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South African Jewish Report

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Israeli's arrest puts spotlight on transnational crime

NICOLA MILTZ

The high-profile extradition hearing of notorious Israeli fugitive and alleged crime kingpin Yaniv Yossi Ben Simon attracted a watertight police and military presence at the Randburg Magistrates' Court this week.

It follows the dramatic swoop on this top Israeli crime figure in Gauteng last Thursday, 17 November, in which he and seven others were arrested in an early morning raid that netted an astonishing weapons cache, stolen vehicles, drugs, and hordes of cash.

The arrests, conducted by a multidisciplinary operation led by Interpol South Africa, organised crime detectives, National Crime Intelligence, and the Special Task Force, sent shock waves through the country. It has shone a light on the steady increase in transnational organised crime and growing unease that South Africa has become a haven for it.

The media has now been barred from court proceedings as part of strict security measures due to sensitive information and security around the high-profile case.

Ben Simon, 46, and the seven other men appeared in the Randburg Magistrates' Court in Johannesburg on Monday, 21 November. Ben Simon, who has apparently been living in South Africa since 2007, is wanted by Israel on a number of charges and on suspicion of being a close associate of jailed Israeli crime boss Yitzhak Abergil, the leader of the so-called Abergil organisation, a crime syndicate.

Abergil, who is linked to an investigation known as Case 512, is serving three life sentences and an additional 30 years in an Israeli jail for the murder of three uninvolved bystanders in a 2003 bombing that was an attempted hit on rivals, as part of his role as

head of an organised crime group involved in drug trafficking, extortion, and other criminal activities.

Ben Simon was allegedly involved in the attempted hit on rivals of the Abergil syndicate in two separate incidents in 2003 and 2004. The Abergil syndicate has long been considered a central player in Israel's criminal underworld, according to the *Times of Israel*.

The exact crimes Ben Simon is alleged to have committed are as yet unknown, but more is expected to be revealed in extradition papers.

Ben Simon isn't your typical Al Capone-style mobster as he doesn't lead a flashy lifestyle or wear fancy clothes, according to reliable sources. He seems to operate quietly under the radar and, because of this, security insiders say, he has been able to evade arrest for several years.

National Prosecuting Authority spokesperson Phindi Mjonondwane said the case against the group of suspects was being held in-camera without media or members of the public being allowed in.

The case against the eight accused was postponed to 28 November.

Ben Simon is expected in court on Thursday, 24 November, where his attorney, Ian Levitt, is expecting to be handed the extradition papers outlining the exact nature of the alleged offences his client is wanted for by Israeli authorities.

Levitt told the *SA Jewish Report* on Wednesday, "We haven't seen the charge sheet yet. We'll get the extradition papers on Thursday. No further comment."

Ben Simon, whose high-walled, electric-fenced, rented home where the arrests took place, in the upmarket suburb of Bryanston in Johannesburg, has been described by the South African Police Service as one of Israel's

most wanted criminals. He has appeared on Interpol's Red List since 2015.

During the police operation, the discovery of a 3kg substance thought to be cocaine, several assault rifles including AK47s, an array of firearms, drones fitted with cameras, and stolen motorbikes and vehicles were among the items seized. A sniper van with an inbuilt soundproofed compartment was also discovered, as well as bullet-proof vests, money counting machines, and a scale for weighing drugs.

Sources in policing circles said the items seized pointed towards a syndicate that was possibly carrying out hits and kidnappings.

National police spokesperson Colonel

Athlenda Mathe, without naming Ben Simon, said last week that the accused was wanted in Israel and was "attached to a criminal organisation [there] called the Abergil organisation".

Chad Thomas of IRS Forensic Investigations, which investigates financial crimes, said, "South Africa is perceived to be a haven for fugitives," with cases going back to that of Italian mafia boss Vito Palazzolo and the most well-known being Czech crime boss Radvan Krejcir.

"Although Krejcir hid in plain sight, he continued his criminal activities, and it seems the Israelis have also continued unabated with criminal activities in South

Africa just like they had allegedly been doing in Israel," he said.

"The greater concern is that during the raids, an arsenal of weapons was found. Some were converted to sniper rifles. [There were also] illicit narcotics and stolen motorcycles. We have seen that motorcycles are the easiest vehicle to use for a hit, so the fact that there were stolen motorcycles, converted firearms, and a converted bakkie with a sniper's den suggests that they may, in fact, be a group that's available for murder for hire [assassins]. These guys may have been here hiding as fugitives, but they were also prepared to continue criminal activities locally," he said. **Continued on page 4>>**

Legendary Achievers



Winners of the 2022 Absa Jewish Achiever Entrepreneur Award, Justin and Greg Blend, and Grant Friedman

Photo: Ilan Ossendryver

See Absa Jewish Achiever Awards magazine (included) and pages 9 to 17 for all you want to know about the awards evening

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Too close for comfort, say SA olim about bus bombings

TALI FEINBERG

South African *olah* and Jerusalem resident Ilanit Liberman and her husband usually catch a bus to work and university every day, but on the morning of 23 November, she was working from home and he was running late for his studies. "Thank G-d, because our final stop is right near where the bomb went off, and we usually arrive very close to the time when the bombing happened," she told the *SA Jewish Report* on Wednesday, 23 November.

This former journalist was referring to two bombs that rocked bus stops at crowded entrances to Jerusalem early on Wednesday morning, killing a teenager and sending about 20 people to hospital, some in serious condition.

"If we had caught the bus, it would definitely have been a very different story," says Liberman. "We get off a bit away from there, but we would have heard and seen what was happening. It's a scary 'what if' situation. It hit close to home, as that's a bus stop and area I know well, and I've taken buses from there numerous times. If I miss the bus to work, I usually run down to that bus stop to catch another bus that can drop me near my office. So, I've been there in the mornings, and it's bustling and hectic. It was peak time. I'm shocked."

Jerusalemites are on edge, she says, as this is the first time that this city has been hit by a bus bomb in years. However, there have been a wave of terrorist attacks in Israel over the past few months. They were mostly stabbings and car rammings, including in an attack in the West Bank last week that consisted of both, and killed three people.

A 16-year-old yeshiva student named Aryeh Shtsupak was killed in Wednesday's Jerusalem bombing. Shtsupak, from Har Nof, a largely Orthodox neighbourhood, is believed to have held Canadian and American citizenship, according to local media reports.

Another South African *olah* who lives in Jerusalem, Dinah Poyurs, says she drives past the spot where the first explosion took place all the time. "I've always taken it for granted that the area was totally safe, and I'm sure the next time I drive past it will feel very different," she says.

"Whenever there's war or an act of terrorism in the country,

there's always an uneasy energy, but it sometimes doesn't set in right away. One of the craziest things about living in Israel is that unfortunately, events such as this are nothing new, and the most important thing we can do is to keep living our lives and pray for safety," Poyurs says.

South African *oleh* Philip Stodel lives about 20km east of Jerusalem, but happened to be in the centre of Jerusalem on a film shoot on Wednesday. He says "everything is bustling and looks very much like business as usual". He isn't anxious for his safety.

Zimbabwean and South African *oleh* Daniel Hasson is executive director at the Jerusalem Intercultural Center. "Our approach is that life must go on," he says. "I was on my way to a course we're hosting for diplomats about the city of Jerusalem. People asked if we would cancel, and the answer was obviously not."



