As we transition into a new calendar year, this edition of The Legacy acknowledges accomplishments and turns a focus on qualities common to the leaders who guide their small-town America Jewish communities through what can be an emotional and daunting process.

The Jewish Community Legacy Project is the connector between those leaders and a network of organizations that can help such communities shape their own legacies.

One such organization is Jewish Cemeteries of Greater Cincinnati, a non-profit corporation operating 24 of the 27 Jewish cemeteries in the Greater Cincinnati area. The most recent JCGC newsletter www.jcemcin.org included an article about JCLP.

As always, please reach out if you or anyone you know might benefit from JCLP's insight and knowledge.

Sincerely,

David Sarnat  
President, JCLP

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**Following the Leaders**

Lay leaders are united in a commitment to guiding and motivating their respective members when communities undertake a planning process. Here are a few stellar individuals who lead by example.

**Temple Beth El in Jefferson City, Missouri**
Gail Severance is president of Temple Beth El in Jefferson City, Missouri, two and a half hours from St. Louis and the oldest Reform synagogue west of the Mississippi still in use. She and the other members of the congregation’s Long Range Planning committee take their responsibility as stewards of a proud history very seriously.
Beth El deals with the same issues as all congregations in small towns and after being introduced to JCLP they realized that their tightly-knit community of 25+ families would benefit by the creation of a plan to record the intentions of current members regarding the future of the congregation’s assets in—as their plan firmly states—“the unlikely event that the temple ceases to be viable.”

Those few words were the most important thing to one stakeholder, according to Ms. Severance.

JCLP staff can offer the perspective of similar experience in other communities, but it’s up to local leaders to invite input from every member of their congregation in order to navigate the fear and trepidation that would prompt the need to include such a phrase. Following a year of discussion and meetings, Beth El now has an exemplary plan that considers the future as well as preservation of the past and present through the creation of professional oral histories, annotated digitization of religious artifacts, and a verified Wikipedia page.

Congregational leaders are key to the legacy planning process since they are the ones on the front line of dealing with the personalities and passions of their respective communities. They recruit volunteers and delegate tasks.

**Temple B’nai Israel in Victoria, Texas**
Crafting a plan takes time and requires great sensitivity on the part of leaders because you are “discussing an institution that is very personal to many people and some people feel you are talking about their religion, not just assets or things,” said Robert Loeb of Temple B’nai Israel in Victoria, Texas.

He was one of the leaders engaged in a yearlong process facilitated by JCLP that resulted in a relationship with Congregation Beth El in Houston in which the Houston congregation provides services vitally important to all members and has taken on responsibility for the cemetery in Victoria.

**Temple Hadar Israel in New Castle, Pennsylvania**
“Constant communication, clear vision, and precise focus,” are important attributes of leadership according to Sam Bernstine, a management consultant and president of Temple Hadar Israel in New Castle, Pennsylvania, which has a multi-layered plan and a relationship with the Jewish Federation of Greater Pittsburgh that will oversee its implementation. He adds that patience and the ability to compromise and work with a board in a collaborative fashion are essential, as is always recognizing the emotionality of the situation.

When Mr. Bernstine became president in 2011, he took great care to persuade others that drastic change to Hadar Israel’s congregational structure was vitally important. He also realized that they needed the guidance, coaching, counsel and facilitation skills of a neutral and objective outsider to contend with all of the issues facing the congregation. JCLP along with the Jewish Federation of Pittsburgh fulfilled that role. As president, Mr. Berstine played the lead and was very careful to communicate each step along the way to all of those who rolled up their sleeves and went to work to ensure the proud legacy of the New Castle Jewish community in a plan still being executed today.
Temple Sinai in Sumter, South Carolina

Temple Sinai in Sumter, South Carolina, was one of the first congregations to engage with JCLP. Board member Roger Ackerman, as the New York Times described in a 2010 article about the Jewish Community Legacy Project, initially faced opposition from his diminishing community but finally convinced them of the importance of planning still leads the way with grace and resolve.

