



WELCOME / RABBI HINDY FINMAN

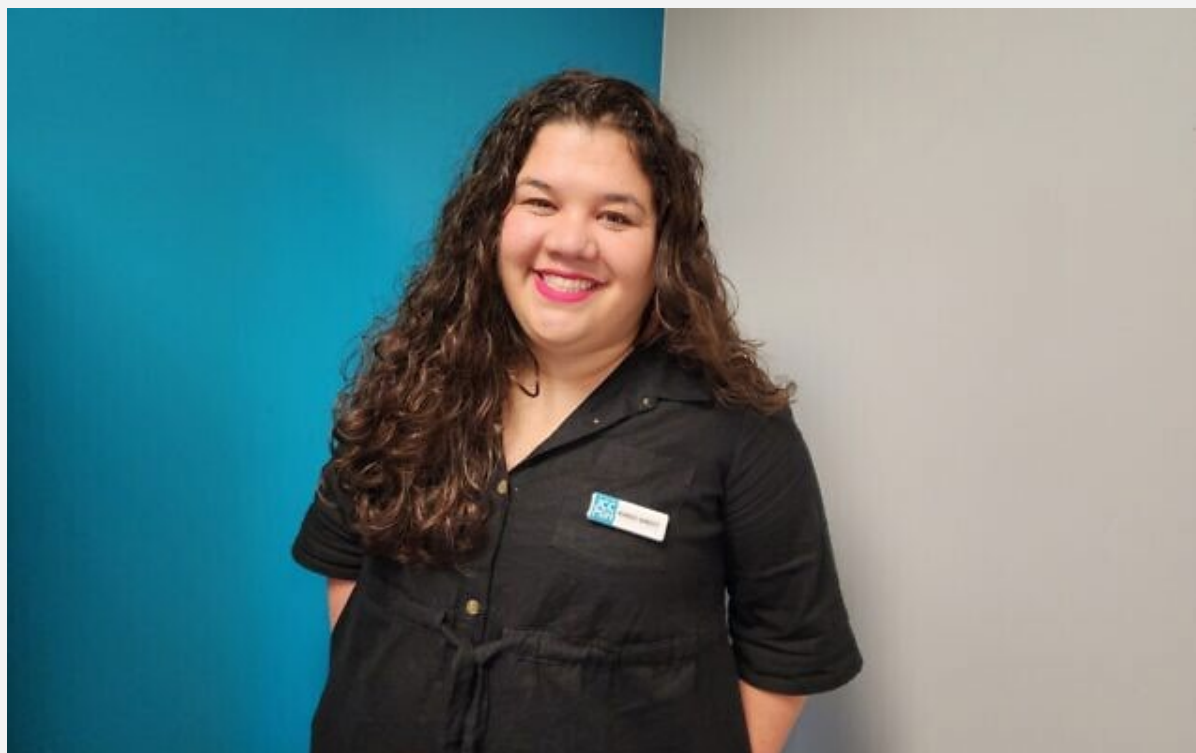
# Open doors and substantive Jewish learning signal start of Rabbi Hindy Finman's tenure at JCC

home page

Following five years in Boston, Pittsburgh's newest Jewish communal professional aims to partner by making a 'seat at the table'

By **ADAM REINHERZ**

May 21, 2024, 3:44 pm



Rabbi Hindy Finman. (Photo by Adam Reinherz)

---

Lest any confusion stem from Rabbi Hindy Finman's lengthy new title, the senior director of Jewish life and director of the Center for Loving Kindness and Civic Engagement at the Jewish Community Center of Greater Pittsburgh has an unmistakable approach.

"My door is open," she said. "You have a seat at the table."

Finman is looking forward to assuming the role [previously held by Rabbi Ron Symons](#), who will move to the New York City area [next month](#).

---

**Get The Jewish Chronicle Weekly Edition by email and never miss our top stories**

**FREE SIGN UP**

"I am so excited and eager to meet

people, and learn about their love for Pittsburgh and their hopes and dreams of Jewish life in Pittsburgh," she said.

Finman is in Boston, where she's slated to receive ordination from Hebrew College on June 2. Last week, she visited Pittsburgh to meet colleagues, speak with community partners and find a place to live.

Having spent much of her adulthood in Massachusetts pursuing the rabbinate and in Colorado helping launch the [BaMidbar Wilderness therapy program](#), she found Pittsburgh presented countless surprises.

“This week has blown my mind,” Finman said. “I was very unaware of all the amazing work that’s happening in Pittsburgh — both amazing work that’s been going on for years and this sort of, what I would call, ‘post-COVID thawing.’”



Rabbi Ron Symons and Rabbi Hindy Finman. (Photo by Adam Reinherz)

Meetings with community members, nonprofit leaders and future partners confirmed that “people just want to get back together and continue the work, or address new things that have come up since COVID.” That heightened excitement and energy is “my love language,” she said.

Finman is intent on building but isn’t fixated on numbers. She said she wants to meet “the needs of the people where they’re at” rather than “just pushing an organization’s agenda of wanting to hit 300 people by this date or raising this amount of dollars.”