Police and security personnel at the scene of the terrorist attack in Jerusalem on Wednesday

South Africa *oleh* Solly Kaplinski, who has lived in Jerusalem for 23 years, says, "I was driving to work when my wife called asking if I was okay. Once again there's an awful *déjà vu* of the horrors of the second intifada and the devastating tragedy of bombs exploding in crowded places with traumatic effect. Once again, it instils a fear of 'are we going to be able to get on buses safely? Are we going to have to look over our shoulders? Is this a new intifada?' It's a frightening thought for all Israeli citizens, whether they're Jewish or Arab."

This week's bomb attacks are the first time in years that terrorists used bombs in a deadly assault against Israelis, and police say they believe the bombs were detonated remotely.

Shabbat – the sauce of blessing

Torah Thought



Rabbi Dr David Nossel

The holy day of Shabbat is intimately related to the concept of blessing. Hashem blessed the Shabbat. The rabbis call it the source of blessing.

Shabbat isn't just filled with lots of blessings, it's filled with lots of food. Lots and lots of food. So much so, that food seems to be at the epicentre of the importance of the day. We're expected to eat at least three meals over the course (pardon the pun) of the day. And the opening blessing on the bread at each meal needs to be made on not one, but two loaves. And it's not enough to merely eat a lot. Oh no! Our Shabbat meals are traditionally garnished with *zemirot* (songs) which have us singing about eating a lot too!

If that's not enough, when our sages tell us that on Shabbat we're blessed with an extra soul, a *neshama yeteira*, the great commentator, Rashi, explains that the purpose of this extra soul is to – wait for it – allow us to eat more! I kid you not.

So what's going on here? It appears that the blessings of Shabbat are directed more at our tummies than our hearts and souls. Something fishy – and soupy and meaty and desserty – is going on here.

The preoccupation with food on Shabbat would, indeed, be hard to swallow if it weren't for one important realisation: the food we

eat on Shabbat isn't only for the calories and energy it provides for Shabbat itself. For sure not. All the additions to the Shabbat menu are intended for the energy that they provide after Shabbat. And it's because they are for after Shabbat that they bring blessing.

What's blessing? Blessing is when something has goodness that isn't primarily for itself, but

for that which is outside of itself, that which comes after itself.

When Shabbat provides for something that comes after Shabbat, for the six days of doing, the time of creativity and of contribution, it becomes blessed.

When Shabbat food is enjoyed for its ability to energise us for what we can accomplish after Shabbat, it's transformed into the sauce of blessing.

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Journalists Nicola Miltz • Tali Feinberg • Junior Reporter Saul Kamionsky • Photographer Ilan Ossendryver • Editorial co-ordinator Dylan Berger – editorial@sajewishreport.co.za

Proofreader Kim Hatchuel Advertising Britt Landsman: 082 292 9520 – britt@sajewishreport.co.za • New business development manager Laura Kaufman laura@sajewishreport.co.za • Design and layout Bryan Maron/Design Bandits – bryan@designbandits.co.za • Distribution Sandy Furman Subscriptions Avusa Publishing (Pty) Ltd. Tel: 0860 525 200 • Board of Directors Howard Sackstein (Chairperson), Dina Diamond, Herschel Jawitz, Shaun Matisonn, Benji Porter. • Advertisements and editorial copy do not necessarily reflect the views of the editor, staff and board of directors. Tel: 011 430 1980.

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Grammy win plays second fiddle to Chev honour, says Autumn Rowe

NICOLA MILTZ

For music producer, songwriter, and performer Autumn Rowe, winning a Grammy for Best Album of the Year was her second-best moment, but being brought to South Africa by the Chevrah Kadisha to talk to 996 Jewish women last week was her best.

When she won the Grammy, she thought it was the “best moment” of her life, until she was embraced by the Chev, brought into its magnanimous fold, and shown the “true meaning of community.”

“I thought my greatest honour would be winning the biggest music award on music’s biggest night but then the Chev came along,” said Rowe at the Chev’s fundraiser last Thursday, 17 November, at the Sandton Convention Centre.

“The Chev cares for all people. I’ve never seen anything like it. I don’t know of any organisations like this back home, we really need it,” she said.

Until this week, Rowe shied away from revealing too much about her past because she said she didn’t want people to feel sorry for her or think less of her. “I also wanted to wait until there was a happy ending, as the world often feels sad enough,” she said.

After a lifetime of struggle, perseverance, and determination to succeed, Rowe recently won a Grammy for *We Are*, with Jon Batiste, at the 64th Grammy Awards, where she was nominated for four awards. She co-wrote five of the winning album’s 13 tracks.

Not only is this a happy ending, it appears to



In keeping with her award-winning song titled *We Are*, the theme for the evening reflected the lyrics of the chorus, “We are the golden ones.”

Rowe, who is the embodiment of triumph over adversity, revealed to the audience her closely guarded childhood traumas. “Tonight is by far the biggest honour of my life, being in South Africa – a lifelong dream – and the most special thing I’ve ever had happen,” she said.

“I wonder if my mother and I had help from an organisation like the Chev how much easier my journey would have been,” she told the *SA Jewish Report*, recalling a childhood spent in the South Bronx with her Jewish mother, where they were very poor and often alone.

be the beginning of infinite possibilities for the glamorous vocal coach, vocalist, and DJ, who has worked her way up through the unforgiving ranks in the most competitive industry of all.

Her father was a drug addict, and when she was five years old, it became clear to her that no one was coming to help them.

“The streets were filled with colourful little bottles that looked like candy to a child but were in fact filled with crack,” she recalls.

There were drug dealers on every corner and violent gangs. It was a time of fear and isolation, in which she and her mother were homeless for many years, living in shelters and washing in church bathrooms.

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“Still, I was full of hope I’d get out of there one day,” she said.

In one of the projects where she lived, she often heard hip-hop and rhythm and blues coming from the park. “I was always drawn to the music,” she said.

She attended a school for gifted children. At 16, she decided to focus on a career in music. It was tough and gruelling.

“I never gave up, and continued to throw myself into the music industry. There was no Plan B.”

Working dozens of jobs, she relentlessly kept writing and performing for 12 years, wondering as she approached 30 if she’d ever get a lucky break. Eventually, Rowe wrote the dance anthem, *Happiness*, behind the 2010 FIFA World Cup, featuring Alexis Jordan.

“That song changed my life,” she said.

As a celebrated vocal coach, she appeared in season two of *The X Factor*, and has been the only vocal coach on *America’s Got Talent* for five years, working with Simon Cowell. She’s also an accomplished DJ, having attended DJ school at the age of 35 and

becoming engrossed in music production. She’s now a big cheese in the industry with her Diana Ross single, *I Still Believe*, recently remixed, and collaborations with some of the industry’s biggest names including Dua Lipa, Pitbull, and Zendaya under her belt.

“At 40, I won my first Grammy. This made me the second black woman ever to win as a producer for album of the year, and the first black Jewish woman to win,” she said proudly.

“I had so many reasons to give up, but I didn’t,” she said, saying she hopes her story inspires people to keep going.

