalom is one of the most meaningful experiences of my life.

So that's the story that I would tell. To somebody who doesn't know yet how they want to be involved, I would say, imagine the thing that you didn't think would be possible for you as a Jew, and let me help you figure out how to do it, because that's what Beth Shalom did for me, and I want to pay it forward to other Jews in the community.



# Congregation Beth Shalom

## 2023 Top Donors

*Beth Shalom gratefully acknowledges the support of all its members, who contribute to our congregation in many meaningful ways. The following alphabetical list recognizes the fifty top donor members in terms of financial support received in 2023:*

Anonymous (3)  
Rabbi Rachel Adler  
Brooke Barker and Boaz Frankel  
Bernstein/Schoen Family Fund  
Sheldon and Elaine Catz  
Ria David and Mark Perlin  
Stanford and Marian Davis  
Mitch Derris and Brenda Kurland  
Norman and Sylvia Elias  
Evelyn Favish  
Helen and Richard Feder  
Debby and Nathan Firestone  
Jordan Fischbach  
Margaret and Gary Fischer  
Ira Frank  
Robert and Ellen Garvin  
Robert and Megan Glimcher  
Meyer S. Grinberg  
Chris Hall and Jessica Hammer  
Steve and Vicky Hoffman  
Stanley and Reva Horn  
Morris and Adriane Horvitz  
Joe Jolson and Sabina Robinson  
John and Diane Katz



Stefi Kirschner and Gil Schneider  
Carl Krasik in memory of Elaine Krasik z"l  
Ariel Levavi and Brendan Meeder  
Jane Liebschutz and Roger Zimmerman  
Robert and Celia Liss  
Aviva and Noah Lubowsky  
Bernice and Jack Meyers  
Abby Morrison  
Lawrence and Eileen Paper  
Andrew and Rita Rabin  
Harvey and Beverly Robins  
Dr. Bruce Rollman and Jane Rollman  
Zarky Rudavsky and Merrienne Leff  
Marc Schwartz and Family  
Steven and Sharon Schwartz  
Mindy Shreve  
Michael and Ellen Siegel  
Yael Silk  
Joel Smalley  
The Smuckler Family  
Chester Spatt  
Kenny and Terry Steinberg  
Dr. James Tauberg and Cindy Tauberg  
Paul Teplitz  
Nancy and Gary Tuckfelt



**Rabbi Andy Shugerman**  
Development Director

**Paul Teplitz**  
President

**Rabbi Seth Adelson**  
Senior Rabbi

**Robert Gleiberman**  
Executive Director