



24 Iyar - 24 Sivan • 5783 • June 2024

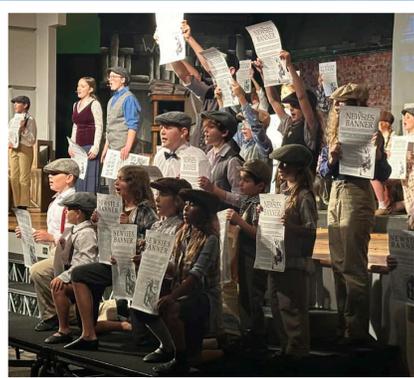


ALLIANCE NEWS

A YEAR IN Review

VOLUME 35
#10

David A. Stein Jewish Community Alliance on the Ed Parker Jewish Community Campus





Adam Chaskin

Shalom Friends,

The results are in and I am so proud to share that our Jewish Community Alliance is celebrating a continental win! According to benchmarking survey results from the Jewish Community Centers Association of North America, our JCA ranks as the friendliest, most engaged, frequently visited Jewish Community Center with the highest customer satisfaction ratings in North America.

A powerful tool to measure our impact, the survey showed us that our JCA is thriving and will remain a premiere destination in Jacksonville. Survey results also detailed the impact our services and employees have on the greater Jacksonville community. While it is no secret that we employ incredible people who dedicate their talents to the JCA, 94% of those surveyed agree that our staff is improving the welfare of this great community.

We are truly fortunate to have some of the most creative, dedicated, and talented staff in the nation, and as we look forward to the future, it is extremely rewarding to know that we impact the lives of every person who visits our campus.

With more than \$13.8 million in funding secured to support our prestigious capital campaign, *Building Our Future Together*, we have a goal to accommodate the tremendous growth of our signature early childhood education, after-school care, and fitness and wellness programs, we are thoroughly committed to providing continued excellence in our community. Stay tuned, you will start seeing updates on campus this summer as we begin the next phase of our capital campaign.

With the excitement of the summer season upon us, we are geared up for the official start of JCAmp on June 10 with our Pre-Adventure camp days starting June 3. This summer, hundreds of children will plan their summer days in our award-winning, nationally accredited camp programs and will embark on a summertime adventure they will never forget. As we approach JCAmp, please be aware that 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. Please be mindful of the busy drop-off and pick-up times during summer camp months and thank you in advance for your patience.

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.

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

Adam Chaskin
CEO

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

Jewish Community Alliance
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For additional program information and to register, please contact the JCA.
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Sam Stromberg Board Chair
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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
Memorial Day			
Mon, May 27.....	8 am - 5 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 is offered by reservation system via the My J app.
- Kid Kare service is for a maximum of 90 mins.
- Visit bit.ly/JCAKidKare for Kid Kare policies and to download My J.


TRIBUTES

In memory of...

RONNIE STEINBERG

by Lior Spring and Daniel Miller
The Flagler Family

ETTA FIALKOW

by Adam and Regina Chaskin

PEARL SEDERBAUM

by Michele and David Steinfeld

In honor of...

GIL SAPOLSKY'S GRADUATION

by Lior Spring and Daniel Miller

BROOKE AND ELLI TRAGER'S GRADUATION

by Rochelle and David Stoddard

SEAN HALLORAN'S GRADUATION WITH MBA AND MD

by Rochelle and David Stoddard
The Board and Staff of the JCA

NOAH CHASKIN AND BECCA GENYK'S ENGAGEMENT

by Rochelle and David Stoddard
Adam and Regina Chaskin
The Board and Staff of the JCA

GRANT CHASKIN'S RETURN TO DANCE AND WINNING HIS COMPETITION

by Rochelle and David Stoddard

THE BIRTH OF SADIE SCHWARTZ

by Lior Spring and Daniel Miller
The Board and Staff of the JCA

JEFF EDWARD'S ONEJAX SILVER MEDALLION HUMANITARIAN AWARD

by The Miller Families
The Board and Staff of the JCA

BRIAN WOLFBURG'S ONEJAX SILVER MEDALLION HUMANITARIAN AWARD

by The Miller Families
The Board and Staff of the JCA

JOSH JACOB'S GRADUATION FROM DUKE

by Lior Spring and Daniel Miller

For a speedy recovery...

BUNNY WITTEN

by Adam and Regina Chaskin



More Than A Gym

By Chris Turner, Membership Director

To some it may seem like it is only a tagline but being, *more than a gym*, is something we strive for every day at our JCA. I am so proud to share that the success of this endeavor is measurable.

