

# Creating a New Vision

for the  
Jewish Community Center



JEWISH COMMUNITY CENTER  
OF GREATER BALTIMORE



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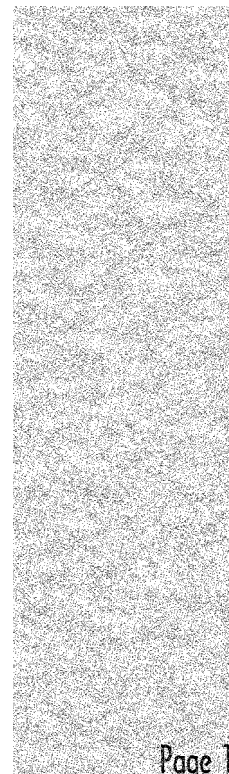
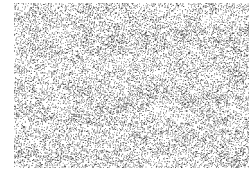
he core values of Jewish Community—such as *Torah* (our common set of laws and our emphasis on learning), *Tzedakah* (our obligation to care for each other), and *Gemilut Hasadim* (our emphasis on personal acts of loving kindness and our commitment to justice)—are among the common threads that carry us as a people from generation to generation.

Our modern institutions of Jewish life—our synagogues, our schools, and our federations—have helped us to continually renew our commitment to these values for two thousand years. As a matter of necessity, all of these institutions have reinvented themselves from time to time in order to ensure their effective stewardship of our peoplehood.

The North American Jewish Community Center is the new kid on the block. However, it has also regularly reinvented itself over its 150-year history. While it continues to be a great place for Jews to gather, work out, and have fun, the JCC has now evolved into a full partner in transmitting the core values of Jewish community from generation to generation.

Our efforts in Baltimore to conceptualize and communicate the JCC's unique contribution to the process of ongoing Jewish renewal have led us to a new Vision of the JCC's role in the Jewish community

Read on to learn the story of our new Vision, beginning with the context in which it was developed, both past (page 2) and future (page 3). Then read the Vision Statement (page 8) followed by an explanation of how it was developed (page 10) and where it might take us (page 12).



# Many Histories

et's go back.

Way, way way back to the corner of Central Avenue and East Baltimore Street as the First World War was coming to an end, back to Moe Gordon's earliest memories.

Back to the sanctuary known as the Jewish Educational Alliance.

"My father died in the pneumonia epidemic and my mother went out to work," said Gordon. "In those days, you either joined the JEA or you went to jail. It was a place to go."

Now 90, Gordon recalls paying a few nickels a week out of his paper route money for a safe haven, a little something to eat, whatever could be learned from the grown-ups, and Jewish kids to play with.

A coin or two in exchange for a place to be with people like yourself..

By Moe Gordon's childhood in the Roaring 20s, the JEA and its antecedents the Hebrew Young Men's Literary Association and the Daughters of Israel—were already about 70 years old.

The young men's book group dates to meetings at Fayette and Gay Streets in 1854 with its sister group founded on Aisquith Street in 1890.

Of the movement that became the modern Jewish Community Center, Gordon said: "It has many histories."

But only one future.



# One future

*'A community that is rich in Jewish life, culture and opportunities for learning is created and maintained by individuals who strongly identify as Jews and value their community; therefore, the community is strengthened every time a child or adult moves farther along his or her journey of Jewish identity. This strengthened Jewish community then provides a better medium for the individual journeys of others.'*

- JCC Vision Statement, November 2000

That future — what the JCC will mean in a 21<sup>st</sup> century America where the notion of neighborhood is largely nostalgic and many Jews are no longer sure what it means to be Jewish — is being charted by the group's current leadership in Baltimore.

"It is," declares Michael Saxon, the JCC's immediate past-president, "the preferred future."

To get there, every major decision the JCC makes will be held up to the measure of its new Vision: Are we creating a place in which Jews experience, absorb and share what it means to be Jewish?

Here will exist the new Jewish-American neighborhood, one to nurture Jews who no longer live close enough to each other to smell what is being cooked for dinner next door.

This neighborhood will have neither East Baltimore alley nor Pikesville cul-de-sac; there will be no one from the Old Country running the corner store and the lady next door won't be yelling for you to stop playing ball in front of her house.

Yet it will be sacred by virtue of its Jewish heart.

"We see the JCC as the Jewish neighborhood of the 21st century, one that is warm and welcoming and overtly Jewish," said Louis "Buddy" Sapolsky, Executive Director of the JCC in Baltimore.