“Our circumstances don’t have to determine where we end up, but they might force us to find a

more creative way to figure out where we want to go. We’re bigger than our obstacles, nothing is as beautiful as the human spirit,” Rowe said.

There have been many highlights visiting South Africa, she said, including meeting members of the Jewish community, seeing the inspiring work of the Chev, visiting Constitution Hill, listening to Albie Sachs – “a lifetime highlight” – visiting the Kruger Park, and eating her first Friday night dinner at Robbie Brozin’s house.

Her mother, Meg Fischgrund, and her husband, Even Stenvold Tysse, accompanied her to South Africa.

“My childhood was so rough, I was always in a bit of a survival state. There wasn’t room for much tradition. I didn’t spend much time thinking about my identity or what it was to be Jewish or black. That’s a luxury. I just accepted that I’m both. My mom said we were Jewish because she is, so that was that. She raised me by herself, that’s all I knew. Our roots are from Austria and Hungary.

“Once things settled, my mom incorporated a menorah and we had our version of Chanukah sometimes. My mom didn’t grow up in a healthy household herself, so she wasn’t raised with many traditions. Forming my own extended family as an adult, having Shabbat with friends, and learning through books, has been amazing,” Rowe said.

She said what most resonated with her about South Africa was the word “community”. “It’s felt here in the most literal sense. To see the love in the Jewish community, togetherness, and warmth is truly special.

“It’s a place like no other, and has touched me beyond [imagining]. Everyone told me that South Africa would be a life-changing experience, but I didn’t expect to gain a whole family. The Chev is now a part of my family. There’s a healing energy here which the world needs.”

As an accomplished songwriter, Rowe feels that she now has a platform to speak out against racism and antisemitism in a fractured world where she’s both black and Jewish, giving her a unique perspective, but it’s no easy task and a constant work in progress.

“As if this trip wasn’t special enough, I created a song I love so much with musicians Msaki and Jesse Clegg for The Chev which is filled with love of South Africa. I can’t wait to share this song with the world.”

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Jewish groups condemn SA cosying up to Iran

TALI FEINBERG

“For the past two months, the Iranian government has violently suppressed protests calling for women’s rights. It’s morally repugnant that our government would welcome the Iranian minister during the 16 Days of Activism, or at any time.”

So said South African Zionist Federation (SAZF) spokesperson, Rolene Marks, this week, following the South African government’s invitation to Iranian foreign minister, Dr Hossein Amir-Abdollahian, to visit South Africa on 28 November in the middle of the 16 Days of Activism for No Violence Against Women and Children campaign. In addition, the government has invited Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi to visit in 2023.

“These invitations portray the hypocrisy of the African National Congress (ANC) government’s commitments to fighting gender-based violence (GBV),” said Marks. “The South African government has yet to utter a single word of support for the women and girls of Iran.”

The SAZF isn’t alone. The South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD) was equally scathing of the government’s invitation to Iranian leaders while their country has unleashed a massive crackdown on citizens protesting its authoritarian regime and oppression of women, girls, and minorities. Meanwhile, South Africa continues to distance itself from Israel, Iran’s sworn enemy.

“As the streets of Iran echo with chants of “Women, life, liberty” and peaceful protestors demand fundamental human rights for the women of their country, it’s deeply shameful that the South African government would welcome a state visit from Iran,” says SAJBD spokesperson Alana Baranov.

“The wave of women-led protests in Iran were sparked by the brutal murder in police custody of 22-year-old Mahsa Amini, arrested by Iran’s notorious ‘morality police’ for allegedly wearing her head scarf too loosely. In the weeks that followed Amini’s death, thousands of

Iranian women and their supporters have taken to the streets. The protestors have encountered brutal violence. The rising death toll has been widely condemned by many governments and international organisations. South Africa has been silent.

“The values of Iran, a theocratic and highly oppressive state, are diametrically opposed to the democratic principles of South Africa,” says Baranov. “Our country, with its long history of women leaders at the forefront of the struggle against apartheid and building a free and equal South Africa, should be a voice for freedom, equality, and dignity for all. We betray the values of the Freedom Charter and our Constitution, as well as the memory of our women leaders, when we don’t stand up for women’s rights around the world.

“Instead of rolling out the red carpet for repressive leaders with the blood of Iranian women and children on their hands, our government should be adding our voice to condemning the violence and calling for full and equal human rights for all citizens of Iran,” says Baranov.

Corné Mulder, a member of parliament and chief whip of the Freedom Front Plus, asked International Relations Minister Dr Naledi Pandor on 8 November to confirm the visits. He also asked, among other questions, “whether, considering that the Iranian regime ascribes to values that are diametrically opposed to the principles on which the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa is based, her department has found that the visit could undermine the fight against GBV in South Africa and around the world? What’s the position of the republic on



Minister of International Relations and Cooperation Dr Naledi Pandor



Iranian Foreign Minister Dr Hossein Amir-Abdollahian

the repression of women’s rights by Iran?” Pandor confirmed the visits, saying that Amir-Abdollahian will participate in the 15th Session of the South Africa-Iran Joint Commission of Co-operation in South Africa on 29 November.

“A state visit by President Raisi will allow for engagement at the highest political level with the objective of strengthening bilateral relations and exchanging views on a number of political, economic, and social issues including human rights, as South Africa will serve as a member of the Human Rights Council from 2023,” she said. “Sectoral visits to Iran earlier this year in May, August, and October already focused on policies and programmes by the two countries to support women empowerment. In this regard, I am of the view that an engagement could enrich the efforts of both countries towards the empowerment of women.

“We’re concerned about discrimination and oppression based on race, gender, sexual orientation, religion, and origin as outlined by our Constitution,” she said. “In this regard, South Africa makes its views heard in different forums, depending on the context and individual incidents. We’ll engage with Iran on concerns we have regarding discrimination and violence against women.”

In addition, Iranian media reported that Amir-Abdollahian and Pandor held a phone conversation on 16 November where “the Iranian foreign minister welcomed the readiness of both sides to take great strides in line with the further enhancement of the ties between the two countries”.

Samuel Hyde, formerly from South Africa and now a Middle-East affairs political researcher at the Institute for Monitoring Peace and Cultural Tolerance in Israel, says, “Following South Africa’s refusal to condemn the Russian invasion of Ukraine, Pandor’s decision to increase bilateral engagement with Iran at a time where its citizens are fighting for their freedom represents a catastrophic error in judgement. This may come as no surprise to some, granted Pandor’s willingness to overlook, and in some cases support, the activities of the Iranian-backed terror organisation Hamas.”

But, says local political analyst Steven Gruz, “The ANC has long allied with post-revolutionary Tehran after

1979, and isn’t too concerned about alleged human rights abuses in Iran. South Africa has strongly opposed sanctions on Iran and defended its right to develop nuclear energy for peaceful purposes. South Africa also sees Iran as a counterweight to the West, in addition to BRICS (the economic grouping of Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa). South Africa would support Iran joining BRICS if it applied.”

Marks says the United States and European Union have exercised harsh sanctions against the Iranian government in response to Iranian police opening fire on crowds of people mourning at Amini’s grave.

“According to the non-government organisation Iran Human Rights, as many as 378 civilians, including 47 children, have been killed by the regime during the past two months, and a protestor has been sentenced to death by the Revolutionary Court,” she says. “Evidence indicates that the Islamic Republic may be planning to carry out hasty executions of at least 20 protestors facing charges punishable by death, as per official reports.”