Benchmarks are “great internally,” she said, but the better approach is rabbinic. Following a divine lead requires “interfaith collaboration, Jew and Jew collaboration, and denominational collaboration. I think there’s so much room for creativity.”

Finman is committed to casting a wide net, but said it’s imperative to reach a

particular demographic.

“There’s a [gap in our Jewish community](#) of providing services for young adults and teens who do not fit your typical camp mold,” she said. “Summer camp is great — I love summer camp — but that’s a two-month experience. So throughout the 10 months of the year, how can the Center for Loving Kindness empower teens?”

The new hire credited several “amazing organizations” that work with Pittsburgh youth before asking, “How can we all do that together?”

As the “new kid on the block,” Finman stressed she isn’t seeking to implement “radical” changes immediately, but hopes several questions will be addressed: “What works? What definitely doesn’t work? What might not work because it just hasn’t been reviewed enough or been creative enough? If there was no budget what would we do? And, working within a budget, where do we see the gaps?”

Finman is convinced the JCC and its Center for Loving Kindness can plug various cavities but eschewed specifics.

“Come back to me in a year, and we’ll see what happened and what still needs to happen,” she said.

Too often, Finman said, the desire to enter a space and create anew denies a thorough review of one’s surroundings.

“If something’s working, let’s keep doing it,” she said. “Let’s keep going and celebrate the things that are working. And that seems to be — because there are [teens walking through our doors](#).”

Finman’s communal and rabbinic approach is shaped by decades of Jewish experience.

“I grew up Chabad,” she said. “My dad’s a Hasidic rabbi, and my mom’s very much the rebbetzin. I’m one of seven. They have a Chabad house just outside of Detroit in Ferndale, Michigan, which is sort of the queer neighborhood of Detroit.”

Finman called her parents' home a refuge to "everybody who is the guy living in his car to the dean of a college."

What every guest will find is "a seat at the table," she said. "Jewish, not Jewish, in the process of converting, trans, straight, you name it, they're at the table. And they're all completely wonderful, lovely people."

From the moment of her birth in Australia — where Finman's parents were *shlichim* (religious emissaries) — exposure to "extreme radical hospitality" has been foundational, she said. "I have an extreme amount of gratitude for my parents for instilling those values in us very, very young."

One way of paying homage is by calling herself a "[Hasidic feminist](#)."

The term means personalizing "foundational" materials, she said. "Not just assuming what's on the page is to be taken for granted but really looking back at biblical texts, Talmudic texts and then the Hasidic texts, while also keeping in mind my love for history."

Issues espoused generations ago remain relevant, Finman explained.

Being a "Hasidic feminist," means [scouring Jewish sources and asking](#), "Is this an inclusive text or not? If it isn't an inclusive text, how can we make it inclusive? And if it already is inclusive, great. Then make a big pot of chicken soup and invite everybody over for Shabbat dinner."

Finman is unabashedly deliberate in who she is and what she wants to accomplish.

Her JCC-issued name tag says "Rabbi Hindy."

"Having the word 'rabbi' was very intentional," she said.



Jason Kunzman and Rabbi Hindy Finman. (Photo by Adam Reinherz)

Hearing that title should “open up people’s eyes,” the rabbi continued. “I don’t wear a kippah, and I don’t wear a collar.”

Holding this position requires “constantly asking who’s not at the table, and

why has our tradition not allowed them at the table,” she said.

Being a rabbi also demands involvement in substantive Jewish learning.

“I love text-based learning. Not everybody loves text-based learning, so sometimes it’s just learning by being a role model and learning by example,” she said.

Weeks remain until Finman begins her Pittsburgh tenure.

Jason Kunzman, the JCC’s president and CEO, cannot wait.

“We are on the cusp of redefining Jewish engagement — of which Jewish learning is a part of — Hindy brings with her this innate ability to turn things upside down and inside out, and make sense of it all in a very Jewish way,” he said. “We’re going to shake it up. We’re going to do it meaningfully and in a way that we hope will resonate with as many of our neighbors, both Jewish and non-Jewish.”

Finman can't imagine any other approach.

"I don't want the word 'senior' to ever scare anybody away. I don't want the word 'rabbi' to ever scare anybody away. I don't want the fact that I'm a woman in a rabbinic role to scare anybody away," she said.

Change is often met with fear, but Finman hopes that people see the goal.

"This open door policy means let's meet, let's chat, let's go for a walk, let's go for coffee and nothing they can say will deter me from wanting to show up again," she said. **PJC**

*Adam Reinherz can be reached at [areinherz@pittsburghjewishchronicle.org](mailto:areinherz@pittsburghjewishchronicle.org).*

READ MORE:

- education
- jewish community center of greater pittsburgh
- Rabbi Hindy Finman
- Rabbi Ron Symons
- Center for Loving Kindness
- local
- all headlines
- Features



---

COMMENTS



home page

TRANSITIONS / RABBI RON SYMONS

# The exit interview: Rabbi Ron Symons

Spiritual guide looks back on time in Pittsburgh, efforts to create change

By **ADAM REINHERZ**

May 13, 2024, 12:40 pm



Rabbi Ron Symons. Photo courtesy of Jewish Community Center of Greater Pittsburgh

A local resident is asking the Pittsburgh Jewish community to remember — [even after he moves](#) — that “‘neighbor’ is not a geographic term, it’s a moral concept.”