Our JCA membership is nearly back to the highest number of households since the JCA opened in 1988. We credit our valued members for nearly all our new members. When JCA members bring their neighbors, friends and family to experience all we offer - whether it be at a theatre production, for some pool time, a workout in the fitness center, or just simply picking up their children at Michele Block Gan Yeladim Preschool & Kindergarten - those neighbors, friends, and extended families, also join the JCA and that is truly one of the biggest compliments we can receive.

The second biggest compliment, in my opinion, is when former members decide to come back. When someone asks me what I do for a living, I tell people that I am in the relationship business. Unfortunately, for a variety of reasons, people decide to cancel their memberships here but later decide to return to the JCA. When they come back, I know it

is because of the relationships they have here, and we are always excited to see those former members return.

As Adam mentioned in his greeting, when the JCC Association surveyed thousands of people throughout North America, we learned what many of you think about our JCA. The survey told us that nearly all of you are likely to recommend our community to a friend, family member, or colleague – and the JCC Association told us that those recommendations happen more at the JCA than any other Jewish Community Center on the continent.

So, when we say, we are *more than a gym* – we are a *community*, we mean it. Incredible things happen at our JCA and as we look toward the future, I am proud to say that the best is still yet to come.

Do you know someone who has not experienced why our JCA is *more than a gym*? We are always eager to share all the great things that happen here. Please invite your friends and family in for a visit, and encourage them to schedule a tour with me, Kali or Hollie. Visit jcjax.org/tour to schedule a tour. When your friends and family join, you will be rewarded with a free month of membership dues and a \$50 JCA gift certificate.





A Year of Recognizing Good

By Kendall Sisisky Valliere, Development Director

In Hebrew, gratitude is expressed as *hakarat hatov* which translates to mean, “recognizing the good.” In my opinion, *hakarat hatov*, may be an even better way to express gratitude than by saying, thank you. As I reflect on all the wonderful things that happened on our campus in the last year, I want to take a moment to recognize all the good that happens at our JCA – and this “good” would not be possible without the work of so many.

Our JCA Board of Trustees is made up of selfless individuals who work to ensure that our beloved JCA is fiscally sound, well-managed, and has adequate resources to fulfill our mission. As volunteers, our board is comprised of JCA members who give their time, talent and treasure to guide and nurture our agency.

Another dedicated group of JCA members, stepping up to make an enormous impact in our community are the *Building Our Future Together* campaign co-chairs. Adam Frisch, Nancy and Mark Green, The Miller Families, and Alison and Brent Trager, spent the last two years leading our initiative designed to propel the JCA into the future. By participating in task forces, securing financial commitments, and making momentous contributions themselves, we are fortunate to have this powerful campaign leaders planning the future of our agency while walking hand in hand with the next generation.



A true labor of love, designing, managing, and planning for our annual fundraiser means six months of thoughtfulness, dedication, and excitement that culminates in one night of fun. Our annual event is more than a great time out with friends, support of our fundraiser provides members with financial assistance for membership and programs. Our fabulous fundraiser chairs this year, Sunny Gettinger and Lior Spring, helped us raise more than \$220,000 to support the members of our JCA community. Next time you see Sunny or Lior around our campus, be sure to share your kudos for all the good they are doing for our JCA. The leaders of our creative, caring and committed volunteers truly created a night in *Jax Vegas, Baby* that we won't soon forget.

Last but certainly not least, we are so fortunate to have knowledgeable, caring and dedicated employees who work endlessly to ensure our members and guests always experience the best we have to offer. Without the incredible staff members who facilitate our programs and manage our facility, our JCA would not be where it is today.



Whether you gave your first gift of \$10 for a tribute card or \$1,000 for 10 years, collectively, our donors gave more than \$1,642,700 in the last fiscal year! The impact of these funds can be seen and felt through the hundreds of members who come here for our free Jewish programs, those who receive scholarships, and how much we all love the culture included in our award-winning preschool, summer camp, and after-school programs.

Consistently ranked among the top Jewish Community Centers in North America, we are so proud to respond to the needs of our community with an unparalleled array of physical, recreational, educational, social and cultural opportunities. It is truly an honor to strengthen Jewish life in Jacksonville, serve as a common meeting ground, and enhance the quality of life of the entire community.

You can support our JCA in a variety of ways. Please visit jcajax.org/give to learn how your generosity can make a difference.



Mazel Tov, LIOR AND KENDALL!



By Beth Milograno, Communications & PR Specialist

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

The recipient of our Howard Korman President's Award as well as Treasurer of the Board and Chair of the JCA's Budget & Finance committee, Lior Spring continues to lead our agency toward success. In addition to improving our budget process this year under Lior's leadership, our committee is developing a new tool to predict the long-term financial success of our JCA.

"Lior Spring earned this year's Howard Korman President's Award for her amazing work as the leader of our Budget & Finance committee," said JCA Board Chair Sam Stromberg. "With Lior also at the helm as our annual fundraiser co-chair, we raised more than \$220,000 at *Jax Vegas, Baby!* Supporting scholarships at the JCA, this funding allows us to continue our mission to assist individuals who need our services."