She points to comments by the director of Iran Human Rights, Mahmood Amiry-Moghaddam, who said, “The international community must strongly warn the Islamic Republic of the consequences of executing protestors, [by] summoning their ambassadors and implementing stronger effective human rights action against state officials.”

“As the world denounces the oppression of women by the Iranian regime, the ANC government welcomes it,” says Marks. “The SAZF strongly condemns this engagement, and calls on the ANC-led South African government to stand with the Iranian people.”

The SA Jewish Report sent questions to the Department of International Relations and Cooperation (Dirco), including why South Africa had invited Iranian dignitaries considering the country’s human rights abuses; South Africa’s reaction to the deaths of protestors including children; how South Africans are meant to interpret the fact that our government has invited this foreign minister during our 16 Days of Activism; what it intends to say to the foreign minister about it; why South Africa condemns Israel for supposed oppression but not Iran; and if South Africa will be recalling its ambassador to Iran.

There was no response from Dirco at the time of going to print.

Israeli’s arrest puts spotlight on transnational crime

>>>Continued from page 1

Crimes had already been committed, Thomas said, namely the alleged illegal possession of firearms and narcotics and illegal possession of stolen vehicles, and the fact that the prime suspect was an international fugitive.

“What now needs to be established is whether further crimes have been committed such as actual drug trafficking, manufacturing, and or murder for hire,” he said.

Though there was the perception that South Africa was a haven for fugitives, Thomas commended law enforcement agencies in this case.

“Our detective units and South African Special Task Force and Interpol were integral in this take down, which didn’t happen overnight. It took planning, surveillance, and intelligence for this operation to take place swiftly and seamlessly without a shot being fired. This shows the professionalism of our police and the fact that we have the ability to deal with organised crime,” he

said. “It’s bad enough that we have enough home-grown criminals to last us a life time and create so much work for our authorities. We shouldn’t allow for the importation of these criminals, and that’s why it’s good that the authorities went in hard and made sure they stamped their authority all over this,” he said.

Thomas said state law enforcement authorities were willing to prosecute serious crimes, and the country has excellent legislation to combat organised crime, but they are let down by lack of capacity, infrastructure, resources, and political will.

Community Active Protection Chairperson Sean Jammy said, “We laud the authorities for this great success. It’s evident from this and other cases that organised criminals live among us, and while they may not present an immediate threat or risk to our safety, the number of lives destroyed and societal impact of organised crime is massive.”



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Martin Levick arrested on fraud charges

NICOLA MILTZ

Sequestered Johannesburg businessman and alleged fraudster, Martin Levick, who has evaded prosecution for many years, was this week arrested on fraud charges.

Levick was arrested on Monday, 21 November, after handing himself over at the Norwood Police Station on charges of fraud, forgery, and uttering.

Steven Segal, the director of Segal Super (Pty) Ltd, the trustee appointed to the Segal Super Fund (SSF) based in Australia, laid a criminal complaint against Levick in January 2020.

According to the complaint, Levick allegedly made fraudulent representations which induced the SSF to loan him about \$1 100 000 (R19 million) on a short-term basis in respect of a fictitious proposed deal for shares, and which loan was allegedly never repaid.

It's also alleged that he further defrauded the Segal family to the tune of millions of dollars.

Levick, the once high-flying former director and chief executive of investment house Genesis Capital (Pty) Ltd and Genesis Capital Partners (renamed Calculus), was sequestered in June 2019. He was previously accused of fleeing investors and former colleagues and friends of hundreds of millions of rands.

At the time of his sequestration saga, numerous creditors came forward claiming that Levick owed them tens of millions of rand through his "fraudulent" behaviour. Levick denied defrauding any creditors. Court papers described Levick as a wheeling and dealing businessman who got into trouble by allegedly borrowing from Peter to pay Paul.

It's understood that a warrant for Levick's arrest was issued last week, after which police attempted to arrest him at his mother, Cheri Levick's, home.

However, when the police arrived at the



Photo: Ian Ossendryver

Cheryl and the late Peter Michels

house, Levick evaded arrest by escaping through a window. He ran away, telling police he was in Polokwane.

Levick later handed himself over to police.

According to Greg Edelstein of Edelstein Farber Grobler (EFG) Incorporated, the attorneys for SSF, his bail hearing is scheduled to take place on Thursday, 24 November, at the Palm Ridge Magistrates Court. Levick remains in custody pending the hearing.

Earlier this year, the *SA Jewish Report* ran a story about how after pressure from the community, Levick paid back money he took from an elderly couple after allegedly inducing them to pay him for alleged fictitious investments.

He paid back most of the money he took from close family friends, Peter Michels – who has since passed away – and his wife, Cheryl, after promising to invest their life savings, only to leave them out of pocket.

The couple were reportedly left penniless

after Levick convinced them to hand over their money to him to invest.

The couple, once well off, were forced to rely on food parcels from Yad Aharon & Michael and money from the Chevrah Kadisha after allegedly investing their hard-earned life savings with Levick.

After months of fruitless attempts to try get their money back, the Michels turned to the Beth Din for assistance. A settlement agreement was drawn up on 2 December 2021, which Levick failed to honour timeously.

Pressure from all sides, including from the couple's attorney, Jeffrey Afriat, of EFG, who instituted criminal and civil proceedings, and the added pressure from the Beth Din, resulted in Levick paying back most of the money in June 2022.

Within a few weeks of the article in the *SA Jewish Report* and legal letters to the trustees of Levick's insolvent estate, as well as to banks, Levick settled most of the money owed.

While Levick's attorneys say he has settled the amount in full, the Michels' attorneys claim there's still money owing. Afriat, told the *SA Jewish Report* that the Michels had received the majority of the capital amount in terms of the settlement agreement before the Beth Din, however there was still an outstanding balance and interest. A criminal complaint of fraud, forgery, and uttering was reported in June 2022 against Levick and his mother, and an investigation is in progress.

Levick's attorneys declined to comment.

NY governor signs hate-crimes bill following threat against Jewish community

JACOB HENRY – JTA

Days after two men were arrested at Penn Station and charged with planning an attack on a synagogue, New York Governor Kathy Hochul signed legislation meant to combat hate and bias crimes.

The bills would require mandatory hate-crime-prevention training for individuals convicted of such crimes, as well as establish a state-wide campaign around inclusion, tolerance, and diversity.

"Before, this was optional," Hochul said in a press conference on Tuesday, 22 November, referring to the training for offenders. "The operative word now is mandatory. No discretion; this training will occur."

The campaign will include the first-ever Unity Summit, with community leaders from around the state gathering "to affirm our stand against hate", Hochul said.

"We'll have everybody," Hochul said. "Government officials, advocates, community leaders, religious leaders to help share practices because I want this to be

a national model."

Hochul said New York could teach the rest of the nation "how you can do things differently".

Hochul's announcement comes after a weekend that included the arrest of the two individuals who wanted to "shoot up a synagogue", and the shooting at an LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual, queer) club in Colorado Springs, Colorado, that left five dead and 25 wounded.

