



Joanna Macrae is the first person that guests, clients and employees of Jewish Family & Child Service see on entering the office. “Welcoming” is but one positive adjective Executive Director Ruth Scott uses to describe “Jo.”



## Cantor Vitells retires from Shaarie Torah

Cantor Aaron Vitells has retired from the Shaarie Torah pulpit after more than two decades, citing medical reasons related to his voice. In an announcement that went out to the Shaarie Torah community on Nov. 11, he shared, “Around two years ago, surgery was performed to remove a polyp from my vocal cord. Since that time, I have been having increasing issues with my voice. At this point, while my soul is willing, my voice simply will not allow me to lead our community through the Shabbat liturgy.”

He will gain the title of Cantor Emeritus, beloved and honored among the kehillah.

“Cantor Vitells is an incredible mensch and asset to our synagogue, and we are strengthened knowing that he is both physically well (except for his voice) and remaining a part of our community,” says Rabbi Gary Ezra Oren.

The congregation will not immediately seek a replacement but will rely on lay leaders as various vocal styles and melodies are explored.

## JFCS’ bookkeeper has perfect pitch

BY JENN DIRECTOR KNUDSEN

By night, Joanna Macrae provides harmony for her two bands. By day, Jo, as she’s known to her colleagues at Jewish Family & Child Service, provides harmony in the office.

JFCS’ bookkeeper and payroll specialist, Jo, 35, took perhaps an untraditional path to the nonprofit to support staff and clients in its four programs – Counseling, Emergency Aid, Disability Support Services and Holocaust Survivor Services.

Eight years ago, a family friend and owner of Mississippi Pizza Pub & Atlantis Lounge simultaneously offered Jo and her mom a part-time job to provide some efficiencies in its revenue system.

“Because in 2013, it was still a pretty cash-heavy business,” Jo says of restaurants in general.

Jo beat her mom to the punch (they still get along), and as the pizza joint’s office clerk, Jo’s responsibilities quickly grew beyond handling cash to include QuickBooks, payroll, depositing and other related tasks.

To subsidize the part-time, back-office portion of the job, Jo joined the pub’s waitstaff and slung pizza, prepared salads, washed dishes and tapped away on its old-fashioned cash register (the kind that dings when the drawer opens).

“I liked QuickBooks and payroll enough to return to school,” Jo says, and in 2015 earned her associates degree in accounting from Portland Community College. “Most people find data entry mind-numbing, but I find it satisfying, and I got really good at it.”

So good that she often catches up on her reading via audiobooks while working two monitors to cross-reference data, track donations, enter bills and more. Also, like so many later bloomers, Jo had struggled with math in college, but then a college teacher emphasized her talents, and she realized she is quite numbers savvy.

And then the pandemic pounced.

For the pizza pub to remain open, it had to pivot to takeout and delivery, and the transition was painful. Jo stayed to train a colleague and tied up the books in a bow before responding to JFCS’

job opening that would be a promotion and just the professional challenge she sought.

Case in point: Nearly one year into the job, JFCS has expanded its client base, programs and pay sources (such as private insurance), so the agency’s billing requirements and systems have become more complex.

“We’re receiving multiple grants to cover counseling programs like our new grief-processing group, we have a newly licensed social worker on staff, we assist kids and families,” she says. Smiling she adds, “I’m doing a little bit of everything and a little bit more than just being a capitalist cog in the wheel.”

“Jo is energetic, positive, always ready to help as well as learn,” says Ruth Scott, executive director. “She is growing in her skill set as JFCS grows and embraces new tasks, like learning medical billing, as opportunities.”

Benefits and Operations Manager Janene Richards adds, “Jo is always willing to help, in any area of the organization, even volunteering on weekends for special events. She is wicked smart and keeps track of so many things around the office. She’s a ‘Star Wars’ connoisseur, shockingly full of random fun facts, and a smile we can depend on. We’re so grateful to have her here at JFCS.”

“I really like working for a nonprofit because it makes me feel like I’m contributing as much as possible to it,” Jo says.

Just like she does harmonizing with bandmates for The Waysiders, which specializes in country, classics, 60s pop, the blues and more, and Gerle Haggard, an all-female band and clever play on their muse’s name, Merle Haggard, the famous country singer-songwriter.

Jo helps keep her bands going despite their having cancelled 17 gigs in summer 2020. Today, The Waysiders performs up to twice a month at the Laurelthirst Public House, and Gerle Haggard is picking up performances.

“I play rhythm guitar, provide some lead vocals,” she says. “But mostly harmony.” Both night and day.

## Jobs board

### FOUNDATION SCHOOL Early Childhood Educator

Salary: \$40,000-\$42,000

Neveh Shalom Foundation School is seeking a nurturing Early Childhood Educator with Special Needs Background. Knowledge of Judaism and/or the Reggio Emilia philosophy a plus but not required.

Job listing: [nevehshalom.org/foundation-school-is-hiring](https://nevehshalom.org/foundation-school-is-hiring). Send resume to Cory Willson at [cwillson@nevehshalom.org](mailto:cwillson@nevehshalom.org).