A Rising Star in our community in every sense of the phrase, our Development Director Kendall Sisisky Valliere was recognized with the JCA Special Service Award. Presented to a person who demonstrates outstanding service, commitment to our community, and a passion for our JCA, Kendall is a true believer in the JCA mission and vision.

"Not only is Kendall a leader in our agency, but she is also a current member of Leadership Jax and earned the Rising Star as well as 40 Under 40 recognition from the Jacksonville Business Journal this year. Awards are presented to individuals in our community who represent Jacksonville's next generation of business leaders, we are all so proud of Kendall's achievements throughout the City of Jacksonville," said Sam.

"It is such an honor to award these two amazing individuals this year who are so deserving and mean so much to our JCA community – Lior and Kendall's efforts to support and promote our JCA are inspiring."

Community through Cultural Arts, Education, Collaboration and Exploration

By Heather Terrill, J Institute Director

This year was a true whirlwind, and I can say with great pride when reflecting that we truly have accomplished a lot!

It was the inaugural year of our *Together Against Hate: Promoting Unity in Our Community* series which forged strong bonds with our partner in this initiative, the First Coast YMCA, and the other organizations we had the privilege to work with. Through these connections, we were able to bring the community together and address a variety of topics that have both local and global impact. *Together Against Hate* began as a simple concept in 2022 and started coming to life in 2023 through the dedication and hard work of so many people.



Amid our series, the world was faced with the horrible events that happened in Israel. We are still wrapping our heads around October 7. This date will never be forgotten, much like September 11, the attacks in Israel were a harsh reminder of how important the work we are doing at the JCA truly is. The impact we have through collaboration, connection, conversation and being present truly shows within our community. I am honored to have the privilege to share space regularly with our guests and really hear their stories. Following Oct 7, hosting visitors from Israel, like Yarin Levin with *Faces of October Seventh*, reminded us of the resilience we all possess inside.

On October 29, we kicked off the 2023 JCA Cultural Arts Festival with our first-ever Jewish Pop-Up Market. The event was well attended and filled with wonderful local artists and makers who shared their talents with our community. In the following three weeks, we hosted a variety of authors and films. We learned about *Microjoys* and how to find them all around us with author Cyndie Spiegel. In connection with *Together Against Hate*, Rabbi Diana Fersko, author of *We Need to Talk About Antisemitism*, and Sarah Emmons, Florida's Regional Director of the Anti-Defamation League (ADL), joined us to discuss antisemitism and the steps we can take to stand up, speak out and be a voice against hate in our community. Our annual festival wrapped up with Adam Mansbach who had us all roaring with laughter discussing his new book, *The Golem of Brooklyn!* Adam brought us all levity when it was desperately needed.

In December, I had the extreme pleasure of taking five of our members on a trip to Savannah, Georgia. We explored the city by land, trolley, boat, and horse, and let's not forget the most important exploration - the food! Every morning, we would sit down over a cup of coffee in our hotel and have a lovely breakfast with the conversation that would get the day going - mostly a lot of football talk since it was getting closer to the playoffs with a sprinkle of the daily news. Throughout the day we would tour the city and learn about the rich history that is nestled within the city streets of Savannah. In the evening, we would continue learning or share personal stories over dinner. It was one of the best memories

I collected this year; the people made that trip so special!

During the winter, we hosted three phenomenal musical talents as part of the *Berman Family JCA Concert Series*. Chelsea Guo, Lun Li, and Benjamin Baker joined us and again this year I had the privilege of getting to know these young musicians. For me, I get a peek inside their lives and who they are; each one of them has something magical that they bring and share effortlessly with our community. It is such a blessed opportunity we have at the JCA to share these talented individuals with our community at no cost thanks to the generosity of the Berman Family.

I would be remiss if I did not mention our *Racing Against Hate 5K*, the final event of this year's *Together Against Hate* series. What started out as a tiny thought turned into an event that exceeded all our expectations. I am so proud of our team and the work we did with the YMCA to bring this to life.

There are so many more great events to mention from the J Institute - our successful pottery classes, dinner club, trips, touring the wonderful little gems hidden in our city, hearing the speakers who all brought something unique to fill our cups, the beautiful exhibits in our Vandroff Art Gallery, and so much more! I've always heard the saying, "Find a job you enjoy doing and you will never have to work a day in your life." I love this job, our community, and the people I work with day in and day out. Thank you for sharing another wonderful year with me!