Rabbi Ron Symons has guided Pittsburghers for more than 15 years through professional posts at the now-defunct Agency for Jewish Learning, Temple Sinai and the Jewish Community Center of Greater Pittsburgh. Even before serving as senior director of Jewish life and director of the Center for Loving Kindness at the JCC, Symons made [social justice the cornerstone of his efforts](#). He is certain the work will continue long after he and his wife, Rabbi Barbara Symons, relocate next month. Until then, “Rabbi Ron” will continue using his voice to foster engagement.

The well-known spiritual guide spoke with the Chronicle about his upcoming move, past projects and what’s ahead.

---

**Get The Jewish Chronicle Weekly Edition by email and never miss our top stories**

**FREE SIGN UP**

This

---

interview has been edited for length and clarity.

**I know you’ll still be neighbors with everyone in Pittsburgh, but where are you going and why?**

We are moving back to the metro New York area, where we have family and friends, where there are people that still call me “Ronnie.” It is 100% a pull and not a push. We love Pittsburgh. We love the work that we’ve done. We love the people that we do that work with. And now we’re trying to find that balance of doing work and being with family and friends.

## **You've made quite the impact over the years. What brought you here in the first place?**

We came to Pittsburgh 18 years ago when Barbara became the [rabbi of Temple David](#).

## **What were you up to?**

At the time, after having served in congregations and day schools, I was working for the Leo Baeck Education Center in Haifa, Israel, helping them advance what eventually became their Zoom technology-based International Education Program and doing fundraising for them.

## **How about when you got here?**

I continued that work and added being a regional educator for the Union for Reform Judaism, throughout Pennsylvania, advising congregations on how to strengthen their religious school programs. I also started working with the [Agency for Jewish Learning](#), doing adult education and professional development.

## **Tell me about Temple Sinai.**

Sixteen years ago, I joined the staff of Temple Sinai, originally to focus on building the Midrash Center for Jewish Learning, which was our version of doing lifelong learning. That expanded beyond the Midrash Center into the Tikkun Olam Center for Social Justice, where we did a lot of faith-based community organizing with Black churches and others. It included standing up for issues of the environment, safe gun ownership and the Fight for \$15, for UPMC employees. I was also happy to be part of so many holiday and life cycle moments at Temple Sinai, just learning with people and being with them at the most trying times and the most celebratory times of their lives.

## **At the JCC you've integrated many of your past involvements. How did your role at the center evolve?**

I came to the JCC nine years ago as the senior director of Jewish life but was also

responsible for transforming Jewish teen engagement in Pittsburgh. At the time, the Agency for Jewish Learning was closing down, and we realized in partnership with the Federation that the JCC was the right place to transfer those efforts. My first task at the JCC was to establish the Second Floor and build out a [new model for how we engage with teens](#). I can say that is going strong, with somewhere over 350 teen memberships every year at the JCC.

### **And what about other methods of engagement?**

We started the Center for Loving Kindness and Civic Engagement in 2017. We knew there was something in the way that community fabric was being woven. And we realized that in both the macro and the micro of the impact of the 2016 presidential campaign — not because of the outcome but because of the way that the conversation had changed. We began a conversation with thought partners around Pittsburgh, the JCC and around the country about what it would look like if we took the values that guide the work of the JCC and push those forward in a 21st-century platform that allowed us to have regional impact. We figured out how to do that, and we are really grateful that we became stewards of the concept of strengthening the fabric of community by amplifying long-held values of [“love your neighbor as yourself,”](#) “do not stand idle while your neighbor bleeds,” and redefining the word “neighbor” from a geographic term to a moral concept.

### **What are the effects of those partnerships?**

We’re really very humbled that we started this work in September 2017 and had a 14-month head start before tragedy hit us on Oct. 27, 2018. The strong network of interfaith, intercultural, interracial, civic engagement partnerships helped us to make our way through the impact of the shooting at the Tree of Life synagogue building. Much of that work was done in partnership with Rev. Liddy Barlow, the executive minister of Christian Associates in Southwest Pennsylvania, and it continues today.

### **You’ve been a supporter to so many colleagues. What would you like them to know?**

I am so grateful to Brian Schreiber and Jason Kunzman, to the lay leaders and leadership team of the JCC, over these years for being so supportive of the

innovative work that we've done in the [area of teen engagement](#), in the area of Center for Loving Kindness, and also in the area of innovative Jewish engagement. Whether through PJ Library or our High Holidays of Hope, all of those innovations took a little bit of guts to move us forward in community life.

**A new hire was named to help move the needle. Any insights about the days ahead?**

I am very excited about the decision to hire Hindy Finman as the next senior director of Jewish life. Hindy will be ordained a rabbi by the Hebrew College in Boston this spring and will come to the JCC with a new set of eyes: not only someone that has not lived in Pittsburgh before, not only as a rabbi from a post-denominational seminary, but also as someone who has a younger perspective on the world around. I think that Hindy is going to bring even more innovation, more insights and even more connectivity than what we have experienced so far.

