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# JCA ALLIANCE NEWS

## A YEAR IN Review

VOLUME 34  
#10



**Adam Chaskin**

(904) 730-2100 ext. 272

Shalom Friends,

Summer is here and with that comes excitement for our JCA Summer Camps! Starting June 5, hundreds of children each week will have the experience of a lifetime at our award-winning, nationally accredited summer camps. Children are not the only people who have a tremendous summer experience with us, our staff members do too. Being a camp counselor is one of the best summer jobs. The leaders on our camp staff learn problem-solving, leadership, crisis management, effective communication – and many, many more valuable skills.

The excitement and energy of summer camp permeate our entire campus this time of year. We are thrilled to continue our partnership with the Jacksonville Jewish Center to offer even more children a fantastic summer experience. As we approach summer camp season, please be aware there will be a lot more families and staff members at the JCA which can make parking and access to the building difficult at times. We ask that our members be mindful of the busy drop-off and pick-up times during summer camp months and thank you in advance for your patience.

Our JCA is an organization that offers a variety of programming and services for the diverse interests of our community. We have hundreds of exceptional programs throughout the year and serve thousands of people in Jacksonville each week. These efforts are possible because of the dedicated leaders on our Board of Trustees led by Chair Sam Stromberg. The entire board's devotion to our JCA makes a tremendous difference in our community. I am extremely thankful for their untiring efforts.

As I walk around the building and talk with people who are here to meet the needs of their mind, body and soul, I am reminded several times every day that our staff members are incredible. I am extremely proud of our JCA's unwavering efforts to serve you. We are fortunate to have some of the most creative, dedicated and talented staff in the nation. I am in awe of their commitment to our community and honored to call myself part of this JCA family. As you read through the pages of this Alliance News, I hope you will enjoy each department's reflections on all that happened here in the past year – and all that is yet to come.

Speaking of incredible staff members, I want to thank our Director of Administration, Pam Tavill, for her 23 years of service to our JCA and the Jacksonville community. As Pam embarks on her next journey in Virginia to be with her family, she leaves a clear standard of excellence in how we should treat each other. Pam will be sorely missed but not forgotten.

Please do not hesitate to let us know how we can continue to improve the experience we provide for all those we impact.

Wishing you and your family a happy, safe and wonderful summer,



Adam Chaskin

The JCA Alliance News and Program Guide are published by the:

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8505 San Jose Boulevard Jacksonville, FL 32217

For additional program information and to register, please contact the JCA.  
(904) 730-2100 P | (904) 730-2444 F | [jcjax.org](http://jcjax.org) | [info@jcjax.org](mailto:info@jcjax.org)  
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**JCA BUILDING HOURS**

Sun.....8 am - 6 pm	Fri.....5:30 am - 5 pm
Mon - Thu.....5:30 am - 9 pm	Sat.....1 - 6 pm

**Kid Kare (babysitting) - (904) 730-2100 ext. 325**

Hours:

**Sun - Fri mornings, 9 am - 12 pm | Mon - Thu evenings, 5 - 8 pm**

- JCA Kid Kare is available for children 3 months to 9 years old.
- Kid Kare service is for a maximum of 2 hours.
- Kid Kare is offered on a first come first serve basis.
- Visit [jcjax.org/fitness](http://jcjax.org/fitness) for Kid Kare policies.
- Space limited to 12 children per shift.


**TRIBUTES**

*In memory of...*

**ELLAN DUKE**  
by The Board and Staff of the JCA

**NOLAN KARSTAEDT**  
by Karen and Philip Adler  
The Board and Staff of the JCA

*In honor of...*

**FRIEDA SARAGA'S BIRTHDAY**  
by Michele and David Steinfeld

**BARBARA AND STEVE PARKER'S NEW GRANDSON**  
by Michele and David Steinfeld

**ANDY KAUFMANN'S RECEIPT OF THE JUNIOR ACHIEVEMENT'S THOMPSON S. BAKER SOLID AS A ROCK AWARD**

by Adam and Regina Chaskin  
The Board and Staff of the JCA

**TALIA ALGEE'S BAT MITZVAH**  
by Rochelle and David Stoddard

**SOPHIA STROMBERG'S HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION**  
by Rochelle and David Stoddard

**JD TYRELL'S RETIREMENT**  
by The Board and Staff of the JCA

**THE BIRTH OF FELIX FISZMAN**  
by The Spring and Miller Family  
The Board and Staff of the JCA

**LIOR SPRING AND HALEY TRAGER FOR THEIR WORK DURING TEACHER APPRECIATION WEEK**  
by Rochelle and David Stoddard

**General donations**  
*Our thanks to...*

**KATI AND CHRISTOPHER SOWADA MEYMAND OMS, PA**  
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**JERRICA AND BRANDON RUSSELL**  
**RACHEL AND ERIC TREST**  
**SUNNY GETTINGER AND TREY CSAR**  
**LEORA AND HAZZAN JESSE HOLZER**  
**SAKOF'S FAMILY FOUNDATION**  
**ALEXANDRA AND ADAM COHLMIA**



## More than the Numbers

By Chris Turner, Membership Director

I consider myself one of the luckiest employees at our JCA because I get a front-row seat to see every one of our members and guests coming and going. From families visiting to enjoy a game of pickup basketball or friends who have a longstanding Friday afternoon racquetball game - getting to know our new members and reconnecting with those who have returned is a great reminder of the positive impact our JCA is so fortunate to create.