On Sunday, Hochul said state police would increase surveillance and protection efforts at synagogues and other vulnerable sites. And earlier in the month, the state made \$50 million (R863 million) available to strengthen security measures at organisations at risk of hate crimes, as well as \$46 million (R795 million) in federal funding for 240 such organisations across the state.

Hochul pointed to an Anti-Defamation League report that showed that the organisation counted 2 717 antisemitic incidents across the country last year, a 34% increase on the previous year and the highest since it began tracking in 1979.

"No young Jewish boy should ever have to look over his shoulder as he's walking to a yeshiva," Hochul said.



New York Governor Kathy Hochul

Photo: YouTube

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Do you feel the heaviness, which has weighed us down for much of this year, lifting? Are you still feeling the darkness brought on by loadshedding? Are you still concerned that so many are emigrating and leaving us behind?

Well, I feel a sense of relief and a lightness of being. I guess I've grown accustomed – although I hate the thought of it – to loadshedding, and I'm not convinced there are such a huge number of people emigrating. Besides, my sense is that the grass isn't greener wherever they're heading.

Perhaps it's the fact that we're speeding into our December holidays, and there's no time to be down about anything because there's way too much to finish before we can relax.

Then, in this community, it doesn't take much to recognise that what we have is so worth looking after and staying here for.

Last Thursday night, I joined almost 1 000 other Jewish women at the Chevrah Kadisha's fundraiser. I understand the Chev had to turn people away because so many women wanted to be there.

That hardly sounds like a community in distress or a community that's sparse and on its way out of here.

We gathered together, enjoyed each other's company, and celebrated the amazing reality that is the Chev. We shed a happy tear for the hundreds and hundreds of people whose lives have been saved in some way because of this incredible organisation.

It was an awesome evening, in which we couldn't get enough of one another. The joy of being at a gathering where we dressed up and hung out, being entertained and learning something, was incredible.

But the biggest message that came home to me is that we're here, we love each other, and we aren't going anywhere. Yes, there are people emigrating for many varied reasons, but most of us are happy right here in this wonderful community.

When Autumn Rowe – the Grammy Award-winning songstress and song writer – spoke about her tough childhood and how her life would have been different if there had been a Chev in New York, it resonated with me. We're so fortunate to have organisations like the Chev that we have created to sustain us on every level.

Then came the event that we on the *SA Jewish Report* work towards every single year – the Absa Jewish Achiever Awards. It's our fundraiser and the annual event that sustains us through the year.

It was inspiring seeing and hearing the phenomenal people who accepted the awards on Saturday night.

In terms of community, I couldn't have been more excited at Mark van Jaarsveld and the hierarchy of CAP winning the Mann Made Media Community Service Award. While so many people believe CAP to be a security company that protects people's homes, I have had the honour of witnessing the crime-fighting work it does.

Although CAP may feature in this newspaper every now and again, the work it does to bring down crime and catch criminals before they do more harm is quite frankly astonishing and mostly done behind the scenes. Nowhere else in the world would you find an organisation quite like this. And you simply don't find the calibre of professional like Mark and those he works with. We're so lucky to have them on our side.

Then, we heard from Mervyn Serebro about what inspired him to join Reach for a Dream and give so much hope and pleasure to youngsters for whom life has dealt a devastating blow. What a hero! What a *mensch*!

Award winner Advocate Carol Steinberg could be defending criminals or innocent people arrested for crimes, but she has chosen to focus on changing our country for the better, ridding it of corruption, hate speech, and so on. What an awesome human being she is!

Then there's Helen Lieberman, whose life is dedicated to uplifting those so much less fortunate than we are. This humble and dedicated veteran activist challenged more than 900 of us to do better in our lives. She called on us to step out of our comfort zone and be better human beings for those who share our country.

It is always so easy, she reminded us, to focus on our own lives and not worry about anything or anyone else. However, the reality is that if we don't do something – even something small – to help uplift others, who will? There aren't a lot of Helen Liebermans out there to do this work. So, if we all played a little part in helping others, we could make a real difference. She sure has.

Each winner was humble. Each winner was talented, dedicated, and passionate about what they do. Each winner was awesome, and each one – other than Pfizer chief Dr Albert Bourla, who won the Special and Extraordinary Award – grew up within our own special community. In fact, many of them went to one of our King David schools.

Are they unique? Yes, but so are we. We all have potential for greatness. It takes dedication and persistence to achieve.

Are their lives all wonderful and without stress and pain? No, they're human and have hardships like the rest of us. But life is what you make of it.

As our wise *SA Jewish Report* and Absa Jewish Achiever Award Chairperson Howard Sackstein said in his speech (paraphrasing Shimon Peres), both pessimists and optimists are going to die sometime, but they live such different lives. Like our winners, let's all strive to live different lives because it means something.

So, we can get depressed, frustrated, and angry with our situation and we can look around us and imagine that everyone is leaving us behind as they emigrate. Or, we can look around and see so many phenomenal people in our community living different lives that matter. Then, even loadshedding doesn't feel so bad!

On behalf of the *SA Jewish Report* team, we congratulate our winners, nominees, and everyone who participated in some way in the Absa Jewish Achiever Awards 2022.

Shabbat Shalom!
Peta Krost
Editor



Ag nee, Charlize, say sorry!

OPINION

MIKE ABEL



There has been much gnashing of teeth, disappointment, and possibly equal amounts of joy in South Africa over *onse* (our) Charlize saying that her home language, Afrikaans, "is a dying language, it's not a very helpful language" and claiming that only about 44 people still speak it.

Now this is quite a curious set of statements by our golden girl, a much loved and celebrated "*meisie*" back home. Charlize's Twitter handle is after all, @CharlizeAfrica, and there are many clips of her speaking in Afrikaans, swearing in Afrikaans as a joke, and when she came back to South Africa after winning her Oscar, she spoke *haar moeder taal* (her mother language) when being interviewed.

I have spent a few shiny moments in Charlize's glittering company on set, when I wrote the famous ad for Sun International, magnificently shot by Ian Gabriel. I was the chief operating officer of Ogilvy SA Group at the time, and we were looking to create a truly standout and memorable commercial for the brand.

Charlize had quite recently won her Oscar for *Monster*, and I thought who better to use as the iconic and emblematic "femme fatale" in the ad than her. Ironically, the script begins, "There is one place I can relax, where I can be myself..."

I'm not sure I could write that same script now?

So why did Charlize say this? Well, in part, I think she was trying to be funny and relatable. She knows well there aren't 44 Afrikaans speaking South Africans. More than seven million people speak it as their first language daily, and tens of millions more can speak and understand it as their second language.

I speak it pretty well as an entirely English Jewish "boytjie". Charlize may have even referred to someone like me as a "*rooinek*" when she grew up in South Africa. My Afrikaans neighbours and close friends certainly did. It's an insulting term (they used it in an only slightly more endearing way) because us "Englishmen" get red necks (burnt) from the sun as we're supposedly so used to the cold English weather. It's an old insult going back to the 1800s. And even if you are from Portuguese, Polish, and Lithuanian blood like me, the language can still earn you that ire.

I raise this because dyed-in-the-wool Afrikaners are usually incredibly proud of their language, culture, and heritage. And by her own admission, Charlize claims to have learnt English only as a late teen. That in itself is hugely questionable, as I don't know any other Afrikaans people who grew up in South Africa who couldn't speak English. So, she would have spoken *suiwer* (pure) Afrikaans, and by all accounts still does, to her mother, Gerda, who moved to America only when she was middle aged.