**There will be a farewell event on May 30 in your honor. What does it mean to be celebrated before you go?**

It's very humbling. And the way I'm figuring out how to make my way through it is that it's a celebration of what we all have done together. I'm looking forward to being with JCC staff and members — with members of the Jewish community and wider community — to celebrate our dream and vision of what we hope Pittsburgh could be. I'm hopeful that we got just a little bit closer because of how I've interacted with people and how they've helped me advance the cause. I know there is so much more to do, and that's a big part of what that event is: to acknowledge that we've made it so far, and that we have more to do, so let's keep on going with it. **PJC**

*Adam Reinherz can be reached at [areinherz@pittsburghjewishchronicle.org](mailto:areinherz@pittsburghjewishchronicle.org).*

READ MORE:

- Rabbi Ron Symons
- Exit Interview
- jewish community center of greater pittsburgh
- local
- all headlines
- Features



---

## COMMENTS



home page

DILLER TEEN FELLOWS / CREATING CONNECTIONS

# Israeli and Pittsburgh teens gain mutual understanding during Diller Mifgash

Midway through yearlong program to bolster Jewish identity, young adults meet, begin broaching war and other 'weighty subjects'

By **ADAM REINHERZ**

May 2, 2024, 1:15 pm



Diller Teen Fellows Carmel Bash, Gabe Seldin, Shahar Ben Shimon and Moriah Neiss gather during the Jewish Community Mifgash. (Photo by Adam Reinherz)

A school year typified by contention and violence is closing with a quest for friendship.

Since Oct. 7, Israel's teens have attended classes while the country fights Hamas. During the same span, Pittsburgh's Jewish teens have faced rising antisemitism at home, including [defacement of private property](#) and [vandalization of Pittsburgh Alderdice High School](#).

During time together last month, Israeli and Pittsburgh teens largely avoided discussing hardships wrought by conflict, political extremism or destruction. Instead, high schoolers in the Diller Teen Fellows program celebrated Shabbat, explored western Pennsylvania and discussed shared interests and Jewish identity.

---

**Get The Jewish Chronicle Weekly Edition by email and never miss our top stories**

**FREE SIGN UP**

The  
annual  
Jewish

---

Community Mifgash seminar in Pittsburgh is part of [Diller's yearlong program](#). Pittsburgh fellows meet once or twice a month for Sunday workshops, complete four overnight weekend retreats and reconvene with the Israeli cohort in the Jewish state for three weeks during the summer.

Despite the ongoing war clouding this year's Mifgash, organizers determined that Oct. 7 wasn't to be broached during initial conversations in Pittsburgh, according to Rebecca Kahn, director of teen leadership at the Jewish Community Center of

Greater Pittsburgh.

“Not because we don’t think it’s important, but because we thought it was more important that they build connections together that are based on things beyond a traumatic experience,” she said.

Forcing conversation between Israeli and American teens “doesn’t make sense,” Kahn continued.

“Our experiences are so otherworldly different,” Point Breeze resident and Diller Teen Fellow Gabe Seldin said. “It’s very, very, impossible, sometimes, to make connections and relate with that subject.”

For high schoolers, meaningful relationships are forged through dialogue “in a way that feels safe and comfortable,” Kahn said.



Israeli and Pittsburgh teens gather for Shabbat at Emma Kaufmann Camp. (Photo courtesy of Jewish Community Center of Greater Pittsburgh)

Several participating teens praised Diller’s approach and said that preliminary days of casual conversation between Israelis and Pittsburghers led to heftier exchanges later into the April 9-18 Mifgash.

Throughout the 10 days, nearly 20 visiting Israeli teens stayed in Pittsburghers’



homes, ran errands together and chatted. The young adults also jointly traveled to West Virginia for Shabbat at Emma Kaufmann Camp.

At camp, on car rides or inside the Squirrel Hill JCC, the high schoolers talked.

“I saw that being Jewish is difficult no matter where you are,” Misgav resident Carmel Bash said.

“It was definitely hard to speak up at first about how I felt about different things, but as this Diller experience has gone I’ve been definitely more open and able to speak my opinions,” Moriah Neiss, a Squirrel Hill resident and Diller Teen Fellow, said. “We’re all getting closer, and things are coming out more naturally.”

“I know that I’m learning more about them and they’re learning more about us. And it’s really nice to understand [where they’re coming from](#) and how their life is back home,” she added.

Creating these connections is critical, Kahn explained.

Within the Jewish state, 11% of adults aged 65-plus hold unfavorable views of the U.S. The number jumps to 18% among those ages 18-29. On the other side of the ocean that disparity swells: Although 27% of older adults have an unfavorable opinion of Israel, the number balloons to 56% among the younger demographic, according to [Pew Research Center](#).

Though [generational divides](#) characterize one aspect of American-Israeli relations, Oct. 7’s “traumatic effect” on Diaspora youth sheds additional light.