"You can not separate the strength of the community from the strength of the individual," said Saxon, under whose leadership the Vision Statement was born. "We've committed ourselves to helping people make connections that increase their Jewish identity"

The many good things that the JCC has accomplished since its beginnings in the 19th century settlement house movement—in particular the hard work of Americanizing immigrant Jews — have led the group to its new challenge.

"The settlement houses harmonized Jewish identity with a newfound American identity," said Lawrence Ziffer, vice-president

of THE ASSOCIATED: Jewish Community Federation of Baltimore.

The ground began to crumble along the fault lines of prosperity and assimilation.

"Three and four generations down the line, the Jewish community realized that it had succeeded beyond its wildest dreams in achieving integration with the surrounding American culture," said Ziffer. "Many parents began to recognize that they were ill-equipped to transmit the beauty and depth of our Jewish culture in a way that is relevant and creative. Synagogues met the needs of some, but it became easier and easier to remain unaffiliated."

This homogenized identity is evident in Owings Mills, where a 150-acre JCC campus opened in 1977 to complement the early 1960s building on Park Heights Avenue, a place which many Jewish baby boomers took for granted as a place to swim and play basketball.

In that time, before the fitness craze of the 1980s and 1990s made recreation available in shopping centers, the JCC was content to be the place where Jews swam, played racquetball or took an art class.

This was also before a 1990 study of national trends within the community rocked American Jewry with statistics that put intermarriage at 50 percent and divorce rates on a par with the rest of the country.

Such are the blessings of prospering in a tolerant society.

"That study scared everyone," said JCC Associate Executive

Director Dale Busch. "It said that we had become so successful at making it that we would assimilate ourselves out of existence."

Though only a dozen miles away from the open spaces and clean lines of Owings Mills, the blunt, Cold War architecture of the Park Heights JCC might as well be on a distant shore, so different is the area—the heart of Baltimore's Orthodox community—and the people it series.

The new Vision demands that the JCC remain market-driven while advancing the needs of the Jewish community. "All of our efforts at THE ASSOCIATED come down to this: we build community," said Darrell D. Friedman, President and CEO. "In articulating a vision for a welcoming, supportive neighborhood, the Jewish Community Center has positioned itself ideally to fulfill that mission—now more than ever."



That positioning is evident at the Park Heights campus as well as Owings Mills.

"Our future is in both places," said Sapolsky "They're different worlds, but we're in the right place in each of them."

When the Owings Mills acreage was purchased with money from the Dalsheimer family, it was considered a folly on a farm. No one, the naysayers argued, is going to *schlep* all the way out there no matter what's going on.



Since then, however, about a quarter of the land has been developed. There are now several ball fields, a new preschool and a new teen wing and Jews who once thought of Pikesville as pastoral have followed the JCC's lead by pushing ever deeper into northwest Baltimore County.

The concentration of Jewish life along Lombard Street and lower Park Heights has been replaced with suburban sprawl and neighborhoods have been replaced with developments.

So where do Jews of all persuasions congregate?

Where might they be reached?

The mall might be the right answer but it's the wrong place.

From Lamaze classes to senior programs "the JCC is a center of the Jewish community" said Matt Freedman, Director of Community Planning and Allocations for THE ASSOCIATED. "There has always been the home, work and synagogue-now there is need for a fourth place in Jewish life, and that will be the JCC."

Soaring membership supports this notion. JCC board member Larry Rosenberg has noted "recent unprecedented growth in membership and usage of over 20 percent. The JCC is literally bursting at the seams in both Park Heights and Owings Mills."

Indeed, about one in every five Jews in the Baltimore metro area belongs to the JCC, and even more participate in its programs.

More important than soaring membership and capital projects, said Rosenberg, are "intangible changes that need to be felt rather than seen."

Again—and again and yet again—the Vision is the map to the future.

"Our Vision is a concrete statement that speaks to Jewish

identity," said Sapolsky. "About 80 percent of our members come to us for exercise, but if we're smart, we'll take them from the treadmill to Jewish activities."

Dale Busch, arguing that modern man is lonely for true connections and getting lonelier with every bleep of a cell phone, is more blunt.

"We saw it coming for years," said Busch, a 30-year veteran of Jewish community work. "Once we Americanized Jews, now we Judaicize' Americans."

And therein lies the biggest challenge of all, that of guiding Jews who range from atheist to Orthodox toward overtly Jewish activities without offending anyone.

Mike Saxon does some quick cultural math on the importance of creating a sense of neighborhood.