It's no secret that Charlize comes from a deeply troubled home with tragic circumstances, so there must be lasting scars in spite of her vast fame and wealth. Reminds me of that famous Peter Sarstedt song, *Marie Claire*, where he asks, "Where do you go to my lovely, when you're alone in your bed? Tell me the thoughts that surround you, I want to look inside your head." Which is, partly, what I'm trying to do here.

Afrikaners are a proud people. Smart and resourceful, many have gone on to achieve the most staggering successes locally and abroad. Many at the very top of the tech industry in Palo Alto today. And they're usually very loyal to their culture.

Now is Charlize proudly South African? I most definitely think so. Look at her Twitter handle above. And she contributes, meaningfully, as I understand it, to her foundation to change local lives.

Is she a proud Afrikaner though? Perhaps not, given her glib and rather insulting comments.

A few years ago, *Wallpaper* magazine apparently described Afrikaans as the ugliest language in the world. That allegedly incensed the Afrikaans owner of Richemont, Johann Rupert, who owns global luxury brands like Cartier and Mont Blanc, and he immediately pulled all his advertising from this publication. Little did *Wallpaper* realise the scale of its faux pas. I wonder what Johann makes of Charlize's comments. Not much, I imagine.

Afrikaans is a rich, descriptive, and wonderful language. Musicians like Karen Zoid and others have returned it to contemporary popularity, and the books and poems still written in Afrikaans harness prose and emotions like few languages. There's also no better language to swear in.

The sad thing about actors is they become world famous, rich, and very important, simply for being able to pretend to be other people in front of a camera or on stage. George Clooney isn't a doctor saving lives because he was in *ER*. But he earned 100 times more than a real doctor saving lives in an ER. Tom Cruise isn't a fighter pilot in the American Airforce, but he earned spectacularly more than any of them for pretending to be one, in *Top Gun 1 and 2*. And award machines like the Oscars are designed to enhance their global fame, power, and desirability. They are called "stars", and many of them believe it and drink the Kool Aid from behind their high walls in the Hollywood hills and beachfront mansions in Malibu. They are often, at such dizzying heights, like a star, hopelessly out of touch. As was Charlize, who never understood, in spite of being an actress, that words matter.

And hers, intended or not, were deeply hurtful and insulting to the Afrikaans community and many other South Africans. Those who celebrated her comments called Afrikaans the language of the oppressor, and yet the coloured community in South Africa mostly speak Afrikaans, and proudly so. It's like saying German is the language of the oppressor because of the Nazis. It's not the whole truth, it lacks context, scrutiny, and is just a blunt and



ill-considered statement because of the very real horrors and legacy of apartheid. And yes, those who perpetrated the crimes were mostly Afrikaners and certainly spoke the language, but that doesn't mean all Afrikaners were racists. Many fought valiantly against the evil system of oppression.

But maybe Charlize is embarrassed? She also has an adopted black son, Jackson, so she may wish to distance herself from her heritage? Who knows. We can only speculate.

I grew up with my grandparents speaking Yiddish. It's based on German, but with many blends of Hebrew, Aramaic, and Slavic languages. It's hardly spoken today but has had some popular resurgences lately, spoken and in music. It's wonderfully rich and descriptive. But I would never dream of calling it "not helpful" because it would be insulting and a betrayal of my culture.

So maybe Charlize, the star, has, like Icarus, flown too close to the sun. On this occasion, maybe her wings melted and she'll come crashing down to earth and apologise. For as Denzel Washington said to Will Smith after he assaulted Chris Rock at the Academy Awards, "At your highest moment, be careful. That's when the devil comes for you".

Charlize, stay humble, *en se jammer na jou mense* (say sorry to your people).

• Mike Abel is the founding partner and chief executive of M&C Saatchi Abel.

Novick still on SAA life raft in spite of resignation

TALI FEINBERG

When Gidon Novick took on the role of a director on the board of the Takatso Consortium at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, many saw it as a bright light in a dark time. South African Airways (SAA) was in the midst of business rescue, and many believed Novick was going to be the one to bring the skills to revive it. So, his resignation last week caused disappointment and confusion.

Yet, Novick told the *SA Jewish Report* this week that he wasn't disembarking from helping SAA. He was unfortunately unable to be effective in his role due to a lack of communication and answers, especially about the raising of capital. Novick decided that stepping down could enable him to make more of an impact than being in a role in which he felt he was going around in circles. "The overall question is how private skills can be leveraged to get involved properly and fix components of the country that need fixing," says Novick. "Private individuals putting up their hands to help are the only way things are going to get fixed. With the depth of skill in the Jewish community, there's a lot to be said for putting our hand up. At the same time, it's a complex process. The motivation of people you're dealing with isn't always aligned with that you want to do. There's that added challenge."

Looking back, he says, "the genesis of our involvement [in SAA] began in mid-2020. It was the start of the pandemic, and I wasn't doing a lot, so I got in touch with the department of public enterprises, asking if I could be of assistance in helping SAA come out of business rescue."

Novick was put in touch with the business-rescue practitioner, but nothing more happened. Six months passed, and Novick started a new venture, launching his airline, LIFT. He was then asked to bring his skills to the consortium.

"Over the past 18 months, it's gone a little bit off track," says Novick, referring to the lack of communication and progress. In addition, some thought he was conflicted because he was running LIFT. "But from the start, that's

the whole reason they were talking to us – that our capability could be used. There was the possibility of a deal to be done [a possible merger with LIFT], and it could still happen," he says.

"A company's value is based on the future income it generates. [SAA] was an enterprise that had lost huge amounts of money for well over a decade. So when it came to the starting point, there wasn't massive value. So, it was about unlocking and bringing in the right skills. We had a plan ready and waiting, but two years have passed, and I'm not sure how much closer it is to fruition."

When he joined the SAA team, Novick says, he "envisioned building the right team, coming up with a plan, and looking at what the business did well and its



Gidon Novick

strengths, as well as what wasn't needed and was holding it back". He wanted to build incrementally "a new culture with a new brand presentation to the travelling public and all South Africans," he told the *SA Jewish Report*.

"SAA is an iconic brand with a lot of legacy and baggage. Flying is an aspirational thing. Only 10% to 15% of South Africans can afford it," he says. "This was an opportunity to create an iconic brand to restore South

Africans' confidence in its ability to succeed. One thing we as South Africans struggle with is that we don't believe we can succeed. And for good reason, we've scored so many own goals. This was a chance to prove that we could succeed with a strong South African brand and emblem alongside it."

He says that the consortium "had genuine hurdles to overcome", such as regulatory processes and the Competition Commission. "But where there's a will, there's a way. And this is something that doesn't have the luxury of time. It shouldn't have an open-ended end date. Our view was that it needed to be done 'by this date', and to get it done without delays and excuses."

He says the consortium will continue its work. "The requirements haven't changed: the need for the right skills and leadership, experience, capital, and aircrafts. The other thing to bear in mind is that SAA is a pretty small business at the moment. The industry has one dominant airline on the major routes. Then, there are smaller players like LIFT and others. So, there's logic in the smaller guys working together to compete better with the bigger guys. That's how industries get stronger."