A First International Resources and Impact Research [survey of 1,989 BBYO members](#) indicates that since the war’s start, Jewish students have “been singled out, discriminated against, harassed online and lost friends simply because of their Jewish identity.” Discrimination has occurred “at school, online and during extracurricular activities.”

Misgav resident Shahar Ben Shimon said he was motivated to join this year’s cohort by a desire to articulate his lived experience.

“I think when the seventh of October started, during the first two months, everyone in the whole world came together and did things for Israel and for the soldiers in Gaza. But I think that’s faded during the past few months,” he said. “Fighting in Gaza continues, people are still losing friends and family, and the hostages are still there.”

The situation in Israel requires Ben Shimon and his fellow Israeli teens to be “[emissaries](#),” he continued. “We are here to talk about it, to get everyone to know how it is, and to say that the war isn’t over, it isn’t ending, people are still fighting and people should know that.”

“It was something we were so afraid to talk about, and for months we couldn’t talk about it. But right now, we feel like we should talk about it because if we don’t it’s not going to be on the surface, it’s not going to be in conversations, and it could [fade away to history](#),” Bash said.



Diller Teen Fellows meet with ECDC students at the Squirrel Hill JCC. (Photo courtesy of Jewish Community Center of Greater Pittsburgh)

For both the Israelis and Pittsburghers, time together yielded new insight.

Casual conversations during car rides led to questions about the war Seldin never before considered.

“I was just thinking what if anything like that happened here. How different would my response be,” he said.

Leaving Israel and encountering other young adults reinforced that, “Around the world, people can connect,” Ben Shimon said. “There is good and there is going to be good.”

Each participant reiterated that the Mifgash had little to do with parsing tragedy or deciphering conflict — weighty subjects were only broached because genuine bonds were established earlier in the week.

“I think it’s really special that we’re all able to connect,” Neiss said.

At the heart of the endeavor is a mutual understanding that “we’re still teenagers,” Bash said.

“We came here to have fun, meet other teenagers, see things and go shopping.”

**PJC**

*Adam Reinherz can be reached at [areinherz@pittsburghjewishchronicle.org](mailto:areinherz@pittsburghjewishchronicle.org).*

READ MORE:

- Diller Teen Fellows
- Israel-Hamas War
- local
- all headlines
- Features
- Israel
- jewish community center of greater pittsburgh



---

COMMENTS



## Columns

---

### Heading back to summer camp as a college senior | Column

Emily Golden | The Daily Collegian   May 21, 2024   2 min to read





Courtesy of Emily Golden

Daily Newsletter

**The News You Need. Straight to Your Inbox.**

[Sign up](#) for our daily newsletter

26508. This ZIP code has been ingrained in my mind since I was young. It's the ZIP code of the summer camp I've attended since I was nine years old.

Emma Kaufmann Camp is a Jewish summer camp, and now more than ever, being somewhere I can

be proud of being Jewish means the world to me.

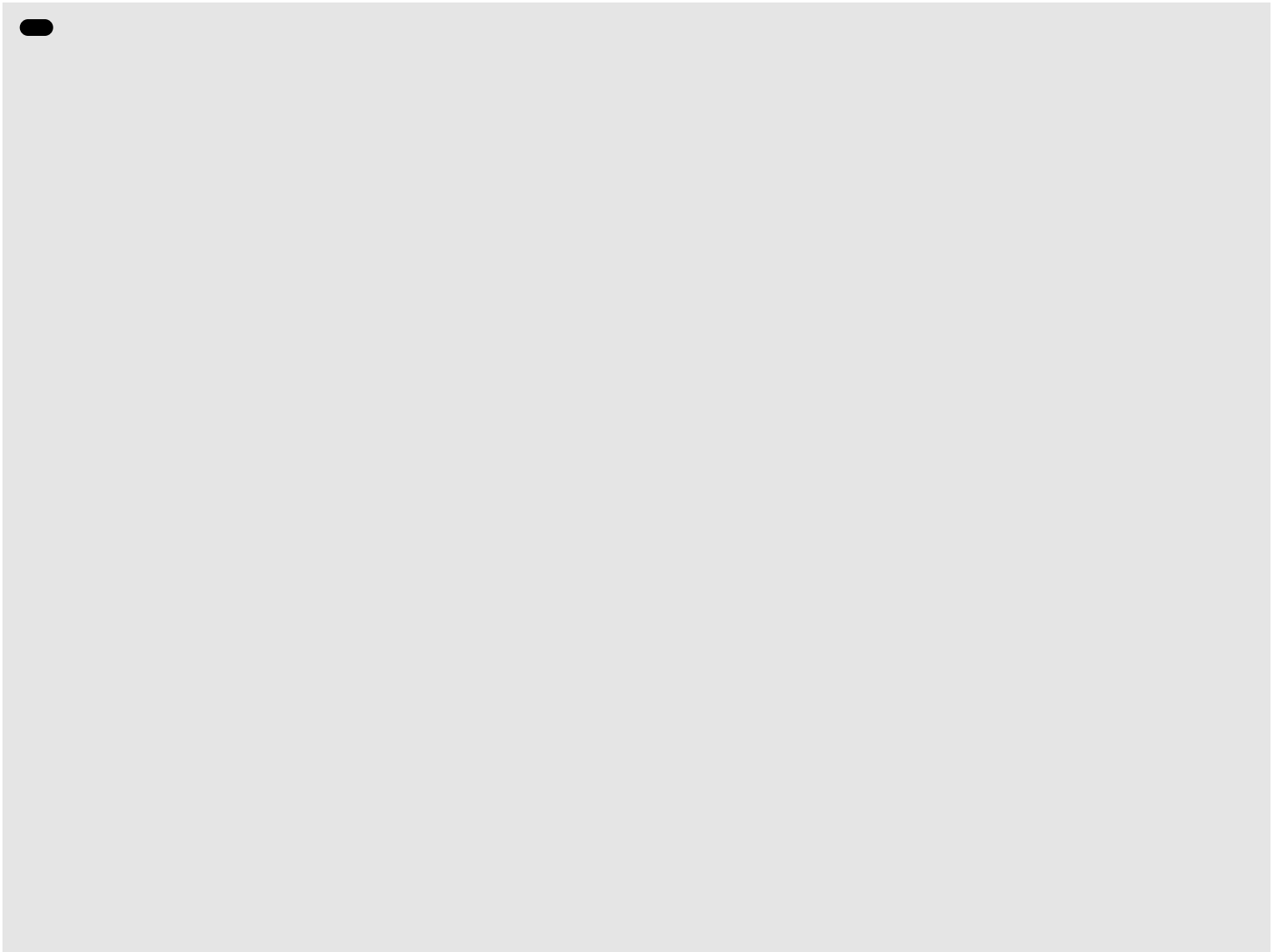
When people ask about my summer plans, the answer usually surprises them because of my age.