I truly believe that we can attribute our great achievements in the past year to the outstanding relationships we have with our members. Through the number of visits and household memberships increasing in the last year, we are seeing more people than ever fully enjoy their time here. So far in this fiscal year, there are 174,052 front desk check-ins by 4,564 members – that's an increase of 57,000 visits to our JCA in the last year alone! I know I speak for all my colleagues when I say how great it is to see our JCA buzzing with activity every day.

Each month in the last year, two of the largest sources of new members came from former members who decided to come back to the JCA, and new members who were referred to our community by their friends. It fills us with pride when our members enjoy our campus so much that they want to share it with their friends and extended family. What is even more rewarding is when our team is hosting someone on a tour, and we are stopped along the way by a member who shares how much the potential member is going to love it here.

You may hear that our JCA is more than just a fitness center or a cultural hub. We believe the JCA is the place in Jacksonville where people come together to create a healthier life, build relationships and support their neighbors. Our JCA is a community and a place where individuals can find friendship and a true sense of belonging.

At the heart of our JCA's success is our dedicated staff – the people who create that sense of belonging for the families who come here. These individuals are passionate about creating a welcoming environment for every person who comes to the JCA and are committed to providing high-quality programs and services that meet the unique needs of people in every generation.

To me, the successes of our JCA in the last year cannot be measured in numbers alone – our JCA is so much more than the number of people who come here. For many, our JCA is a second home and a place where they feel welcome and accepted. In my opinion, the true measurement of success is when we hear about our JCA being the place where our members have formed lifelong friendships and found meaningful connections, while they discover their own interests, passions and talents.

**What is better than a JCA membership? Not having to pay membership fees! Refer your friends and we will reward you with a free month of membership for every new member you refer.**





# Fulfilling the JCA Mission

By Kendall Sisisky Valliere, Development Director

From Jewish education, culture and the arts, to swim lessons, scholarships, water safety and continuous education for teachers - our Jewish Community Alliance is beyond proud of the work we do to help our neighbors throughout Northeast Florida. With our vision, *to provide the place in the tradition of our heritage where all people come together throughout their lives to enhance body, mind, and spirit, in an environment of fun, harmony and friendship*, we cannot kvell enough about the great things happening at our JCA – and the wonderful corporations that support us.

Now a 35-year tradition in Jacksonville, our nonprofit agency never stops fulfilling its mission to strengthen Jewish life, serve as a common meeting ground, and enhance the quality of life of our entire community. To do this, we rely on a range of generosity and financial contributions that support the incredible programs we offer, many at no cost. I am proud to share that in the last fiscal year, we were fortunate to receive a variety of grants from foundations and corporations throughout Northeast Florida to support our mission and vision at the JCA for many years to come.



- **A JCC Association** microgrant allowed us to celebrate *Yom Ha'Atzmaut*, Israel's 75<sup>th</sup> Independence Day with a free community-wide event hosting 300 people.
- The **B'nai Tzedek Philanthropic Fund** provided money to engage a group of young professionals and their families with Second Night Passover programming.
- **VyStar Credit Union** and **Ecolab** funded our beloved Magic Wardrobe Theatre Program. The generosity of our Magic Wardrobe sponsors, allowed 27,000 children from local schools to attend live theatre shows at the JCA. More than 6,200 of those students attended Magic Wardrobe shows at a reduced cost.
- The JCA's Educator Support Network, presented by Michele Block Gan Yeladim Preschool & Kindergarten was generously funded by **CSX**, **Florida Blue Foundation** and **VyStar Credit Union**. The funding gave early childhood educators from Northeast Florida free professional development with a nationally recognized educator throughout the year.
- Funding from **Jewish Federations of North America** and its **Shine a Light** initiative, allowed us to promote and support an antisemitism awareness campaign at the Jacksonville Icemen's Hanukkah and Hockey game.
- **Johnson & Johnson** provided a grant for STEM equipment for our high-demand After School Classes at the JCA.
- Dozens of children from the **Boys & Girls Club of Northeast Florida** will receive free swim lessons at the JCA this fall thanks to funding for Learn to Swim programs provided by the **USA Swimming Foundation**.



While every donation we receive, large or small, is incredibly important to our agency, grants allow us to use a lump sum to innovate and elevate the programs we offer. With these funds, we are proud to provide even more opportunities for our neighbors to learn and grow toward a better tomorrow.

**If you have questions about the grant funding we receive or would like more information about the initiatives we believe in, please email [kendall.valliere@jcajax.org](mailto:kendall.valliere@jcajax.org).**



# HONORING GREATNESS

By Beth Milograno, Communications & PR Specialist

Each year, our JCA is proud to recognize the members of our JCA family who go above and beyond in service to our agency and to the community with the Howard Korman President's Award and the JCA Special Service Award.