Israel and Beyond in Jewish Education

By Rachel Sandler, J Institute, Assistant Director, Jewish Education

Since the events of October 7, our JCA has joined together to show Israel our support in many ways. In the lobby, we put blue ribbons on display, available for the community to wear as a symbol of solidarity with the hostages and their families in Israel. We also encouraged our community to make cards and notes that were sent to Israel to remind Israelis that Northeast Florida is thinking about them.

In October, the JCA hosted an *Empty Shabbat Table* with the community to honor the hostages. It was a powerful sight to see. Thanks to volunteers from throughout our Jewish community and JCA staff members, the table was set up with place settings for every hostage. Additionally, we hosted two programs that brought survivors from Israel to Jacksonville. In November, Yarin Levin was here to speak about his experience escaping from the *Nova Music Festival*. In April, we welcomed three Israelis to share their testimonies of Oct 7, Yali Jacobovitz, Sapir Sa'ar and Gat Gonen. Finally, as is an annual tradition, this May we joined with our community to honor Israel's National Days.



In addition to teaching Hebrew to the Kindergarten class, I had the privilege to teach Hebrew to three of our Junior Kindergarten classes in *Michele Block Gan Yeladim Preschool & Kindergarten*. Students learned action words in Hebrew like walking, running, jumping, and spinning, and the words for different items around the classroom like table, chair, floor, and door. They also learned colors and words related to our Jewish Holidays. The kindergarten class learned their *alef bet*, the Hebrew alphabet letters, and were like sponges soaking up the new letters each week. One student would sometimes miss our class on Wednesdays, but she was always sure to ask her teacher, Mrs. Ledesma, to be sure to get her Hebrew letter that week since she didn't want to miss it. These classes made me feel like a rock star because every time I saw them around the JCA, they would yell out, "*Morah* (teacher) Rachel!" Hebrew at the JCA is not just for the children who come here. We have many adults learning Hebrew with us too. It is amazing to see how, in just a few months, my adult students can read Hebrew and start to have conversations.

I was proud to collaborate with the teachers in our Early Childhood department this year too. I presented professional development to our teachers about Jewish holidays so they would have more knowledge and be able to use it to plan their lessons. Let me tell you, those teachers were

competitive when we played a review game of *Kahoot*. They had a fun time learning with each other and even participating in a model Passover Seder.

For the first time in 2023, our annual *Chanukkah Extravaganza* was open to the public – which meant hundreds joined us to see the lighting of our giant *chanukiah* outside of the JCA. Families enjoyed games, crafts, songs, and of course latkes! Our annual menorah-making contest delivered some incredible creations and truly showed us how creative our community can be.

It was also another fantastic year of collaboration on Jewish Education programs with our partner agencies and synagogues. We paired up with the *Jewish Federation & Foundation of Northeast Florida Young Professionals & Families* and *PJ Library* to host quarterly programs at each local synagogue, for Jewish holiday events and *mezuzah* making.

We worked with *Hadassah* and Dr. Larry Kanter for some incredible programs, and we continued to offer Jewish Yoga, Shabbat in the Lobby, and Lunch 'n Learns with the *Kollel*. Throughout the year we had programs about Jewish St. Augustine, Jewish history and holiday programs for families and adults.

I was proud to serve a leading role in the inaugural year of *Together Against Hate: Promoting Unity in Our Community* and *Racing Against Hate 5K* presented by the JCA and First Coast YMCA, and our annual *JCA Cultural Arts Festival* that we are relaunching this year as *The Jacksonville Jewish Cultural Arts Festival presented by the JCA*.

As we look toward the future, we are continuing to expand our monthly member *mitzvah* programs. This year we made lunches for St. Francis House, created cards and *mishloach manot* bags for Holocaust survivors and residents at River Garden Senior Services – and collected donations for LJD Jewish Family & Community Services, First Coast No More Homeless Pets and V for Victory.



This summer Tal Mola will finish her two years as our Israeli Community Shlichah. Thank you to the Jewish Federation & Foundation of Northeast Florida for funding this partnership with the JCA. Over the last year, Tal brought us incredible programs to help us learn more and experience Israeli culture. From Israel Time, a variety of Jewish films, Israeli Dancing, *Sigd* celebrations, Hebrew classes, and of course, our community gatherings for *Yom Ha'Zikaron*, Memorial Day for Fallen Soldiers and Victims of Terrorism, and *Yom Ha'Atzmaut*, Israel's Independence Day – we are so thankful for all we learned from Tal.

We will miss you, Tal.

See you again soon - להתראות - l'hit ra ot!



J Experience, Headed Your Way!

By Faye Hedrick, J Experience Coordinator

For 35 years and counting, our JCA has set the bar in offering the highest quality, educational and cultural programs for people of all ages throughout Northeast Florida.

Because we are already doing this and doing it well, we decided to take the JCA outside our campus walls! J Experience was created so that we can bring our amazing JCA programs to the broader community.