Summer camp isn't the traditional course for college students, especially ahead of graduation, making it difficult to understand why a college senior would attend a childhood summer camp instead of a traditional full-time internship.

I attend summer camp because of the immense value it has added to my adult life. Through summer camp, I've learned life lessons and built lifelong friendships. Summer camp has taught me how to work in a team, solve problems and how to best lead within my community.

Some people think summer camp is just for kids, but they don't acknowledge how summer camp activities connect and add value to the adult world. People who haven't attended summer camp can't always understand these connections, but summer camp has built the confidence I need to succeed in the world.





Courtesy of Emily Golden

For me, camp is a special place where I've grown up. One of my most special camp memories was inducting my younger sister into the staff.

Something that had always meant so much to me was now going to be shared with her as well.

While I'm no longer a camper, I get to lead and give back to a place that has given so much to me. Being on the staff is a completely different experience, there is a sense of responsibility and confidence one gains from leading a community one grew up in.

I never stop learning and growing when I'm at camp. Over the years, the lessons learned may change, but a person learns a lot about themselves when they are surrounded by a supportive and uplifting environment with their peers.

Some of my prior counselors are influential role models in my life, and for the past few years, I've been able to fulfill that role for a new generation of campers. Summer camp builds community values. There is something to learn from every person at camp, whether they're campers or staff members.

Camp has taught me independence and drives my willingness to learn about the world. I've learned more about myself at camp than I ever have in any other job or internship. Summer camp is an experience that has shaped me into the person I am today.

I know there will come a time when spending my summers working at camp will only be a memory. I'm lucky to have a place so special, knowing that I can't attend summer camp forever shows me the value of being present in the moment.

I may not be doing a full-time internship or taking classes this summer, but as I move forward in my adult life, I will always remember my most rewarding job.

