

# The JEWISH REVIEW

Oregon and SW Washington's Online Jewish Newspaper

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## Chanukah Shopping

The Ron Tonkin Family Museum Shop is open for holiday shopping. See pages 8 & 9 for more places to find holiday essentials and gifts.

## DNA Reunion Project for survivors

BY DEBORAH MOON

The DNA Reunion Project at the Center for Jewish History was introduced Nov. 29 with a virtual kickoff event. The pilot project is designed to help Holocaust survivors and their children find living relatives they did not know they have.

Holocaust survivors or their children can apply for free commercial DNA kits from the DNA Reunion Project. The DNA Reunion Project will also serve as a central genealogical resource where survivors with complex case histories (e.g., hidden children, adoptees, foundlings) can avail themselves of expert genetic genealogical consultation, which is also at no cost. Jennifer Mendelsohn and Adina Newman, experts in the field of Ashkenazi Jewish genetic genealogy, will

lead the consultation aspect of the project.

Local descendants of Holocaust survivors and genealogists are excited about the project's potential.

For Caron Blau Rothstein, the project is both professional and very personal. As Chief Allocations & Engagement Officer at the Jewish Federation of Greater Portland, she wants to ensure the community is aware of the opportunity. On the personal side, she knows her father and his seven older siblings all survived the Holocaust. But perhaps because it was so traumatic, they never shared any information about other family.

"I have never even seen a picture of my paternal grandfather let alone know anything about his family," says Caron.

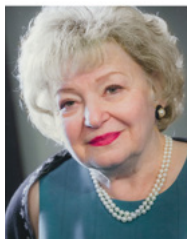
See REUNITING RELATIVES, page 10

## Challenge grant to aid Shoah victims

BY DEBORAH MOON

Now is the time to help ensure local Holocaust survivors are able to age with dignity and in place. With that goal in mind, Portland philanthropist Renée Holzman has provided a \$500,000 challenge grant for the Holocaust Survivor Community Fund.

Jewish Family & Child Services has until June 30, 2023, to raise the matching funds. JFCS serves 60 Holocaust survivors, 60% of whom live below the poverty line. The Claims Conference, under which the German government provides compensation for victims of Nazi persecution, covers 65% of the cost JFCS spends



Renée Holzman

for Holocaust services. JFCS fundraises to cover the difference.

With survivor clients' average age of 85, the cost to meet their growing needs increases each year. This year, JFCS must raise approximately \$7,500 per survivor.

"Coming out of Covid, there was clearly a suppressed need," says JFCS Executive Director Ruth Scott. "Once we started doing assessments, it was evident there was quite a need."

Deputy Director Susan Greenberg says those needs include in-home care such as cleaning and personal care with hygiene and eating. Shopping and transportation assistance, social programs and trauma counseling are also provided.

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## NEXT ISSUES

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Submit photos, news and obituaries to

[editor@jewishportland.org](mailto:editor@jewishportland.org)

## CHALLENGE GRANT (from page 1)

"We also help clients with paperwork to get other services such as Medicaid," says Greenberg. "Since 80% of our clients are Russian-speaking, our case managers also speak Russian."

While many survivors from western Europe came to the United States in the 1940s and '50s, many of today's JFCS survivor clients were children during the Holocaust and arrived in the states after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. Many Holocaust survivors who were in Soviet-controlled areas after the war also suffered under the policies of Stalin, further adding to their trauma.

The Holocaust has "torn at my heart," says Holzman. "I have been very moved and anguished by things I have read and the stories I have heard from people I have known who experienced the Holocaust."

When Holocaust survivor, Nobel laureate and author Elie Wiesel came to Portland to speak many years ago, Holzman was the president of the Oregon Council for the Humanities and was able to have dinner with him and hear his stories firsthand.

To help others understand the horrors of that time, she made sure she provided historical context to books she had high school students read when she taught Jewish literature at Congregation Beth Israel.

When her son, Larry Holzman, became president of JFCS, she learned about all of the intricacies of survivor care and the funding needs. She emphasizes that her son never suggested she donate, but once she understood the need, she felt compelled to do so.

"When does anyone decide that it's time to take a big step and try to do something on someone else's behalf?" she asked. When she learned of the fundraising challenge facing JFCS, "I thought I must do something. If not now, when?"

"I was thinking about whether one can ever right the wrongs of history," says Holzman. "Clearly, in the 1930s, when we could have saved many of the Jews of Europe, the world chose to close its gates, thereby condemning them to the fate that is called the Holocaust. We cannot today undo that cruel decision. ... What we can do today is open our hearts to the needs of the survivors. When the history of our era is written, let it be said that we chose the right path."

To donate, visit [jfccs-portland.org/services/holocaust-survivor-services/holzman\\_challenge\\_grant/](http://jfccs-portland.org/services/holocaust-survivor-services/holzman_challenge_grant/) or mail a check to JFCS (put HHS donation in memo line), 1221 SW Yamhill, Suite 301, Portland, OR 97205.

## REUNITING RELATIVES (from page 1)

She does know relatives who emigrated to Israel before the war on her paternal grandmother's side.

"With both my parents gone since last year and my being an only child, family is more important to me than ever," says Caron. "It would be meaningful to have this gift for my young adult children, my cousins and myself to know if there are more of us still out there and make the connections."

The quest for relatives is also personal for Naomi Derner, a member of Portland's Next Generations Group, which consists of descendants of Holocaust survivors, refugees and heroes.

"As a descendant of Holocaust survivors who has tried to piece together the missing parts of my family tree, the hope that I could find a long lost relative – or the descendant of one – is very exciting," says Naomi, who did a DNA test at 23andme several years ago with the hope of finding lost relatives.

"Although all four of my grandparents were Holocaust survivors, only my maternal grandfather, Joe, was unable to find even a single living relative after the war – not even a cousin, nobody," says Naomi.

"I still have not identified any relatives of Joe or any descendants of his relatives. But more and more people are tested every day, and I hope one day to find a descendant of someone from Joe's family."

"My grandfather passed away years ago, but my mother and uncles knew the pain my grandfather suffered after losing every member of his family and never finding a survivor," Naomi says of her continuing quest. "We would be thrilled to find a long lost relative."

The project isn't personally relevant to Jewish Genealogical Society of Oregon Secretary Linda Kelley, but as a genealogist, she says "the project is very important, worthwhile and inspiring."

"Two top professional genetic genealogists are going to do what they do best – find unknown (relatives)," says Linda, who listened to the kickoff. "They encourage survivors and hidden children to get tested at Ancestry. The project will provide kits for those who cannot pay. Ancestry results can be uploaded to other websites to increase the matches and information."

Learn more about the project, apply for a free kit or donate to the project at [cjh.org/research/dna](http://cjh.org/research/dna).