This new opportunity to build strong and meaningful partnerships and relationships in our growing community is more important now than ever. So far, we ventured to the First Coast Cultural Center to celebrate *Tu B' Shevat*, The New Year of the Trees, and enjoyed an incredible, family-friendly *Pesach* - Passover celebration in Julington Creek. We hosted several Yiddish classes at the Ponte Vedra Beach Library and held our first-ever offsite J-Cation Day at Beth El – The Beaches Synagogue.

In the past six months, our J Experience programs have expanded the JCA's reach throughout our community. We are already offering a variety of off-campus opportunities with partners throughout the community and are just getting started!

We are excited to keep the momentum rolling with even more J Experiences planned throughout Jacksonville and beyond in the upcoming months.

Lunch & Learn with Rabbi Shmuli Novack happens at Ahava Café on Tue, Jun 4 at noon. Mark your calendars for Tue, Jul 16 to meet our Fitness and Wellness Director Karen Cataldo for a Sit & Get Fit session at Ponte Vedra Beach Library. Then on Sun, Aug 18, our JCA Personal Trainer and Fitness Instructor Gisela Reis will meet us at Beth El – The Beaches Synagogue in Ponte Vedra for a Stroller Fit class at 10 am, bring your strollers and your children, newborn to 3 years old. Also on Sun, Aug 18, Full Moon Yoga for *Tu B'Av*, Israel's holiday that honors love, starts at 7 pm in the Bryan-Gooding Planetarium at the Museum of Science and History (MOSH).

While some date, time and location details are still being finalized, I am thrilled to be planning programs that will bring even more of the JCA your way. We welcome new ideas on how we can partner with local organizations to create engaging programs throughout Northeast Florida. If you have thoughts or suggestions for a J Experience in your neighborhood, email me at faye.hedrick@jcajax.org and let me know what and where you want the next J Experience to be.



Another Amazing Year!

By Natalia Fisher, Early Childhood Director

We are proud to celebrate another year of remarkable growth and innovation, which truly characterizes our school community. This year, we witnessed the incredible dedication of our staff, the enthusiastic participation of our parents, and the collaborative spirit that defines our school community.

One of the highlights of the year was the deepening partnership and active involvement of our parents. The support and commitment continue to play a pivotal role in enriching the educational experiences of our students. From volunteering in classrooms to organizing engaging events, our parents demonstrated their dedication to the success of our school.

The establishment of our Parent and Teacher Garden Committee was a great achievement for our school this year! This initiative has not only enhanced the beauty of our garden, but it also provides invaluable learning opportunities for our students. Under the guidance of passionate parent volunteers, our students roll up their sleeves and get their hands dirty, while they learn about the wonders of nature and the importance of sustainable living firsthand. The Garden Committee is fostering a deeper connection to the natural world among our students while helping promote an environmental stewardship culture within our school community.

Our continued collaboration with colleagues from the University of North Florida (UNF) has opened new avenues for professional development and knowledge with our teachers. By working together with colleagues in our community, teachers can engage in opportunities that enrich their instructional practices and promote new ideas in the classroom.

We are most excited to announce that our first group of teachers will be embarking on a week-long study tour to Reggio Emilia, Italy, in January. Our teachers will study together beforehand and visit Reggio Emilia schools throughout Florida before they travel to Italy next year. Throughout this educational experience, our teachers will refine their knowledge of the values, principles and practices of Reggio Emilia firsthand so they can bring their knowledge and new expertise to the children in our school.

As we reflect on the past year, our Michele Block Gan Yeladim Preschool & Kindergarten is filled with gratitude for the growth, collaboration, and innovation that defines our school community. Looking ahead, we remain committed to fostering a supportive and enriching environment where every student can thrive and reach their full potential. Together, we will continue to build upon our successes and embrace new opportunities for learning and growth in the years to come.



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.

Please visit jcjax.org/early-childhood/ to learn more about the unique learning opportunities we have available and how your children can become students at Michele Block Gan Yeladim Preschool & Kindergarten.



Happy 50th Birthday to the Michele Block Gan Yeladim Preschool & Kindergarten!

Are you ready to celebrate?

Our 50th Anniversary event, *Memories & Mimosas*, is a yummy brunch set for Sunday, October 27, 2024 from 10 am - 12:30 pm.

Mentalist David Jaison will be on hand to get into your mind and draw out all those fond memories of your Gan years.

All Gan Grads, their families, educators, parents and grandparents are invited to attend!



For an invitation, please send your email and contact information to theresa.levy@jcjax.org. Attendees must be 21 years or older.