As Secretary of our Board, Sunny Gettinger makes sharing the experiences at our JCA a regular practice in her life and through her efforts, attracts attendees and sponsors in support of our amazing agency. We are proud to recognize all Sunny does for the JCA with this year's Howard Korman President's Award, recognizing a JCA board member who embodies the qualities of leadership, vision and courage.

Additionally honored for her work as chair of our annual fundraiser, The Great Jaxby – A Roaring Affair, Sunny and her husband, Trey Csar, led the fundraising committee and the action on the dance floor at our Jazz-Age party of the year. With Sunny at the helm this year, we raised more than \$220,000 during our annual fundraising event. This funding allows us to continue in our mission to assist individuals and families in our community who need the services we provide.



A true believer in the JCA's mission and vision, our Fitness & Wellness Director Eiffel Gilyana is the recipient of the 2023 JCA Special Service Award. Presented to a person in our JCA community who demonstrates outstanding service, commitment to our community, and a true passion for our JCA, Eiffel's dedication to our members and our fitness and wellness initiatives is evident through all he does each day.

With childhood obesity on the rise throughout the United States, Eiffel decided to use his expertise and experience to make a change in our community. Teaming up with our Youth Services department, Eiffel designed and implemented three weekly Youth Fitness classes for our youngest valued members: Fit Start, Sports Conditioning and Next Generation Yoga and Pilates. L'dor V'dor, Eiffel's efforts to promote health and wellness from generation to generation throughout our entire community is truly inspiring.

**Mazal Tov, Sunny and Eiffel!**

## An Abundance of Adventures!

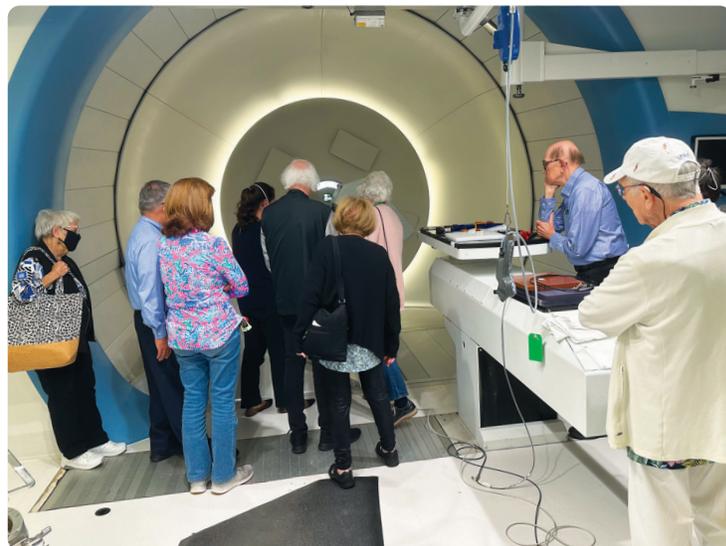
By Heather Terrill, J Institute Program Manager

When I look back on the last year as manager of our magnificent J Institute programs, I am surrounded by so many memories of fantastic adventures with our community. Celebrating seven years at the JCA, being a mom to a newborn all over again, and making my way back in full force after maternity leave this year reminded me of how much I value my JCA family and the experiences we embark on together.

My two personal favorites, our 2022 Cultural Arts Festival and 2023 Berman Family JCA Concert Series top the list of highlights in the J Institute. For the first time in event history, our annual celebration of Jewish arts, films, culture and literature began with Joe Buchanan – a country singer with a Jewish soul. A heartwarming evening, Joe serenaded us with his humble reflections and beautiful sounds while he shared his personal stories related to Judaism. The 2022 festival continued through the first two weeks of November with multiple films and inspirational author talks from Anna Salton Eisen, Dan Grunfeld, Gioia Diliberto and Lisa Barr.

Our annual Berman Family JCA Concert Series featured three phenomenal young talents: Maxim Lando who wowed our audience on piano, Risa Hokamura played the violin flawlessly and Ying Li was thrilling on piano as our final concert in the series. Each of these young musicians shared an afternoon at the JCA with 200 members of the community in attendance. The following Monday after each concert, the artists joined me for an outreach program at River Garden where they performed again and hosted a question-and-answer session for attendees. Seeing the impact our agency has through offering all of these free cultural experiences and events is truly gratifying.

Other than the adventures our minds take while reading a book, watching a film or listening to a musician play - our J Institute takes many literal adventures each year. In the last year alone we learned about spirits and the distilling process at Manifest Distillery, visited the oldest Spanish plantation home in the United States and ventured to UF



Health for a close-up look at all the new things happening in the hospital. We explored the proton therapy center at UF Health and even saw one of the rooms where proton therapy equipment is held - a room that is separated by a 14' wall of concrete. Wrapping up the tour with a visit to the Trauma One center, we also visited the hospital's helipad which is large enough to provide a landing space for a Black Hawk helicopter.

