

Schmoozapalooza "celebrates older adults"

By **ROCKNE ROLL**

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Corsages, a dance floor, a DJ and a photo booth – the Mittleman Jewish Community Center had all the trappings of a modern prom Sunday, Oct. 22. But this party wasn't for high schoolers.

Instead, it was a more mature crowd on hand as Jewish Family & Child Service hosted Schmoozapalooza, a "senior prom" for those over 60.

"We wanted an opportunity to celebrate all of the new connections we've made and really to celebrate older adults and survivors in our community," explained Missy Fry, JFCS's Aging and Adult Services Clinician. "We wanted to do something that's fun where people can just come and be together."

Schmoozapalooza comes as part of two years of programming for older adults put on by JFCS through a grant from Jewish Federations of North America's Center on Holocaust Survivor Care and Institute on Aging and Trauma that have focused on socialization. A number of those programs have centered on the needs of Holocaust survivors in the community, and this was no exception.

"We ran with the prom idea and I think part of it is that a lot of survivors did not get to have a prom," Fry said.

Planning started in May, with a "prom committee" of volunteers doing much of the work to bring things together. Kristin Lawson was on the committee and at Schmoozapalooza on Sunday; she didn't attend her high school prom, making this her first.

"It is beyond special. It's very touching, you know, especially with things going on right now in the world," she said. "There's no better time to honor people, remember and celebrate as we can."

Lawson was alluding to the terror attacks in Israel just two weeks before the prom. There



Above: Myra Siegel, left, stands for a photo at the Schmoozapalooza photo booth operated by Avery Phillips of Flash Photography at the Mittleman Jewish Community Center Sunday, Oct. 22. Below: Couples cut a rug on the dance floor in the MJCC ballroom. (Rockne Roll/The Jewish Review)

was a consideration of postponing or cancelling altogether, but the event went forward.

"With everything going on, I think it was even more important to have an opportunity to gather with other Jewish people and to be in a Jewish space hosted by a Jewish organization where folks could be together," Fry said. "I think it is its own form of protest; terrorism won't shut us down, we are going to continue to live our lives. Having a room with Holocaust survivors who literally did that and have generations of families, sometimes with them at these events, it's another way of kind of. Honoring them."

Snacks and a bar were available, and the DJ played songs ranging from swing classic "In The Mood" to "Boot Scoot Boogie," as well as "Hava Nagila."

"There were a couple of people there that I think danced almost the entire time there was music playing," Fry recalled.

Fry said the experience for her surpassed her own high school



prom, even if the planning was stressful

"My high school problem was fine," Fry recalled, "Once we were there though, it was just looking around and seeing people smiling and laughing and eating the food and having so much fun with the photo booth, which was such a hit, it just it felt much more, much more fun and enjoyable than my own school prom."

Myra Siegel was first in line for the photo booth – she wanted to have her picture taken

while she had her nerve up, she said. She stood in front of the camera wearing a "Prom Queen" sash and smiled, then smiled again when the print came out a few minutes later.

Siegel said the row of corsages arranged next to the name tags at the entryway reminded her of the corsage her prom date pinned on her at her own high school prom years ago.

"That brought back very nice memories," she said. "It reminds me of being 17 again."

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