Youth! (There it is)

Evan McInnis, Youth Services Director

Writing the Youth Services Year in Review for the Alliance News is easily one of my favorite articles. It is a rare chance to focus strictly on the incredible work of my colleagues and celebrate our successes. With the number of changes we had in Youth Services this year, I am proud of how our team adapted and rose to the occasion to create world-class experiences for our youngest members.

When I took over the role of Youth Services Director, in my opinion, we formed a team of veritable Avengers! We welcomed two Youth Services veterans with full-time positions. Camp legend and long-time lead counselor, Julia Breen is thriving as Youth Services Assistant Director. Lea Melvin also returned to Youth Services in a full-time role as our Youth Services Assistant Director, Curriculum and Enrichment, where she is thinking of new and exciting projects for your children daily.

In the realm of Youth Services enrichment programs, we introduced new S.T.E.M.-based activities like Epic Engineers, Budding Biologists and Coding Crew this year. In these classes, Ms. Lea guides participants through the world of science and technology. Our cooking classes are more popular than ever too! Young chefs are cooking up a variety of foods like homemade whipped cream and apple pie, and flourishing at our mystery ingredient challenges in MasterChef Junior. We also went on a tour of world cuisine in Tasty Travels this year and I cannot recall the last time I saw so many children who were proud of their dishes. Coming up this summer, Lea will lead JCamp programming at the JCA as the Director of Kaytana.



Ms. Julia has helped shepherd our After School and Study Central programs into a new era to accommodate our unprecedented growth with over 140 elementary and middle school students coming to the JCA from 13 different schools every day. Julia's eye for detail and dedication to the children we serve is unparalleled and I credit her greatly for the success of our program. Beyond After School, Julia is also the Director of JCamp Sabra and Habonim this summer and has more fun planned than you can imagine! *Mazel tov* to Julia, she was accepted into the highly competitive Martin Pear Fellowship.

We are also reintroducing teen programs in Youth Services! After my year and a half in the Merrin Teen Professional Fellowship, I'm so happy that we are resuming programs specifically for the teenagers who come to the JCA. That's not all! We are engaging in Monthly Mitzvot through visits to River Garden Senior Services, at the Jacksonville Jewish Center and we even hosted a beach cleanup!

We are excited to provide more opportunities for teens to socialize in the coming months. It was a banner year for our Youth Services team, and I cannot wait to see what the rest of 2024 will bring!





Another Magical Year!

By Shelly Higgins Hughes, Theatre Director

The JCA Theatre Department had another fantastically creative year!

Thanks to the continued support of VyStar Credit Union, the *Magic Wardrobe Theatre* entertained and educated more than 28,000 children from Duval, St. Johns, Clay, and Nassau counties. Due to overwhelming generosity, VyStar Credit Union made it possible for local exceptional student education (ESE) children, who never had the opportunity to go on a field trip, to attend two of our Magic Wardrobe performances.

The children, educators and parent chaperones were beyond thrilled for this opportunity in our made possible through the generosity of VyStar Credit Union.

Our after-school Performing Arts for Children (PAC) program had over 225 young people performing in three different shows. These talented young thespians entertain over 2,000 audience members throughout the run of the shows! Thank you to our PAC sponsors: Alexandra & Adam Cohlma, Sunny Gettinger & Trey Csar, The Fritchman Family, Hazzan Jesse & Leora Holzer, The Murray Family, Tmima & Steven Niehaus, The Sakofs Family, The Sowada Family, Laura and Jefferson Taylor, The Trest Family, The Werner Family, The Walter Family, Dr. Samira Meymand, Oral Maxillofacial Surgery.

The Zoe's World classes sold out each session. With over 150 children participating in Baby Bear Ballet, Hippity Hop, Zoe's Clubhouse, Zoe's Alumni, Zoe's Story Sketches, and Fit For Broadway this year, we are looking forward to expanding our enrichment classes and with the addition of new classes next season!

Thank you to everyone who participated onstage, backstage, at the popcorn stand, in the tech booth and in the audience! It was an amazing season!





Leading Like a Maccabee

By Karen Cataldo, Fitness and Wellness Director

When I was asked to step into this role and fill the unexpected void left by Eiffel Gilyana, I was incredibly honored. With this change in my career, I promised myself and our team of trainers that we would do all we could to keep our mentor's legacy and memory thriving throughout the JCA.

It was no secret that Eiffel had an extraordinary vision for our award-winning fitness center. The true definition of a Maccabee rebel warrior, the heroes in the *Chanukkah* story, Eiffel's spirit and ambition to persevere consistently lead us all to greatness. Although the dynamic has changed in his absence, I am proud to share that we are continuing the path of success that Eiffel forged for us.



The Youth Fitness classes Eiffel began for our JCA's young members, ages 5 – 15, are usually at capacity. Any time you walk by our Fit Start, Sports Conditioning, or Next Generation Yoga and Pilates classes, you are likely to see a room full of children on the move with some of the biggest smiles on the planet.