Of the many memories I have from the past year, perhaps my favorite is with the Traveling Diner Dinner Club. Now in its sixth year, it is truly a delight to spend an evening with the dinner club – the wonderful people whom I call my friends. As we share stories of family, work, and all the little things in between, we always get to enjoy a delicious meal together. The connection and unity that happens during our Traveling Diner Dinner Club are truly irreplaceable and why I value this part of my “job” more than any other.

I am busy planning many more adventures for our community in the coming months, including our inaugural trip to Savannah, Georgia, with the Globe Trotters of the J. Be on the lookout for more details about our first trip, happening this fall.

## SAVE THE DATES!



## IT IS NEVER TOO EARLY TO MARK YOUR CALENDARS!

Join us for the 2023 JCA Cultural Arts Festival, kicking off with our **first-ever Cultural Arts Festival Pop-Up Market on Sun, Oct 29.**

Our JCA's celebration of art, literature, films and culture continues through **Thu, Nov 16.** Thanks to the generosity of our sponsors, the JCA Cultural Arts Festival is **FREE AND OPEN TO THE ENTIRE COMMUNITY.**

**FOR MORE INFORMATION,**  
email [cafest@jcajax.org](mailto:cafest@jcajax.org).





## Learning, Experiences, Mitzvahs and More!

By Rachel Sandler, Jewish Educator

In reflecting on the plethora of Jewish experiences in our community this year, I cannot help but smile with pride knowing that we are fulfilling our founders' mission to strengthen Jewish life, serve as a common meeting ground and enhance the quality of life for our entire community.

After welcoming our new Community Shlichah Tal Mola to Jacksonville last August, we immediately started learning more about life, culture and music in Israel from Tal. Thanks to our partnership with the Jewish Federation & Foundation of Northeast Florida, Tal is now the fifth Israeli to serve Jewish agencies throughout Northeast Florida, including our local synagogues and schools. With one year left of her service in Jacksonville and Camp Kaytana's Israel Style around the corner for the summer, Tal is excited to share even more of her favorite traditions with us.

Other than meeting Tal and learning from her, topping the list of my favorite memories from the year is teaching Hebrew to the students in Mrs. Ledesma's Kindergarten class. The children learned all of the Hebrew letters and through the Hebrew through Movement program, a language acquisition strategy, they can hear and respond to Hebrew commands. It is truly amazing to see the children progress and to realize how much they learned this year – not to mention all the fun we had learning Hebrew!

The adults in our community joined to expand their knowledge of Hebrew and Judaism in the last year too. Our Jewish Spirituality series with Evelyn Gaal and Justin Sakofs continues to grow with unique sessions of Jewish-infused yoga at the Jacksonville Jewish Center – The Center and Congregation Ahavath Chesed – The Temple. As our Hebrew and Yiddish classes expand at the JCA we are also proud to have even more people enrolled in our six-week Melton School of Adult Jewish Learning led by Justin Sakofs.

**Tzedek**, translated as the pursuit of justice, is the Jewish value at the root of repairing the world – and our JCA was chosen by the JCC Association of North America this year as an inaugural JCC for Tzedek. As we all seek to build a just, complete world and create meaningful lasting changes in our community, I am especially proud of all we did in the past year to enhance our Monthly Member Mitzvah projects. Our community-wide mitzvot efforts supported the Jacksonville Humane Society, PACE Center for Girls, the Israel Defense Force, Say No to Violence: A Place for Women and Children in Israel, the Sulzbacher Center, the Ronald McDonald House, River Garden Hebrew Home, Baptist MD Anderson, and LJD Jewish Family & Community Services.

Aside from the organizations we helped this year, we continued our work to further educate our community about Judaism through our partnerships with local Jewish agencies. We hosted a program with beekeepers at The Temple for Rosh Hashanah, partnered with Beth El to plant seeds for Tu B'Shevat, and made cheesecake for Shavuot at Etz Chaim Synagogue. Our Community Havdalah at The Center was an incredible success, and thanks to the Jewish Federation & Foundation of Northeast Florida's



**Next Gen Grant**, we spent an evening together learning about Blackness and Race in Medieval Jewish Culture. It was truly a remarkable and memorable year full of Jewish experiences and learning.

Coming up this summer, we are taking our Monthly Member Mitzvah on the road! Our initial stop is planned at the first-ever **Kosher Market Sweep** in Jacksonville on **Tuesday, June 6**. The \$18 dollar fee to play will be used at the event to purchase food to stock the shelves of the Max Block Food Pantry. You can visit [jcjax.org](http://jcjax.org) to register; space is limited.



Our mitzvahs continue this summer at **JFCS Max Block Food Pantry**, 6261 Dupont Station Ct. Jacksonville, FL 32217, where JCA volunteers are invited to help us unpack food, stock shelves, and assemble boxes of food for the community. Individuals and families with children who are 8 years and older can participate in our off-site mitzvah. Please save the dates and register to join us this summer! **We will meet at 9 am at the Max Block Food Pantry on Jun 7, 21, Jul 5 and Aug 2**. Please email me directly to register for one or all of our volunteer dates, [rachel.sandler@jcjax.org](mailto:rachel.sandler@jcjax.org).