Relationships with the Jewish Federation and Congregation Kahal Kodesh Beth Elohim organizations in Charleston are well established and now, courtesy of a collaboration with the Sumter County Museum, the temple complex will be a benefit to the community even if the time should come when there are no longer enough members to justify holding Sabbath services, according to Mr. Ackerman.

These leaders in four different parts of the country—Mid-Missouri, Mid-Coastal Texas, Western Pennsylvania, and Central South Carolina—share patience, persistence, stamina, listening ability, sound judgment, and a passion for Jewish life.

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Considerate Acts

*Am Yisrael Chai/The Jewish Nation Lives On* might also be an appropriate description of what occurs when legacy plans are developed and enacted.

As one of its four endowments, the Legacy Fund of Beth Israel in Latrobe, Pennsylvania, supported Summer Institute Scholarships at Seton Hill University’s National Center for Holocaust Education. Study at Yad VaShem in Israel may be part of the program. Seton Hill initiated this national Catholic movement towards study of the Shoah and genocide as response to the urging, in 1987, of Pope John Paul II to recognize the significance of the Shoah and to “promote the necessary historic and religious studies on this event which concerns the whole of humanity today.”

Religious articles from Beth Abraham in Zanesville, Ohio, were donated to other Jewish organizations in the state.

Temple Hadar Israel of New Castle, Pennsylvania, donated a Torah to United Orthodox Synagogues of Houston, whose building was heavily damaged by Hurricane Harvey. And to the delighted appreciation of the small but vibrant Jewish communities on Java and in Papua Indonesia, a Hadar Israel Torah is now on the way to [Jakarta](https://www.google.com/search?q=Jakarta).

Additionally, a special ceremony on February 10 at University of Pittsburgh Hillel will honor the transfer there of Hadar Israel’s Holocaust Torah donated by the Mirow Family. Torahs from the New Castle congregation are preserving the spiritual legacy of that congregation worldwide as Jewish communities in Warsaw, Poland, and Ft. Mill, South Carolina also cherish the Torahs they have received from New Castle.

“Jews hand Muslims keys to synagogue after Texas mosque burns,” stated a CNN headline in February. So did Temple B’nai Israel of Victoria in an example of a legacy congregation’s act of tikkun olam when they offered to share their sacred space with their neighbors.
Greensboro Jewish Federation has established the GJF Legacy LLC, a North Carolina limited liability company and wholly owned subsidiary of the Greensboro Jewish Federation, which is designated as the Sponsoring Organization for the Aetz Chayim Cemetery Association of Danville, Virginia. The Association is responsible for maintaining a permanent endowment fund with the Jewish Foundation of Greensboro, which will pay for the expenses related to maintaining and preserving in perpetuity the Aetz Chayim Cemetery.

Temple Sinai of Sumter, South Carolina, has entered into a partnership with the Sumter County Museum. The sanctuary will still be used for Shabbat and holiday services and eventual general community activity, but the adjoining social hall is currently being transformed into a permanent exhibit about Jewish history in South Carolina, Jewish life in Sumter during the Holocaust, and how the Holocaust affected Sumter. This assures a lasting footprint when there is no longer an active Jewish community in Sumter. Temple Sinai has been in the National Register of Historic Places since 1999. Part of the congregation’s application for inclusion noted that “the Jewish community has been important in every aspect of Sumter’s development and the synagogue stands as a fitting testament to love of heritage and the practice of the Jewish faith, as well as dedication to the Sumter community.” The museum partnership also assures conservation of the congregation’s distinctive stained glass windows.

While much of the legacy plan of enduring congregation Temple Israel relates to the Jewish community, a significant component is designated to benefit all Marion County residents living in poverty.
For additional information, please contact Noah Levine at (678) 429-8895 or by email: l_noah@bellsouth.com

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**WHEN TO CONTACT JCLP**

- Declining congregational membership (< 80)
- Few, if any, new members
- Increased average age of members
- Few or no children in the religious school
- Leadership falling on fewer shoulders
- Only Jewish communal institution in the area

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