For our more seasoned members, we are gearing up to celebrate 15 years of Sit & Get Fit success. With Aqua, Yoga, Strength, and Core and Balance, we are consistently seeing jumps in the number of members who come here to take the variety of Sit & Get Fit classes we offer. If you have not heard, our Sit & Get Fit community does not have to move locations this summer. To accommodate the increase in participants, the customized Sit & Get Fit classes our members love will be hosted at the JCA all year. Don't forget that we also have silent disco headphones available for classes held in the gymnasium so that you can always hear your instructor.



FightFit classes have grown tremendously since Eiffel brought them to the JCA last year too. These special classes for Parkinson's patients are doing well and members are raving about this tailormade exercise experience. If you know someone who could benefit from FightFit and would like to try a class, please email me at karen.cataldo@jcajax.org for more information and potential accommodations.

Since accepting this position, I have hired new personal trainers to join our fabulous team and welcomed new babysitters so we can accommodate 15 children per hour in Kid Kare instead of only 12. Our team completed thousands of personal training sessions which can be coupled with high-fives from every client who accomplishes a goal.

Before the desk I sit at was mine, I would walk by the Fitness Center and more times than not hear Eiffel cheering for something – or someone. I completely understand that part of Eiffel's job now. As Fitness and Wellness Director, you can't help but cheer as our clients, colleagues, and community keep going! Please don't hesitate to talk to me, Beshka or any of our experienced instructors and trainers if there is anything we can do to better support you along your fitness and wellness journey. Visit jcajax.org/fitness-wellness to learn more about what we have available for you in the JCA Fitness Center and all we do to promote a healthier community.



Let's Hear it for the JCA!

By Beth Milograno, Communications & PR Specialist

We cannot stop *kvelling* about the participation, competition, and successes in our Sports and Recreation programs in the last 12 months. On the courts, around the field, rushing through obstacle courses, balancing on beams, donning a sabre and mask, dribbling basketballs, throwing baseballs, grabbing the football flag, spiking over the net and shooting the goal - from the newest to the most seasoned, athletes enrolled in our academies, clinics, and leagues had an extraordinary year.

The JCA Fencing Academy led by Coaches Bill Becker and Lindsey Stapleton made big gains toward the USA Fencing National Championships in Columbus, Ohio, this July. Grayson Becker, Andrew Pak, Emily Pak, Ethan Rostholder, Hannah Rostholder, Kiara Vergara, Lakshya Yadav, Tishya Yadav, and Elizabeth Yao, all earned qualifying points during a regional fencing tournament held in Daytona in February, and in a tournament held at the Jacksonville Fairgrounds this April. We are excited to watch our young fencers progress as they are in a prime position to make their mark with fantastic bouts this summer.



Speaking of amazing young athletes, our Jacksonville JCA Maccabi Games team joined more than 1,800 teenagers from around the world to compete in Fort Lauderdale at the David Posnack Jewish Community Center in 2023 - and the next group of young Jewish athletes is gearing up for competition this year. Come August, 30 young athletes will travel to the Rubenstein JCC in Houston, Texas, to compete at the 2024 JCC Maccabi Games®. Led by our CEO Adam Chaskin and several incredible coaches, Jewish athletes from the JCA will play basketball, baseball, flag football, tennis, volleyball and swim at the games this summer. *Mazel tov* to our Maccabi-bound JCA athletes!

In addition to nurturing the athleticism of students in our Michele Block Gan Yeladim Preschool & Kindergarten and improving their gross motor skills, our PE and Sports Coordinator Alex Minardi was instrumental in organizing and facilitating every JCA Sports league this year. Whether it was soccer, basketball or flag football, Coach Alex successfully worked with parents, volunteer coaches, and JCA staff members to support and accommodate every athlete who wanted to play. A testament to the extraordinary growth in every sports program we offer, there were so many young basketball players, ages 4 – 16, that we created an all-girls youth basketball division this year.

After a nationwide search at the beginning of the year, we learned that we did not have to look far to find our new Sports and Recreation Director. With incredible experience and knowledge, JCA Personal Trainer Mike Raffol transitioned into the position in May. No stranger to the sports enrichment programs our community loves, Mike has two children who are active in our JCA sports leagues. As our Sports and Recreation Director, Coach Mike, is looking forward to working with every athlete who comes his way to help them build confidence as they grow into well-rounded young adults.

As we look forward to another summer of fun at the JCA, we hope you are planning to take advantage of the sports and recreation programs we offer children in JCAmp. Check the schedule in our Joe and Sophie Witten Gymnasium to start planning summertime activities for your family.

The JCA Fencing Academy's second summer session starts July 7 and 10 with opportunities for fencers of all ages and skill levels.