## What A Year!

By Natalia Fisher, ECE Director

As we reflect on the many accomplishments in our **Michele Block Gan Yeladim Preschool & Kindergarten**, we are excited for the future and the opportunities that allow us to give the children who come here the highest-quality, research-based education in our area. Being named Best Preschool in Jacksonville by the Florida Times-Union not only recognized our commitment to quality education in our city, but it set the momentum for an incredible school year.

At the top of our list of accolades was earning the **National Association for the Education of Young Children – NAEYC** reaccreditation. Quite frankly, it is hard not to be proud of the commitment to excellence in our school. What we value most about our reaccreditation is that it aligns with our school's vision to always remain reflective, responsive, research-driven, and grounded in our image of every child.

In celebrating fourteen years of inspiring early childhood educators throughout Northeast Florida, our Educator Support Network welcomed international speaker, educational consultant, parent educator and author, **Tom “Teacher Tom” Hobson** in October. Thanks to the generosity of our sponsors, **VyStar Credit Union, Florida Blue** and **CSX**, our Educator Support Network is offered at no cost. Tom's lessons throughout the year inspired all of us to communicate more effectively and empowered our early childhood educators with the resources they need to provide exceptional education to students.

Focusing on strengthening our relationships and connections with other schools and universities in our area, we set multiple partnerships in motion to inspire our students and teachers. We collaborated with the North Florida School of Special Education to learn from each other to provide

inclusive education and care to children of all abilities. Aside from our Kindergarten students' learning experience at the school, this valuable partnership in special education has taught us how to create a more inclusive and welcoming environment in our school. Through an exchange of ideas, resources, and best practices with other educators we can better care for young children.

We firmly believe that intertwined schools and educators are stronger together. With sharing knowledge and experience as our focus, we were proud to welcome student teachers from FSCJ and UNF to learn from our staff of gifted early childhood educators this year. Allowing the next generation of educators to share in our knowledge and experience provided them with a truly valuable hands-on learning opportunity.

In keeping our children at the forefront of our goals, we also created the Family Community Council at our school this year to keep our families better connected. Opening a better dialogue between our parents and teachers has proven to be an instrumental force in strengthening our school community. Our hope is that this council continues to unite parents, teachers, and administrators, as we share ideas, express concerns, and support each other in creating the best possible learning environment for our children.

While the end of every school year always feels bittersweet, it is so rewarding to realize just how much we accomplished in the halls of our Michele Block Gan Yeladim Preschool & Kindergarten this year. We are proud to be a school of quality, innovation, and dedication to excellence – a tradition we plan on continuing for many years to come.

**If you would like more information about Michele Block Gan Yeladim Preschool & Kindergarten please email [ganyeladim@jcjax.org](mailto:ganyeladim@jcjax.org).**





## L'Dor V'Dor - Generation to Generation

By Theresa Levy, Alumni Coordinator

Alumni Corner gives us the opportunity to share stories about our incredible alumni, many of whom are now gifting an education at Michele Block Gan Yeladim Preschool & Kindergarten to their own children. Amazingly enough, through my research in the last year, I found four Gan graduates who all had children enrolled in Staci Fortun and Ashlynn Vargas' Junior Kindergarten class.

Callie Maskell Beesley's son, Davis, Lauren Lippes Senecal's son, Jack, Jennifer Purpura Woodling's son, Cole, and Aiden Mills-Conrad's daughter, Olive – are now proud JK graduates and thanks to the education they received in our school they are prepared to take on Kindergarten!

“  
I met one of my dearest friends in preschool... Nothing compares to the experience the JCA offers, it is a really great place!  
”



“My favorite thing to do in my classroom is building marble runs. Outside, I play with the digger. I like flatbed trucks because they transport excavators. Mac-n-Cheese is my favorite food and I like blue. My little sister is two and she will come to my school in August.” – **Cole Woodling**

“I met one of my dearest friends in preschool. We live about one minute away from each other now,” explains Jennifer Purpura Woodling. “When we lived out of state, Cole attended two different schools. Nothing compares to the experience the JCA offers, it is a really great place!”



“I am five. Inside I like going to the Atelier\*, playing with puzzles, Lincoln Logs and Legos. I think my dad liked those too. Outside I play with big shovels and wheelbarrows. My favorite job is line leader. My little brother Finn just turned four, he goes to school here too, he likes to play with his friends.” – **Olive Mills-Conrad**



“I am four years old. I like to draw pictures of houses. Outside I like running and playing Lava Monsters on the climbing playground. I pretend I can fly over lava. My dog Griffin is super scared of fireworks, so he lays down. He licks me and snuggles me. I like steak, salmon and tuna, the sushi kind.” – **Jack Senecal**



“I am four years old, but I will be five soon. I like to play with Legos at school and at home. I exercise outside. When my mom went to school here, she liked the art center and Legos. My little brother is two and he is a Busy Bee, I am coming to Kindergarten here at the J.” – **Davis Beesley**

“I remember doing Shabbat on Fridays. We aren't Jewish but I can still recite the prayers,” recalls Callie Maskell Beesley. “We live 17 miles away and looked at several schools that were closer but here there is a wonderful family environment. My husband jokes that it was always going to be the JCA!”