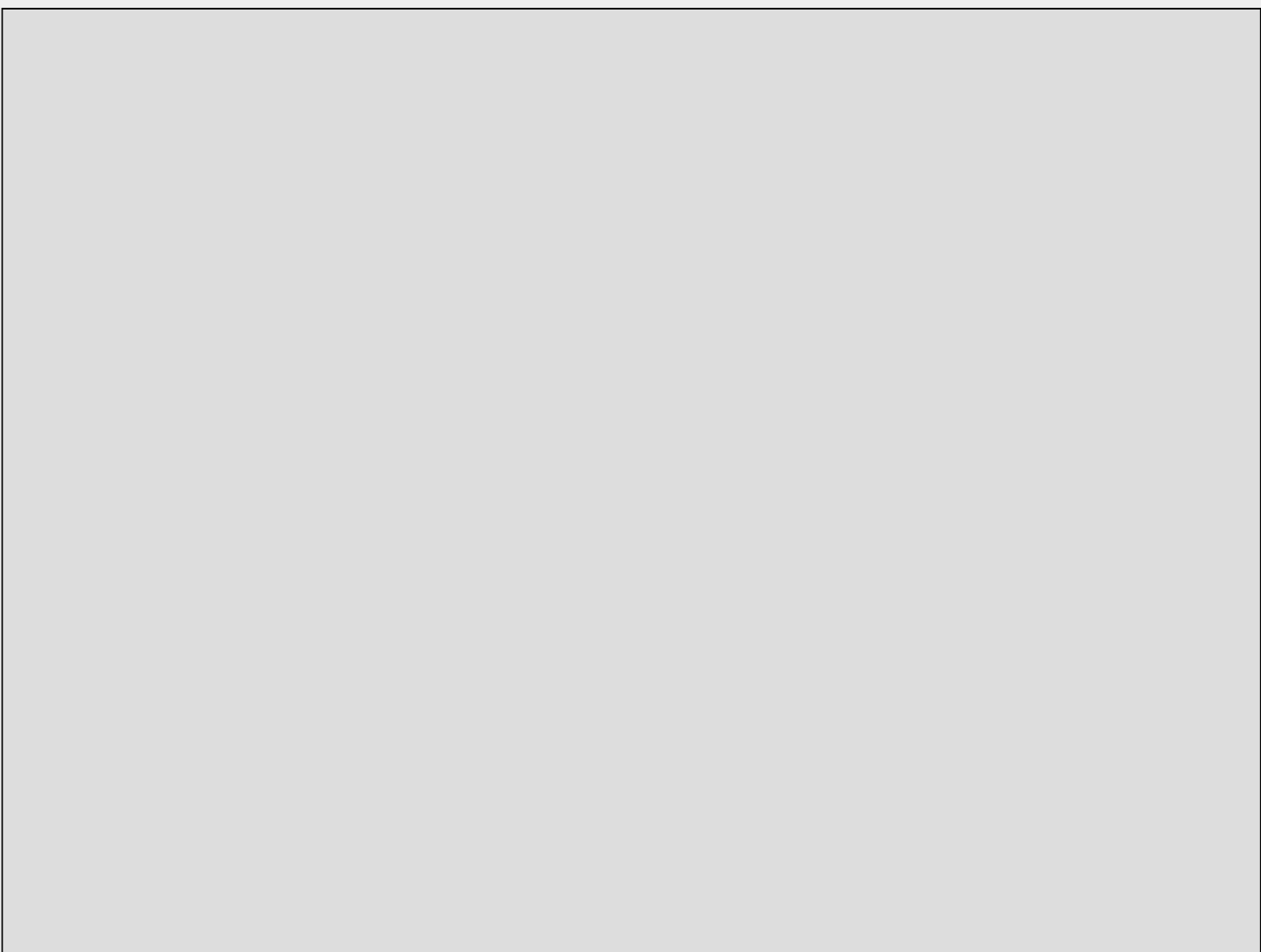
## MORE COLUMNS



[Every moment matters with those you love: Making friends as a transfer student | Column](#)

“Remember, there’s only one rule tonight: no sad music,” Riley told me. I held his JBL speak...





### Making my younger self proud: Reflections from South Africa | Column

I'm studying reproductive justice in Cape Town, South Africa, while participating in a Maymester course. In June, I will participate in anothe...

## Tags

Emily Golden

Columns | Opinion | Daily Collegian

Home / Opinions | Daily Collegian / Columns | Opinion | Daily Collegian

MORE HEADLINES

- Do unpaid internships for the experience, not the money | Column

Sections

- Support Student Journalism
- Graduation Send-Off
- Collegian Shop
- News
- Sports
- Football
- Opinion
- Arts
- Videos
- Classifieds
- Advertise With Us

Services

- Contact Us
- Daily Collegian Print Calendar
- Send a Letter to the Editor
- About Us
- Join
- Browse Historic Collegians
- Back Issues (PDFs)
- Newsletter for News
- Newsletter for Football

Follow Us



Contact Information



**psu.collegian.com**  
 115 Carnegie Building  
 University Park, PA 16802

News: 814-863-6897  
 Business: 814-865-2531  
 webstaff@psu.collegian.com

Independently published by students at Penn State



home page

TRANSPORTATION / WHEELS STOP GOING ROUND AND ROUND

# Sunsetting of Elder Express highlights transportation needs for older adults

'Things change over time — the demographic changed, needs change — and we need to pivot with it'

By **ADAM REINHERZ**

June 2, 2024, 8:54 am



Elder Express vehicle comes to a stop. (Photo courtesy of AgeWell Pittsburgh)

Sheryl Stolzenberg is frustrated by her commute. She used to travel between The New Riverview and Squirrel Hill Jewish Community Center twice a week via Elder Express. Now, Stolzenberg is stuck.

“They told us that not enough people were taking it and that’s why they are reducing it,” she said.

Ever since moving into Riverview almost four years ago Stolzenberg used Elder Express, a transportation service — operated by [AgeWell Pittsburgh](#) and ACCESS — that serves older adults living in the 15217 zip code. Van rides start and end at Riverview. Stops occur at the Squirrel Hill Health Center, JFCS Squirrel Hill Food Pantry, grocery stores, senior living centers and other nearby locations.

---

**Get The Jewish Chronicle Weekly Edition by email and never miss our top stories**

**FREE SIGN UP**

---

Stolzenberg rode the van on Mondays and Tuesdays to the JCC.

“Whenever I got on, there was someone getting on from another retirement community,” she said.