Our Youth Summer Developmental League with Coach Will Holloman, which helps children improve their skills on the basketball court begins on Sunday, June 23 with a Mandatory Skills Assessment. Children ages 4 – 16 are encouraged to register to play in our developmental league this summer. Games happen Sundays, July 7 – 28 from 12 – 6 pm. Game time will vary based on the number of players and divisions.

Adult Basketball Leagues continue all summer long too. The 18+ Adult Basketball League happens every Wednesday at 6 pm and our 25+ Adult Basketball League is held on Sundays starting at 8:30 am.

Please visit jcjax.org/sport-recreation if you would like to register, have questions, or want to learn more about the variety of quality sports programs we offer.



We Are Making a SPLASH!

By Dustin Rulien, Aquatics Manager

Our JCA Aquatics program made quite a splash this year! With tremendous growth and even more opportunities in our pool for every age, we were proud to be named the Best Swimming Pool or Water Park in Jacksonville by Folio Weekly this year. In my opinion, our JCA team of coaches, lifeguards and water safety instructors, are just some of the reasons why our Aquatics programs are so great!

Since this time last year, our American Red Cross Learn to Swim program participation increased from 436 to 670 participants. Even more impressive is that our certified water safety instructors taught 3,567 lessons in the last calendar year and thanks to a grant from the USA Swimming Foundation we helped 18 children with no swim experience from Boys & Girls Clubs of Northeast Florida become comfortable and safe in and around water.

Because there is always something happening in our pools, we make sure those watching our pools have top certifications to keep every swimmer who comes here safe. Every season, our JCA offers Water Safety Instruction, First Aid/CPR/AED, and Lifeguard Certification courses to our entire community. This year, 50 people earned their CPR certifications with us, 25 became Red Cross Certified Lifeguards and 11 individuals received their Water Safety Instructor training so they can teach parent and child aquatics, Learn-to-Swim programs, and our adult swim courses at the JCA.



Our swimmers are already lapping the JCA pools in their Makos swim gear this summer and we are excited for another incredible Summer Makos Swim Team season to begin. In the last year, we had a total of 532 swimmers participate in our School Year and Summer Makos teams and many of those children are with us for this summer's season too. We will host three River City Swim League meets at our JCA this season where swimmers will compete to beat their times in our summer league competitions. One of the greatest aspects of the summer swim team is that there is a race for everyone and our JCA coaches are proud to work with every swimmer to help them achieve their goals in the pool.



I hope to see you by the pool this summer. Mark your calendars to join us at one of our summertime traditions, the 4th of July Family Fun Day starts at 11:30 am on Thu, Jul 4. Adam will be on the grill cooking up our world-famous hot dogs and we will have poolside fun planned for members of all ages.



By Lucas Ramos Campos, Tennis Pro

Looking back, we have so many things to be proud of in our JCA tennis community. Not only are our players getting stronger by the day, but we are seeing more and more players compete on our HarTru® clay courts. For example, there are more players than ever before at our tennis socials on the second Thursday of every month and it is clear by the players' joy just how much they love playing mixed doubles with different athletes in our community.

Earlier this year, I had the pleasure of welcoming Coach Morrill Hay to our tennis coaching staff. Morrill brings a lot of teaching and coordinating experience to our tennis programs and can help players greatly improve their game. Coach Morrill's experience and attention to detail on the court is greatly appreciated by all.

Our JCA tennis program had a very busy year. We had an incredible season in Cardio tennis, which was a great way to start every Sunday. We offered beginners two Tennis 101 clinics which encouraged new players to join this amazing sport. The children on our courts learned new skills while having a lot of fun in our Pee Wee tennis and Junior Quick Start clinics. The adults on our courts had better watch out, these children continue to improve and have developed a strong love for the game.

From the young to the young at heart, the tennis players who come here always bring a lot of energy to our courts and last year was no different. The ladies from the A, B and C teams, as well as the Working Women's A3 and the Men's 3.0/3.5 teams, had great matches and moments throughout the year. I would like to personally thank our captains Linda Proudfoot, Carol Kleiner, Patti Price, Tina Biggers and Jarred Shaw, for their commitment and for providing everything we needed for a fun and exciting season.

It was so awesome to see all our tennis players displaying their talents and having a great time playing the game that we love all year through. I could not ask for a better group to work with and I am looking forward to many more seasons at the JCA.

Stay tuned, changes are coming to the JCA tennis courts in the coming months. As we are always looking to improve our players' experience, we are working to resurface and refurbish our HarTru® clay courts which will mean more quality play for our incredible members.

Want to play tennis with us? We have opportunities for all ages and skill levels. Please send me an email at lucas.ramoscamos@jcajax.org to learn more and start playing!





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