

The Charlotte JEWISH news

Vol. 41, No. 3

Adar I-Adar II 5779

March 2019



Jewish Federation
OF GREATER CHARLOTTE

IT ALL STARTS WITH YOU!

FEDERATION 2019 CAMPAIGN IN FULL SWING

A crowd of more than 600 people packed the sanctuary at Temple Israel for the Jewish Federation's 2019 Main Event! Co-Chairs Sam and Emily Zimmern & Bill and Angie Zimmern told their personal stories about family, becoming involved in Federation and other Jewish organizations. They spoke passionately about the power to sustain and create Jewish life, to ensure a safety net locally and globally for Jews in need, and to create a positive Jewish future here in Charlotte.

Every dollar and every gift make a difference. Just as generations before you built the community we benefit from today, it's up to you to create the Jewish world we wish to pass along to our children and grandchildren. Giving generously to our community is at the core of how we accomplish this together.

Special thanks to The Leon Levine Foundation for their generous commitment of \$800,000 to the 2019 Campaign! PLUS \$50,000 of their gift is a match to help inspire YOU, our donors in making a new or increased gift to the Federation. To learn more about how you can take advantage of this incredible opportunity, please call Jason Pressberg, Chief Development Officer, at 704.944.6758.

The extraordinary impact of Federation can be felt throughout the community and around the world. Join us by making your gift to the annual campaign today! www.jewishcharlotte.org

DONATE. VOLUNTEER. MAKE A DIFFERENCE.



How Purim is a Call to Leadership

By Abigail Pogrebin

(JTA) — Purim is a dark story marked by a crazy party. I'm still unsure why a close brush with extermination became, in the Middle Ages, an opportunity for costumes and farce, but there you have it.

It's the fifth century BCE, about a hundred years after the First Temple's destruction. The Jews who were exiled to Babylon are now ruled by the Persian king

Ahaseurus, who thinks highly of himself. In the city of Shushan, the king's adviser, Haman, is a cruel Jew-hater. He hatches a plan to kill all the Jews and draws lots ("purim") to pick the day it will happen, persuading Ahaseurus to go along.

A proclamation is made throughout the kingdom: On that day, all Jews shall be killed. A Jew named Mordechai entreats his cousin, the gorgeous Queen

Esther, to prevent it by pleading for mercy with her husband the king.

Esther was married to Ahaseurus essentially against her will. He chose her out of a bevy of prospective wives at a banquet after banishing his then-wife, Vashti, who refused to display her beauty for his guests. (Some say she refused to dance naked.) Esther's Jewish roots were kept secret when she married the king, so for her to now entreat her husband would mean exposing her Judaism — not to mention that in those days it was life threatening to approach the king without having been summoned.

Nevertheless, she plucks up the courage, successfully appeals to her husband and foils the massacre. The king kills Haman and his sons, and then, because the proclamation could not officially be canceled according to Persian law, the Jews can only defend themselves with a preemptive strike. Some say they took self-defense too far, slaughtering 75,000.

Purim's modern observance, at least in Reform synagogues I've visited, does not focus on that brutal coda, highlighting instead the reenactment of cruel Haman and courageous Esther. The ritual is to read aloud the story from a scroll of parchment known as the Megillah, which has the biblical book of Esther inscribed on it.

The narrative is then often

theatricalized with wacky costumes in a play called a spiel — pronounced "shpeel." Whenever Haman is mentioned during the satire, people "boo" vigorously or spin noisemakers, called groggers, to drown out his name.

Purim is, hands down, the biggest party of the Jewish year. Simchat Torah pales by comparison, with its sips of single malt. This is the Big Megillah (word-play intended), and we're supposed to get so trashed that we can't tell the difference between Mordechai (good guy) and Haman (really bad).

I decide to sample some of the elaborate spiel-prep under way in New York City, so I spend an evening watching rehearsals at the Stephen Wise Synagogue on the Upper West Side of New York City, where congregant Norman Roth, 76, a retired accountant, has been writing and directing the shul's spiel for the

past three decades.

Some of his past triumphs line the stairway in colorful, theatrical show posters with titles like "Michael Jackson's The Thriller Megillah," "Les Mis — Les Me-gillah," and "Oh What a Spiel — The Jersey Boys Megillah." This year's theme is Elvis. One of Roth's lyrics riffs on "Blue Suede Shoes," when the king tells Haman, "Don't you step on my Shushan Jews."

Roth takes great pride in his spiel scripts. And he points out that in his librettos, Haman never dies.

"We have very few men in the show, so we need Haman for the closing number. We never kill him off," he says.

I ask Roth if it gives him pause to know he's leaving out the real bloody end of the story — the 75,000 slain.

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**Community
Purim Carnival**

**March 17
Noon - 3 PM
Levine JCC**

See page 26 for details.

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