

I want to wish everyone a Happy New Year and I want to thank you for inviting me to speak on behalf of the Greater Altoona Jewish Federation about what is new and exciting, as well as what is not so new, but still exciting and important.

With regard to not so new and still important:

We continue to be excited about our Film Festival which will be going into year number eleven. Each year Len Zimmerman and his committee have found four excellent films that are going to be shown on consecutive Thursday evenings in late February and early March at the Penn State Altoona Downtown Theatre. The last few years we have had dinner prior to the show in the adjacent Heritage Center and our "dinner and a movie" concept has continued to attract the community in record numbers. We have seen a direct relationship between the presence of wine and attendance, and we are looking for another big year.

As many of you know our Community Sunday School has recently begun with the first semester being located at the Synagogue. Our Sunday School is a partnership between TBI, AAC and the Federation. The Federation strongly believes in helping our kids develop a strong sense of Jewish identity through education as well as sponsoring our kids to attend Jewish summer camps. This summer the Federation helped send 7 kids to camp and 3 to Israel.

Federation also continues to sponsor Celebrate Diversity and Holocaust programs. Each year we fund the cost of transportation to the Holocaust Museum in Washington DC for Celebrate Diversity. Federation has also assisted in providing programs in local schools concerning the genocide in Darfur.

Our Federation has continued its work with senior outreach to those in homes and for those who are homebound, as well as providing outreach to Jewish students at PS Altoona and Juniata College.

The Federation believes that lifelong learning through adult education is also very important and we have been very pleased to continue to partner with the Temple's Adult Education Committee to present programs for the Jewish Community.

With regard to new and exciting:

The PJ Pajama Program is for families with children from 6 months of age to eight years old. By registering for the PJ Pajama program parents or grandparents will be sent a free age appropriate book or CD each month featuring Jewish content to share with their child or grandchild.

We are also proud of our Website, www.greateraltoonajewishfederation.org, which we launched in February of this year. We feel our site has become our community bulletin board and on our website you will find:

Photo galleries of community events, such as the recent community night at the Altoona curve

Bill Wallen's blog, Bill is still waiting for first comment, by the way

A Book Review area of new Jewish releases and old classics

Jewish News Online which provides links to current articles from newspapers around the world about topics ranging from Jewish Online dating to the Iranian threat to Israel

Our Member Happenings area which highlights community members in the news

And all of Our Upcoming Events and Programs are found on the home page

Some upcoming programs found on our home page of interest are:

The Annual Federation Picnic at Diamond Carriage Lane on Sunday October 18th. Wagon rides, pumpkin carving, cookout and bonfire. We also may do some square dancing this year.

On Sunday October 25th Israel Bonds Dinner Honoring Sister Paula DelGrosso

On Sunday November 15th we are planning a Bus Trip to Pittsburgh to the Byham Theater, for LIGHT/ the Holocaust and Humanity Project

Light is a ballet that explores the themes of family, segregation, isolation, relationships and survival as it follows the experience of one Holocaust survivor. Often the lessons of the Holocaust have found their most powerful expression through the arts. We will have details on the website once they are finalized.

On Saturday December 12th We are helping sponsor a Reception for the Shirley Goldfarb exhibit at SAMA. Shirley grew up in Altoona in the 1940's. She eventually made her way to NYC and then Paris and became an internationally renowned artist.

As you can see, there is a lot going on and your Federation continues to work toward fulfilling our mission,

Which is to further the welfare of the Jewish community and to foster cooperation among local Jewish organizations directed toward that end.

I feel that Federation fills a very important role in our community, as Federation is the only active remaining organization that represents our entire Jewish community. We have members from TBI, AAC and members who are not affiliated with a congregation.

More and more we have become focused on community building and as a result we began Campaign 100% three years ago. Campaign 100% is an attempt to engage every Jewish person and it is about providing for the philanthropic, social, cultural and educational advancement of our community.

It is no secret that our community has experienced a significant decrease in population in the last 20 years and there is no reason to believe that this trend will not continue. I think it is in the best interest of every Jew in this community to look for ways to support and to collaborate with one another for the greater good. It is our goal for every member of TBI to feel like the Federation is your partner in enhancing Jewish life in our community. Truly we feel:

Kol Yisrael Averim Zeh v Zeh – Every Jew is Responsible for one another

Our Federation also counts on the support of this Jewish community to make a difference for Jews experiencing hardship in Israel and throughout the world. The recent worldwide economic downturn placed great stress on the Jewish agencies that provide support of poor and elderly Jews in Russia, Europe as well as South America.

As the Talmud says, “I did not find the world desolate when I entered it; my fathers planted for me before I was born: so do I plant for those who come after me.”

May we all be blessed with health, happiness and a good new year.