*\*An Atelier is a welcoming and inspiring place offering a wide variety of natural and man-made materials for artistic expression.*



If you are a first or second-generation Michele Block Gan Yeladim Preschool & Kindergarten graduate, I would love to hear from you! Please share your stories and photos from attending preschool and kindergarten at the JCA with me by email, [theresa.levy@jcajax.org](mailto:theresa.levy@jcajax.org).

**Todah Rabah!**

**Accredited by NAEYC**  
**National Association of Education of Young Children**

Every early childhood learning experience at the JCA is hands-on and formulated to help children reach their full potential.

**We have spots in our Junior Kindergarten and Kindergarten classes for the 2023-24 school year.** Parents who are interested in scheduling a tour and play date should email [ganyeladim@jcajax.org](mailto:ganyeladim@jcajax.org) or call (904) 730-2100 ext. 235.



**By Evan McInnis, Youth Services Assistant Director**

What an incredible year we had in our JCA's Youth Services department! We notice daily how the children who come here are growing – both literally and figuratively. When we sat down to look at the numbers, studying the unique youth-driven programs we offer our community, we realized that based on pre-pandemic numbers, our program grew in participation by 10%. I would humbly like to say, this information only confirms – we are back and better than ever!

Beyond our growth in attracting more children to the JCA than ever before, we experienced several exciting developments. While we often celebrate successes quietly, we are absolutely thrilled to share our victories in the last 12 months!

With the support of our astounding colleagues in Development, our Youth Services department was awarded a \$5,000 grant from **Johnson & Johnson** that will help us continue to build our youth STEM programs. This funding is going to allow us to purchase new Chromebooks for the children we serve at the JCA. The computers will also give the children who come here a dedicated computer to use when they learn to code and design video games. Our goal is to create a STEM lab with Chromebook workstations, a 3D printer, and have even more materials for children to explore the world of robotics at the JCA.

You may have already heard but our incredible After School program and Summer Camp was recognized as THE BEST in the **2022 Florida Times-Union Bold City Best** contest. With a multitude of other premier camps and after-school programs in the running for this title, we know we won because our incredibly talented team of counselors and staff nurture this award-winning environment where children have a safe place to explore, grow and thrive.

Beyond awards and grant dollars, our team continues to create world-class experiences and programs for your children and we are doing it by expanding our own expertise and knowledge. Our Youth Services Director Amanda Collins Hall ventured to Israel this fall with the **Myron I. Flagler Israel Learning Seminar**, a life-changing experience that allows her to share first-hand knowledge of Israel with the families who come here. As for adventures on U.S. soil, Amanda was recently selected to

present as a subject-matter expert during the **2023 Southeast JCC Professional Conference** in Tampa. Using her knowledge and experience, Amanda shared insights and gathered ideas from dozens of our JCC colleagues working to make a difference in the Youth Services world. Further demonstrating her commitment to serving the young members of our JCA community, Amanda is now the first member of our Youth Services team to be certified in Youth Mental Health First Aid.

Our Youth Programs Coordinator, Rachel Rosenblum, is also improving her knowledge to better serve the youth in our community. This year, Rachel participated in the **New Director's Orientation** program through a partnership with the **Jewish Community Centers Association of North America (JCCA)** and the **American Camp Association**. Over the course of several months, Rachel learned how to best serve our campers and camp staff through lectures, exercises and group discussions. We are incredibly proud of her leadership and excited to see her flourish this summer.

As for me, our JCA's Youth Services Assistant Director, I was accepted to participate in two national fellowships for Jewish professionals who work with teens. The **Jewish Education Project's GENERATE Fellowship** provided unique insights on the development of adolescents and how to incorporate Jewish traditions and values into a space for teenagers. The **JCCA's Merrin Teen Fellowship** will give me the knowledge and skills to create a positive and brave space for the teenagers who come here. The Merrin Fellowship is neat; I recently traveled to Washington D.C. with the 17 participants in my group for a retreat, and we will travel to Israel in October. I am truly grateful for these opportunities and excited to have even more education that will allow me to better serve your children.

With a full year of growth behind us and nothing but positive change ahead, it's an exciting time for our Youth Services team – and of course, the kids who come here. We have summer camp spots available for your children but time is running out; please visit [jcjax.org/camp](http://jcjax.org/camp) to register them for a fun-filled summer.

After School and Study Central programs are filling up quickly – be sure to have a safe place for your children next school year, call (904) 730-2100 ext. 228 for availability and registration. I hope to see you this summer!



# A Five Star Review!



## By Shelly Higgins Hughes, Theatre Director

Our JCA Theatre Department had a record-breaking year. We started our season off with a bang and never slowed down!

The Performing Arts for Children (PAC) all-stars performed for more than 2,100 theatre guests. A total of 107 individual actors brought 215 colorful characters to life on our stage in our productions of *Matilda*, *HONK! The Story of the Ugly Duckling*, and *Alice in Wonderland*.