"If people are ambivalent about their Jewish identity, then they don't partake of Jewish educational opportunities, they don't

volunteer their time, they don't contribute to Jewish causes," he said.

"Over time—in very tangible ways—the whole community suffers this lack of identity."

According to a broad outline of its preferred future, the JCC seeks "a new vocabulary for talking about concepts that are important to us."

Steven Rod, a social worker who serves as Vice President of Professional

Development for the JCC Association of North America, sees the Baltimore JCC taking the lead in creating the language of vision for others.

"They've stepped forward to take the leadership on this issue," said Rod, who guided a pair of day-long retreats that forged the Vision Statement. "In a condensed amount of time, they came up with a document that all Jews could buy into—from cultural to the Orthodox. It was hard work."

The real work is just beginning. The future—preferred or not—does not exist until we move forward to meet it. Unspoiled, it is always just beyond our reach.

Right now, there is no new Jewish neighborhood befitting the intimacy of the word, only what we remember and what we desire.



Enter Nina Beth Cardin, a rabbi on the JCC staff whose very function within the group—Director of Jewish Life—would have been unthinkable a decade ago. As would the way she begins each JCC board meeting with a short discussion of one Jewish theme or another.

When Cardin imagines the new Jewish neighborhood, she dreams of sacred ground, every bit as holy as the soil beneath your grandmother's rose-bush, the one that's still blooming somewhere on Reservoir Hill.

"These days, it's a lot harder for us to bump into each other for meaningful moments," said Cardin. "If we are really going to be a neighborhood—we need a place for meaningful serendipitous meetings.

°I would like to see our outdoor space as a point of destination... a place where a young mother wakes up on a beautiful Sunday morning and instead of choosing the zoo or the Inner Harbor... chooses us."

Imagine that.

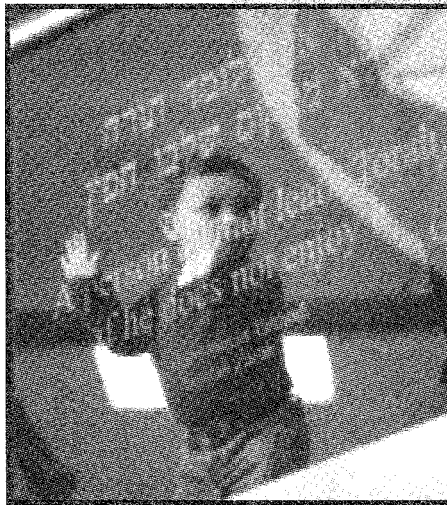
Twenty-first Century Jews choosing to be in a place where they will not only encounter a little bit of Hebrew wisdom carved on the walls and artsy renderings of the Star of David, but other Jews with whom to nurture their mind, body and soul.

All this plus a dip in the pool for a few *shekels* a year.

What's not to like?

And what better way for meaningful, seemingly happenstance encounters to occur—for Jews across the board to find their way back to one another—than to travel along shining paths at a great good place?

"Every time a child or an adult moves farther along in their journey of Jewish identity it comes right back to the community," said Saxon. "It's a circle."





# vision Statement of the Jewish Corr

## Vision

A vision statement is created by an organization to describe a bold and exciting future. A successful vision becomes a goal that inspires the work of the organization. The JCC's Board has created this vision statement so that our leadership, our staff and concerned constituents can share in this exciting journey for the JCC.

## **A New Jewish Neighborhood**

Neighborhoods are where community happens. They are where people meet in familiar surroundings. They are where people hang out or walk around or go to find friends. A neighborhood is a place where just choosing to be there is a voluntary act of belonging. The JCC is Baltimore's Jewish neighborhood.

This neighborhood has four core values.

- The JCC Neighborhood is inclusive, welcoming every Jew into a comfortable environment that makes each person feel part of something special and familiar.
- The JCC Neighborhood promotes the Jewish value of communal responsibility-that we are all responsible for each other-and enhances this relationship by creating a culture of caring.
- The JCC Neighborhood recognizes that diversity is one of our community's great strengths and that we are all enriched by our differences.
- The JCC Neighborhood promotes partnerships with other Jewish institutions. The JCC has much to offer others in the process of building and maintaining a strong community, as well as much to gain from the expertise and resources of others.

The JCC will develop, promote, and maintain a new Jewish neighborhood that strengthens and celebrates the Baltimore Jewish community by:

- Maintaining that all Jews are bound together as a community and responsible for one another,
- Promoting an inclusive, spirited environment that

Our neighborhood connects us to the memories of our past and the opportunities of our future.