So, it's still logical to try to aim for a possible merger, he says. "LIFT is a strong domestic brand with a broad regional network. There's an obvious synergy. LIFT also has modern systems and processes, and an innovative culture that could be infused into SAA. From our point of view, all options are on the table. But we need an environment that's open and transparent, with action-oriented deadlines, and a real commitment to getting things done. With the right brains around the table, anything is solvable."

Novick says he's generally impressed with the South African media, but was disappointed with one Sunday paper claiming that his resignation was because he "wanted too much money". "That's completely incorrect," he says.

"We remain open to helping," he emphasises. "We believe strongly that the skills to build this airline exist in South Africa and we don't have to look for international experts as long as we have the right solution, skills, and capital."

WED-ded to philanthropy and her roots, Fisher wins UN award

TALI FEINBERG

Born in Potchefstroom and growing up in Swaziland, Wendy Fisher never dreamed that she would one day be given an award at the United Nations (UN). But on 18 November, she became the recipient of the Women's Entrepreneurship Day (WED) Pioneer Awards, presented each year at the UN "to a select group of women whose accomplishments and impact are of the highest order", according to the organisation.

The awards are recognised as one of America's most prestigious by both houses of the United States congress. Fisher's accomplishments will be placed in the congressional record, recorded in history.

Thrilled to receive the award, Fisher says her roots have always been her driving force. "In spite of living outside South Africa for nearly 30 years, I've never lost my connection to it as home," she says. "I've remained engaged in projects throughout, and I spend long periods in South Africa annually."

"My parents, Natie and Frances Kirsh, established philanthropy as a family value and practise as early on in our lives as I can remember. So I, my sister Linda, and brother, Philip, act in the spirit and with the principles my parents inculcated in us. Around us is our amazing team that supports our vision, as well as the individuals and organisations we engage. The principles of philanthropy and teamwork underpin everything we do."

It ties in to the mission and vision of the Women's Entrepreneurship Day Organisation (WEDO), founded in 2013 to bring awareness of the 250 million girls living in poverty globally, and inspiring and empowering the four billion women on the planet.

WEDO was started by social entrepreneur and humanitarian Wendy Diamond to empower, celebrate, and support women in business worldwide. It works globally to help women and girls to become active participants in the economy by igniting a network of women leaders, innovators, and entrepreneurs to initiate start-ups, drive economic expansion, and advance communities around the world.

"I'm extremely privileged to work with my family to support vital organisations in South Africa, with incredible people at the helm who work tirelessly to empower, educate, feed, house, and nurture the most vulnerable in the country," says Fisher.

"In addition, I believe strongly in the role of cultural exchange in building self-confidence and resilience in people at both individual and community level. So [working in] the arts forms a significant part of the work I do."

An artist herself, she was selected to represent England in the 1993 exhibition "Women and Europe", and exhibited her sculpture at the 2012 London Olympic Games. She's also on the board of a number of art trusts, including the Tate International Council; the Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation; and the Israel Museum, Jerusalem. She founded the A4 Arts Foundation, a free-to-public, not-for-profit laboratory for arts in southern Africa.

"Having had the incredible opportunity to experience the power of the arts around the world – often in very challenging environments – I feel it's my obligation to facilitate spaces and opportunities for such exchange in South Africa," says Fisher. "The arts invite dialogue, difference, diversity, and curiosity, helping to build bridges and stimulate community. It also empowers the imagination. And this is imperative – we have to imagine the world we want to share before we can make it a reality. The arts are about change in all its forms."

Though South Africa is facing enormous challenges, "It has shown time and time again that it's resilient," says Fisher. "I believe we'll rise above current challenges. But faith or hope isn't a strategy. If we want South Africa to survive – if we want



Wendy Fisher

it to thrive – we have to engage in the future we want. We can't stand on the sidelines and hope – we have to roll up our sleeves and participate.

"For me, leadership is key," she says. "We need to identify remarkable people with integrity, creativity, and drive, and support them as best we can. And I believe we have these great people in droves. Just look at the Jewish Achiever Award nominees and recipients over the years as examples. Instead of fear, we can choose creativity; instead of collapse, we can choose change. Leonard Cohen's well travelled quote remains inspiring to me: 'There's a crack in everything. That's how the light gets in.' I think that sums it up. It's challenging, but there's strength and joy in community and work to be done. Done together, lasting and meaningful change isn't just possible, it's probable."

She believes philanthropy begins at home, "with our family, with those who work with, for, and close to us, and with our communities. Community is a collective garden that we all need to care for and nourish. We all have something to give – financing is one option of course, but skills, energy, care, and time can all be massively helpful to an organisation or person. We all need to look deeply at what we can give, and give that."

Also a trained physiologist, "I'm acutely aware of the role that self-esteem plays in people's capacity to live with purpose and achieve," says Fisher. "Never underestimate what kindness, encouragement, and motivation can do for a person or a group. To give that kind of support – to give hope – can in itself be transformational."

She's extremely proud to be part of the South African Jewish community. "We punch far, far above our weight. *Kol hakavod!*," she says. "I see the extraordinary work done, work that extends far and wide, that significantly effects lives, creates change, and sows seeds for the future, and I feel blessed to be part of such a community. I'm a proud South African."

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No beer at World Cup, but there will be kosher bagels

SAUL KAMIONSKY

Kosher bagels are available for fans attending the FIFA World Cup in Qatar, thanks to New York-based Rabbi Marc Schneier and Istanbul-based Rabbi Mendy Chitrik, who worked with Qatari officials to create kosher catering for Jewish fans at the World Cup.

The kosher bagels are being baked in a catering space provided by Qatar Airways.



Photo: Michael Jankelowitz

“We decided to go with the theme of bagels because though they aren’t well known here in Qatar, they are very well known in the United States and ethnically identified with Jews,” Schneier told the Jewish Telegraphic Agency (JTA). “They’re probably the first kosher bagels being produced and baked here in Qatar.”

The kitchen will be operational for the full 30 days of the World Cup. It’s under the supervision of Chitrik, who has helped facilitate previous kosher operations in the Middle East. Many people phoned him to ask if kosher food would be available in Qatar.

“As rabbis in the region, we felt it was our responsibility to respond to those requests and make sure that people have something to eat if they’re coming to the games,” he told JTA. “Some people are staying for a month.”

Chitrik and Schneier said that if they experienced high demand, they hoped to increase the offerings beyond bagels.

They denied reports that Qatar had banned cooked kosher food at the World Cup.

Chitrik said no cooked kosher food was available because deciding to open a kosher kitchen “was very last minute, so there’s no meat”.

Both Chitrik and Schneier are in the business of building Jewish-Islamic relations. Schneier is president of the Foundation for Ethnic Understanding, a non-profit organisation devoted to improving Jewish-Muslim relations, while Chitrik leads the Alliance of Rabbis in Islamic States.

The former collaborated with his Qatari contacts to help bring the first direct flights from Israel to the gulf nation, enabling Israeli soccer fans to attend the World Cup unhindered by regional politics. In spite of the lack of formal relations, the Israeli foreign ministry negotiated the establishment of a temporary diplomatic mission and consular office to serve its citizens throughout the tournament.