We hosted teen and adult acting improv workshops and participated in our JCA's amazing community-wide events like our Breast Cancer Awareness campaign, the annual JCA Toy Drive, the Chanukkah Extravaganza, our yearly Purim parade and *Yom Ha'Atzmaut* at the JCA – just to name a few.

Our thanks to everyone who participated in our programs and came out to support our creative endeavors. Now, it is full steam ahead to Sababa Theatre Camp!



Our award-winning Magic Wardrobe Theatre educational series hosted more than 27,000 students from all over the First Coast. Thanks to continued support from our friends at **VyStar Credit Union**, 6,200+ underserved children of Northeast Florida were able to come to experience the magic of live theatre, most for the very first time! I would also like to give a very special thanks to our troupe of Magic Wardrobe Theatre actors; Brooks Anne Meierdierks, George Hawkins, Amanda Lore, Kathy Sanders, Shauna Clarke, Gary Baker and I performed in over 70 productions throughout the school year.

That's not all! 144 children ranging in age from 3 - 12 years old joined us in creative play and dance through our unique theatre classes: *Zoe's Clubhouse*, *Zoe's Alumni*, *Fit For Broadway*, *Baby Bear Ballet* and *Zoe's Hippy Hop*.





## Best of Jax, Bold City Best and SO MUCH MORE!

By Eiffel Gilyana, Fitness & Wellness Director

You often hear that our JCA is more than a gym. It is true, our campus is a place where people come to enhance their minds, bodies and spirits – and many of the people who come here do so inside our incredible JCA Fitness Center.

In the last year alone we saw hundreds of our members come here to work out. We experienced thousands of visits to our JCA Fitness Center for group fitness classes and private sessions by members who are all focused on meeting and exceeding their wellness goals!

When you think about all we do in the JCA Fitness Center like private training sessions, 240 monthly group classes, more than 30 private group classes including Tai Chi, Barre Fitness, Yoga, meditation, Pilates and Melt Method, not to mention a variety of fitness and sports conditioning classes for our youngest and oldest members alike - it really is no surprise our JCA's Fitness Center was named the **Best of Jax by Folio Weekly** and **Bold City Best by The Florida Times Union** in the last year.

It also comes as no surprise that even more of our incredible trainers were named as the Best of Jax and welcomed to our JCA's Best of Jax Winner's Circle - Clint Neale was recognized as Best Personal Trainer and Grant Helm was named the Best Yoga Instructor in Jax.

It is also no secret that we have the best personal trainers in all of Jacksonville. Our professionals in the fitness center help every one of their clients see results. They are the reasons why I think many of our fitness programs are so successful and why our personal training sessions were at an all-time high this year. Pilates Reformer training for example, now has five machines and more and more of our members are seeing results with this full-body workout program every day.

Upon starting Youth Fitness Classes for young members, ages 5 – 15, the program took off! Since our Youth Sports Conditioning, Fit Start, Pilates and Yoga classes began we consistently serve 25 young members every Monday, Wednesday and Friday. Our longtime members are getting out and moving more too. We saw a major jump in the number of people who take advantage of the classes offered to our adult population. In fact, our Sit & Get Fit programs: Aqua, Yoga, Strength and Core Balance, all saw record attendance in the last 12 months.

I know I speak on behalf of all our fitness professionals at the JCA when I say what a pleasure it is to watch as you all enhance your mind, bodies and spirits through your work with our trainers and in our fitness classes.

It's never too late to start your journey toward better health. Remember, every JCA member is eligible for a complimentary J Start personal training package. If you are interested in learning more about our Fitness Center or are ready to start a fitness journey, please call (904) 730-2100 ext. 267 or 324.



## Sporting Success

**By Rio Robinson, Sports & Recreation Director**

Sports and success both start with the letter S – which is no coincidence at the JCA. I am proud to share that our Sports & Recreation department had a super successful year – and that was mostly because of all of you.



After promoting Dustin Rulien to Aquatics Manager in June, and Lydia Samples to Aquatics Coordinator, we welcomed our new Sports Program Coordinator Alex Minardi to lead our youth sports programs at the JCA. Through this new leadership, the Sports & Rec team achieved an all-time high enrollment in our JCA's Youth Sports Leagues and programs.

The JCA Fencing Academy led by Coach Bill Becker steadily attracted new fencers throughout the year and reached the highest number of youth and adult fencers to ever participate in our private academy. Our fencers are now competing in a variety of national tournaments and seeing big results. Hannah Rostholder was among those competitors and in April she won the Y10 Women's Sabre Regional Competition during the Infinity Cup in Savannah, Georgia.



Master Frederick Vescera leads students in Fast Freddy's Taekwondo Academy and consistently sees dozens of children who advance through Taekwondo class, achieving their orange belts or higher for the first time.

Willpower Basketball Training also saw an increase in private and group training this year, and according to Will Holloman, the courts will be full this summer too. Our JCA's 18+ Adult Basketball League had an all-time high of eight member-only teams play this season.