## ***Strengthening and Celebrating the Community***

As a constituent agency of THE ASSOCIATED: Jewish Community Federation of Baltimore, the JCC works to ensure that the community remains strong so that the coming generations of Baltimore's Jews can enjoy a good "quality of Jewish life." Through its commitment to its core values, including its partnership with other Jewish institutions, the JCC will help individuals to both strengthen their Jewish identities and adopt the sense of communal responsibility that is central to Judaism.

## ***Personal Journey of Jewish Identity***

Each individual follows a unique path in the development of his or her Jewish identity. The JCC can help people along their personal journeys, and can help

celebrates the diversity of our community, and

Developing mutually beneficial partnerships with other Jewish institutions.

Our "JCC Neighborhood" will invite individuals to progress along their personal journey of Jewish identity and learning by connecting them with pathways filled with meaningful Jewish experiences.

them to recognize the value of participating in a community with which they share a common set of values, a common history, a common destiny and a commitment to acting as a group to ensure the welfare of others.

A community that is rich in Jewish life, culture, and opportunities for learning is created and maintained by individuals who strongly identify as Jews and value their community. Therefore, the community is strengthened every time a child or adult moves farther along his or her journey of Jewish identity. This strengthened Jewish community then provides a better medium for the individual journeys of others.

*Pathways*

The JCC connects individuals with pathways—unlimited series of opportunities for spiritual, physical, emotional, and intellectual growth within a Jewish context. The JCC uses its core services (health and fitness, preschool, camping and adult services) to attract new

participants to the JCC Neighborhood. Then the JCC consciously provides opportunities for individuals beginning with one experience to find that their pathway intersects with other experiences.

The JCC's core value of partnership provides a unique opportunity to expand its pathways by seamlessly leading participants from programs and services inside the JCC to those that are outside the JCC.

The goal of the JCC with regard to pathways is to proactively answer the question, "Where do I go from here?"

*Meaningful Jewish Experiences*

The JCC seeks to provide individuals with meaningful Jewish experiences that have the ability to propel them down their personal paths to stronger Jewish identities and more fulfilled Jewish lives. Experiences may become meaningful when an idea or a special moment generates a spark in a receptive mind or creates a special memory. Each individual finds meaning in a different way.

The JCC begins by creating the best programs possible and then provides the opportunity for staff and volunteers to act as positive Jewish role models. Additionally, the JCC offers access to programs, surroundings, shared common experiences, and opportunities to develop special relationships with other members and staff—all of which contribute to the potential for meaningful Jewish experiences in the JCC Neighborhood.

## Buldin a Vision in the 1st century

It started about three years ago with words, as most things do among Jews.

Lots of words and ideas shared by a small group of JCC staff and lay leaders. This "leadership group" talked about where the JCC could go to better serve the community and how it could get there.

Vision was paramount.

Slowly, the words began to fall into place, and themes emerged: Jewish diversity is a communal asset to be celebrated; the importance of providing a place where all Jews feel included; the benefits of partnering with other Jewish organizations.

These values were tested by the JCC Board, which began to discuss the fledgling ideas at its meetings in the context of

re-envisioning the role of JCC in the Jewish community.

Before long, the Board had begun to think like visionaries.

Brainstorm followed brainstorm, something new invariably bubbling to the surface... the recognition that the JCC has a valid role to play in helping its members to strengthen their Jewish identity... the concept of JCC members traveling on

decidedly Jewish journeys — routes both physical and poetic.

But how to bring it all together?

An outside facilitator was needed, someone with experience relevant to the project, yet not part of it. The leadership group selected Steven Rod, Vice President of Professional Development for the JCC Association of North America, and shared a preliminary document with him that summarized the ideas that had been discussed to date.

Rod helped the JCC organize two retreats with both lay and staff leaders. Nineteen people attended a pair of five-hour sessions at the JCC's Park Heights Avenue campus.

At the first retreat, the preliminary document served as the basis for discussion. Participants worked in groups to break down the fledgling vision into basic concepts and to expand upon each



one. This process, which was lively, passionate, and sometimes heated, led to some concepts being abandoned and others revised. In the end, a writing group was chosen to put the vision into words.

As the writing group hashed out the final wording of the Vision Statement, the leadership group produced a draft of commentary based on discussions from the first retreat. At the second retreat, the draft Vision Statement was finalized, and small groups began reviewing the commentary and making adjustments. Fine-tuning continued after the retreats and, together with the facilitator, the leadership group made final edits.

More than two and a half years after it began to emerge in casual discussions among JCC staff and lay leaders, a ready-to-install Vision Statement was presented to the entire Board, which enthusiastically adopted it and began seeking ways to put it to use.