AgeWell representatives said [Elder Express](#) was a useful resource for older adults to reach stores, social engagements and community-based educational programs.

Nonetheless, notification was sent two months ago that “due to declining

ridership” Elder Express’ final day of regular service would be April 5 and that the new Friday-only service would be limited to four runs, with the last run beginning at 1 p.m.

As part of the changes, Murray Towers, Imperial House and Beacon Place were dropped from the route. In order to reach those locations and other sites, passengers were instructed to contact ACCESS, a [shared-ride public service](#).

Operated in Allegheny County since 1979, ACCESS relies on federal and state funding to deliver affordable transportation.

ACCESS’ public-private partnership facilitates about 5,000 trips each week for older riders, disabled individuals and others, according to representatives.

“It’s a good service, but it has limits,” Stolzenberg said.

The Squirrel Hill resident previously used ACCESS to reach healthcare facilities.

If her appointment was at 2 p.m. Stolzenberg said she’d call several days prior and ask to be picked up at 1 p.m.

Though the trek was no more than a couple miles from her apartment, drivers often needed extra time to help passengers enter and exit the vehicle, Stolzenberg said.

“It wasn’t so difficult going on ACCESS but going back could be terrifying,” she continued. “A doctor’s office isn’t open 24 hours. If the vehicle was late you could sit on a sidewalk for an hour.”

A [national driver shortage](#) made the service even “less reliable,” Stolzenberg added.

Along with food insecurity and housing, transportation is one of the major issues affecting older adults nationwide, according to Sharon Feinman, division director AgeWell at the JCC.

[Transportation barriers](#) prevented 2.3 million older adults from participating in “social activities, visiting with family or friends and attending religious services,”

The Journal of the American Geriatrics Society reported. Additionally, of the nearly 3 million older adults in the U.S. who rely on public transportation, more than 600,000 told researchers that their [need for transport was due to a medical appointment](#).

Feinman is aware of the challenges and said that AgeWell — a collaboration between the Jewish Association on Aging, the JCC and JFCS — is exploring various options.



Former JCC staffer Alan Mallinger delivers lunches to homebound older adults via Elder Express. Photo courtesy of Jewish Community Center of Greater Pittsburgh

For more than 21 years, ACCESS and [AgeWell](#) partnered on Elder Express. The pandemic “prompted a hiatus,” but the JCC and ACCESS responded by using the service to deliver [J Cafe meals](#) to those who were homebound. Since its September 2021 relaunch, ridership has trailed pre-pandemic usage by 40%, with rates continuing to decline.

The service averages only “10 rides per day, with some days being as low as 2,”

Feinman said.

“It’s well below the minimum requirement of at least 25 rides a day for sustainability.”

Although Elder Express still operates on Fridays — due to a higher usage rate — the subsidized service will sunset at the end of this month.

Feinman and other AgeWell representatives said they’re disappointed by the decision but [reality necessitates change](#).

“We’ve been trying for the past two years to increase ridership through marketing and speaking with people to find out what their needs are,” Feinman said. “People say they want the service but then the ridership isn’t enough to keep it going. It was successful earlier, but things change over time — the demographic changed, needs change — and [we need to pivot with it](#).”

Though subsidized, Elder Express isn’t free for passengers. In order to ride, a personal account with ACCESS must be established before [loading an electronic purse with funds](#). Each fare, which costs \$1.75, is then deducted from the passenger’s account. New rides cannot be scheduled unless there’s enough money in an account.

The cheaper option is riding a bus.

Older adults, ages 65 and up, can take any [public transit in Pennsylvania for free](#) as long as the person applies for and receives a Senior ConnectCard.

Apart from the bus or ACCESS, other options exist.

[AgeWell Rides](#) is a volunteer-based transportation system for people ages 60 and up who do not drive and need to get to medical appointments, supermarkets, volunteer sites or other social settings. More information is available at 412-422-0400.

There’s also [A to B](#), a digital tool that recommends transportation options for Allegheny County residents. After answering a series of questions regarding age,



ability, insurance and trip logistics, individuals are presented with personalized options for transport.

There are multiple ways to get around the area, but the loss of Elder Express still stings, Stolzenberg said.

Before moving to Pittsburgh, the Squirrel Hill resident worked as a city and county planner in central Pennsylvania and South Florida.

“I got a chance to see how public transportation was handled in a lot of different places, and I never saw anything like Elder Express anywhere I’d been,” she said.

“Unfortunately with ridership dropping since the pandemic, it’s difficult to keep the service running the way that it has been,” Feinman said.

That doesn’t negate AgeWell’s commitment to helping older adults easily navigate the area.

“You can contact us directly and we will work with you,” Feinman said. “We are here to support.” **PJC**

*Adam Reinherz can be reached at [areinherz@pittsburghjewishchronicle.org](mailto:areinherz@pittsburghjewishchronicle.org).*

READ MORE:

- [Transportation](#)
- [Older adults](#)
- [AgeWell](#)
- [Access](#)
- [local](#)
- [all headlines](#)
- [Features](#)
- [Elder Express](#)



---

## COMMENTS