As I think back to all we did in the last 12 months, one of my favorite memories involves the 10 athletes who traveled with me to San Diego, California, to compete in the 2022 JCC

Maccabi Games. To be part of the largest gathering of young Jewish athletes in the world was an incredible feeling and the teenagers who competed in the games received an experience they will never forget.

Our Jacksonville JCA team is Maccabi bound again this summer. Come August, we will travel to Fort Lauderdale to compete in the 2023 JCC Maccabi Games, where 15 local Jewish athletes will compete in basketball, flag football and swimming – and of course, make summer memories that will last a lifetime.

The Jacksonville JCA Maccabi Games team is funded in part by our Send a Kid campaign. If you would like to support our Jewish athletes traveling to Fort Lauderdale this summer, please visit [jcajax.org/give/send-a-kid](https://jcajax.org/give/send-a-kid).





## Making Waves

By Dustin Rulien, Aquatics Manager

The summer season brings us many reasons to celebrate around the JCA. Approaching my one-year anniversary of managing our Learn to Swim programs, I am also celebrating 13 years as an employee here and am excited about what the future looks like in our pools.

Upon promoting our longtime Water Safety Instructor and Lifeguard Lydia Samples to Aquatics Coordinator, we immediately started looking at ways to make our Learn to Swim programs more beneficial for our members.

Our first step was to create a new swim lesson curriculum that tracks the progress of swimmers. We find that this new level-to-level plan gives swimmers the opportunity to recognize their achievements in the water and a direct path to our Makos Swim Team.

For those who have specific goals they want to achieve in the water, we revised the way private swim lessons happen. Private or semi-private lessons can now be scheduled with classes starting as soon as the same day because we believe safety in the water should not be delayed.

Aside from our many administrative changes, I am excited to announce a joint effort with the **USA Swimming Foundation** to provide no-cost swim lessons to local underserved children with the **Boys & Girls Club of Northeast Florida**.

This exciting opportunity beginning in the fall helps to uphold our JCA's vision to enhance the quality of life in our community and our commitment to reducing the risk of drowning throughout Northeast Florida.

With a mission to help people of all ages to be safer in, on, and around the water, our JCA was recognized by the **American Red Cross** as having the largest swim program growth in Florida. Our Aquatics department provides many opportunities to grow and further knowledge of important lifesaving skills. In addition to swim lessons, we are proud to offer several certified training classes, like First Aid, CPR, Lifeguard and Water Safety Instructor.

There are so many reasons to join us this summer. Whether you are a new swimmer, a veteran looking to refine your skills, or just wanting to cool off from the Florida heat – we hope to see you at the pool.





## Aces on the Court

By Aline Berkenbrock, Tennis Pro

If you have not met them yet, we added two amazing Tennis Pros to our staff this year! Lucas Campos and Chris Lee helped increase our momentum on the courts, making our JCA's tennis programs even stronger this year. Lucas Campos was promoted as a member of our full-time tennis staff and brings an incredible amount of knowledge and excitement to our Har-Tru clay tennis courts. Chris Lee is our newly hired Tennis Pro in the evening, teaching players of all ages how to improve their abilities, no matter their current skill level.

Whether through drills, clinics, or leagues, our tennis programs kept our courts and coaches busy this year. For the first time ever at the JCA, we introduced a daytime 101 - D team clinic and it was an incredible success! Dozens of women, 70 to be exact, participated in our Women's Daytime League and afternoon Working Women Team held on Saturdays. Our 3.0 Men's team, USTA, also had an awesome season and made it all the way to local playoff games.

While serving up competition all over town, our Working Women's team advanced their skills, moving from B level to A level this year. Not to mention that every player on our team showed a tremendous amount of resilience – especially competing on the Working Women League at a much higher level than they were last year. Our JCA's Working Women's team saw a 5 - 0 sweep over Huguenot, while the A, B and

C-level teams showed commitment at every match and filled every lineup. Our daytime teams saw successes too, including a 4 - 0 sweep over the Williams YMCA and the Woods teams. I would like to thank our amazing captains, Linda Proudfoot, Carol Kleiner, Mae Cannon, Beth Seeker and Jared Shaw, for all their effort to ensure our teams had a great time in the competition.

The adults in our tennis programs give us something to brag about - and our kids do too! Our JCA offers classes for kids ages 4 - 12 years old to teach the next generation of players the game of tennis. Watching these young people learn and grow their love for the sport is so rewarding. We are also busy cheering for our teenage players, Hope Alexander, Efrat Ohayon, Emma Griner and Mya Griner, who are using the skills they learned at the JCA to play and compete on their high school tennis teams.

Thanks to the **Serve Love Endowment Fund**, our JCA and the Jewish Federation & Foundation of Northeast Florida can provide financial support to children in need of tennis items like program fees, equipment, or shoes. Whether it is singles or doubles, young players have a lot of fun while they learn valuable lessons in teamwork and camaraderie and develop discipline, patience, self-confidence and work ethic from any tennis competition.

It is a saying that is true for all ages, "Learning to win and lose with grace on the court translates to behaving with integrity off the court, too." Thank you to all our JCA tennis players for an incredible year!





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**VISION STATEMENT** Our vision is to provide **the** place in the tradition of our  
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