Immediately, it became the measure by which to count off paces toward a preferred future: Are we creating a place in which Jews experience, absorb and share all that it means to be Jewish?



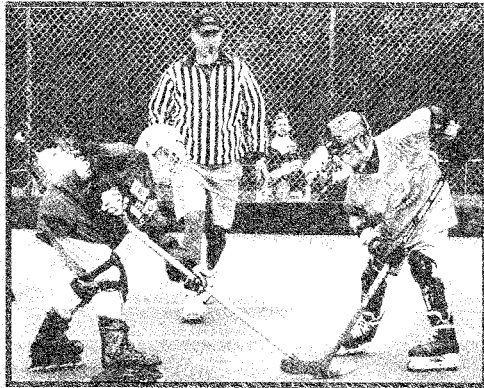
afemen, £very"

he folks at the helm of the JCC wasted no time in getting started. Long before the Vision that will guide them through the next decade was codified in a formal statement, they began looking for ways to implement the spirit behind it.

But how?

Arthur Adler, the JCC's current president, says, "I believe that, as the JCC makes major decisions about programs, the first criterion will be whether the new program is consistent with our Vision Statement. If a discrepancy exists, the JCC must then determine if the program is not appropriate or if the Vision Statement needs to be revised."

Joseph Meyerhoff 11, a past JCC president, adds, "Vision statements require the staff and lay leadership to constantly remind themselves that this is their vision—not to let it sit on a shelf."



The path to the preferred future begins with the JCC staff. There will be staff retreats, breakfast meetings, and poolside chats to kick ideas around. Jewish values will trickle down from sports coaches to the kid playing hockey who is going through a difficult time that his teammates know nothing about.

Rachel Lachow, in her second year as a member of the JCC Board, says "The Vision will change the way work gets done... helping people who are looking for spiritual guidance to get in touch with their Jewishness. The Vision Statement created this shift; made it a stated goal."

"We've made a very strong statement," said the JCC's immediate past president Michael Saxon. "We're going to be driven by our values and the belief that if you give someone a gentle push at the right time in their life, you can send them to the next good thing."

As Rabbi Nina Beth Cardin, Director of Jewish Life, explains, "Each and every interaction with a member is paramount. Judaism is made through community, not experts."

And more than that, the JCC can become a new Jewish neighborhood.

Bob Manekin, another JCC past president, relates, "The JCC is uniquely qualified to serve as a neighborhood for all members of Baltimore's Jewish community. It meets their needs without regard to affiliation and degree of religious observance. With the new Vision, we are collectively responsive to the needs of everyone in the community"

In this neighborhood, single parents and working parents too busy to catch their breath will enjoy pizza parties at the end of workdays they thought would never end.

Preschool teachers will receive bonuses for putting the new Vision into practice and grants will be available to those teachers who come up with new ideas on how to do it.

And the tricky challenge of interfaith families will be addressed in a series of welcoming programs.

"We're going to deal with issues like this now," declares Dale Busch, "because this is what the community looks like."

Bernard Manekin, a JCC president in the early 1950s, explains, "The JCC has to adapt itself to changing lifestyles ...and it's not going to be a simple task. They may not get neighborhood the way we used to think of it, but perhaps they will put the Jewish imprimatur of family and extended family on everything they do."

"We're so new to this," said Saxon. "It may take years, but we'll be looking for evidence that our Vision has helped the JCC strengthen the Jewish community"



At the staff retreats, everyone from the folks who open the doors in the morning, to the teachers who wave goodbye to the kids in the afternoon, will begin to absorb the breadth of the JCC's Vision for its future.

After the retreats, these 100 or so people will go back to Park Heights Avenue and Owings Mills to share what they have learned—what they have felt—with the people who use the JCC and its programs.

Their basic text will be the Vision Statement.



Arthur A. Adler  
JCC President

Michael Saxon  
Late Past JCC President

Buddy Sapolsky  
JCC Executive Director



Jerome B. Makowsky  
JCC Association Chair

Allan Finkelstein  
JCC Association President



Morton Plant  
Chairman of the Board

Darrell D. Friedman  
President

The Jewish Community Center of Greater Baltimore is an agency supported by THE ASSOCIATED Jewish Community Federation of Baltimore and an affiliate agency of the Jewish Community Centers Association.

JCC Association - Non-Profit America is the leadership network of and central force for the Jewish Community Center Movement, which is comprised of more than 275 JCCs, YM-YWHA's, and camps in the United States and Canada, which annually serve more than one million members and an additional million non-member users.