Veteran South African football administrator Raymond Hack, an honorary life member of Maccabi, says the question of the impact on Jews of the World Cup being held in the Middle East is something Israel should answer. “I’ve been involved in the Confederation of African Football and FIFA, and I’ve never ever had any altercations,” he says. “I’ve never experienced antisemitism. I mean, I know the chairperson of the Palestinian Football Association. I’ve met him and the president of the Israeli one.”

The United States squad has two players with Jewish roots. Goalkeeper Matt Turner’s father is Jewish, while right-back DeAndre Yedlin’s great-grandparents are Jewish and he sports a Hebrew tattoo dedicated to them.

Israeli sports enthusiast Michael Jankelowitz, attending his third FIFA World Cup, is one of the approximately 15 000 Israelis watching the spectacle in Qatar. He marvels at the vibe, excitement, and atmosphere, saying that nothing beats attending a live World Cup, be it soccer, rugby, or cricket.

Tickets for group-stage games in Qatar are reasonable for a tournament of such prestige, Jankelowitz says. “Tickets start at 250 Rial, the equivalent of about \$69 [R1 192] a game.”

He watched Holland’s 2-0 win over Senegal in the packed 45 000-capacity Al Thumama Stadium, built in the shape of a Muslim skullcap. “Many Dutch fans and local expatriates from the Indian subcontinent attended. Very few Senegalese,” he said.

All the eight World Cup stadiums in

Qatar are within a 100km radius, making it possible to see a maximum number of games at different stadiums without having to fly. “At the 2026 World Cup, fans will have to fly from New York to Los Angeles to Miami to Chicago to see the same number of games,” Jankelowitz says.

Hack says the significance of the tournament being held following the COVID-19 pandemic is that “People are able to travel and get back to some form of normality. The passion of having spectators in the stadium is something everybody wants. You could still play football



Photo: John Dorton/ISI Photos/Getty Images

DeAndre Yedlin of the United States



when there were empty stadiums, but spectators certainly add to the atmosphere.”

South Africa will be represented on the field by referee Victor Gomes and linesman Zakhele Siwela

in Qatar, while Bafana Bafana team doctor Thulani Ngwenya will be the doping control officer at the tournament. In addition, former Bafana Bafana coach Carlos Queiroz and former Orlando Pirates coach Roger De Sá will be in the dugout as the respective coach and assistant coach of Iran. Australian midfielder Keanu Baccus, meanwhile, was born in Durban.

Finding his feet after the killer wave – property icon tells all

Most people who experience career disasters do their best to move on, but businessman Rael Levitt has chosen to come clean about his life story. The SA Jewish Report spoke to him.

How would you describe yourself?

A “boykie from Bellville”.

What inspired you to write your book?

Ten years ago, my inspiration was to tell my side of the Auction Alliance story. Initially, it was a case of therapy by memoir. Then, after the COVID-19 pandemic, I noticed that many people were traumatised. So, I decided to share my story about facing adversity and coming out better on the other side.

What made you decide on the title, *It takes a Tsunami*?

When someone asked me what my key message was, I said, “It takes a tsunami to discover what you’re made of.” And the title was born.

How would you describe your career to date?

It’s been exhilarating, with dramatic ups and downs. Barely out of my teens, I started an auction business from the canteen at the University of Cape Town. By my mid-twenties, the company became one of the largest auctioneers in the country. By 2011, it was a well-recognised market leader, and could contend with the best auctioneers in the world. Then disaster struck. And the company, together with my reputation, was obliterated.

For five years, I didn’t do much career-wise, but I obtained two master’s degrees. In 2017, I founded Inospace, which grew rapidly and became one of the fastest-growing property funds in South Africa.

Tell us about your so-called fall from grace. What happened?

The South African Revenue Service (SARS) instructed me to sell a wine estate seized from businessman Dave King. I was accused by the highest bidder, Wendy Appelbaum, of using a vendor bidder (or what some call a “ghost bidder”) to drive up the price.

SARS wanted R75 million, so I used a vendor bidder to achieve its price. It was – and still is – industry practice. Appelbaum’s R55m bid wasn’t confirmed – it was R20m too low. The media said the deal fell through, but it was never a sale in the first place because her bid was rejected. Quoin Rock was sold to a Ukrainian billionaire for R75 million.

Nevertheless, Appelbaum was enraged because I lied about who the underbidder was.

The incident morphed into a catastrophic media scandal that came at me like a train of killer waves. The career and business I’d spent two decades building were wiped out in weeks. And it triggered a

prosecutorial onslaught that lasted for 10 years. When the investigation ended, I was vindicated.

What impact did it have on your life?

It was devastating. I shut down Auction Alliance in weeks. It affected me personally and financially. I felt directionless, immobilised, and depressed.

How did the community deal with it? How did it react towards you?

It enveloped me with support, love, and guidance. From religious to community leaders, businesspeople to total strangers, I was supported. The powerful kind-heartedness of our incredible community was a great discovery. **Looking back, how do you feel about what happened during that time? Do you have any regrets? If so, what are they?** My greatest regret was lying to Appelbaum when she asked who

was bidding against her. I should have explained what happened. We probably could have resolved the issue over a cup of coffee.

What got you through it and helped you dust yourself off and start all over again?

After languishing for a while, I decided to stop feeling sorry for myself. I believe that one’s life is a series of stories, so by the time I turned 50, resurrecting my career was my way of bringing a happy ending to a dramatic chapter. I focused on building a new company, based on how I wanted the book to end. It was a case of creating the story before writing about it.

How did you rise to own and manage a R3 billion property company and be a founding shareholder of LIFT airline?

My business partners knew Auction Alliance as an honest and professional company. They continued to do business with me after it was gone. I started Inospace in 2017 with the backing of Investec Bank and Buffet-KLT Investments. In 2020, my friend, Gidon Novick, asked me to invest in his start-up airline.

Did you make amends with Appelbaum, and what, if any, is your relationship like now?

We’ve never met. I saw her at the auction, and we had a brief telephone call after the auction. Since 2012, I have tried to make amends, but I’ve experienced pushback.

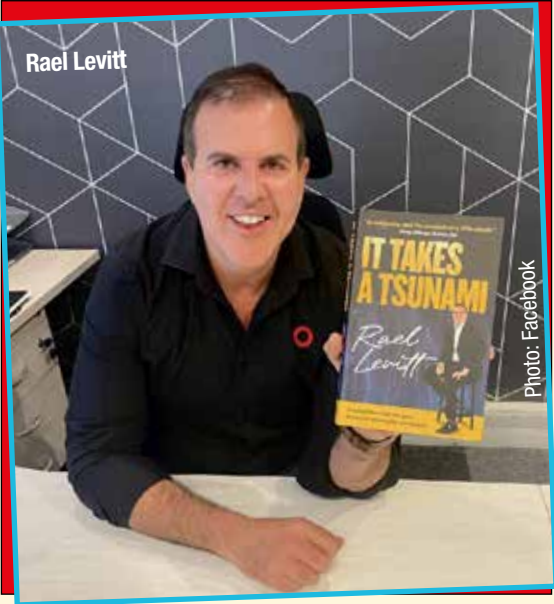


Photo: Facebook

Back to Life at the 2022 Absa Jewish Achiever Awards

GILLIAN KLAWSKY

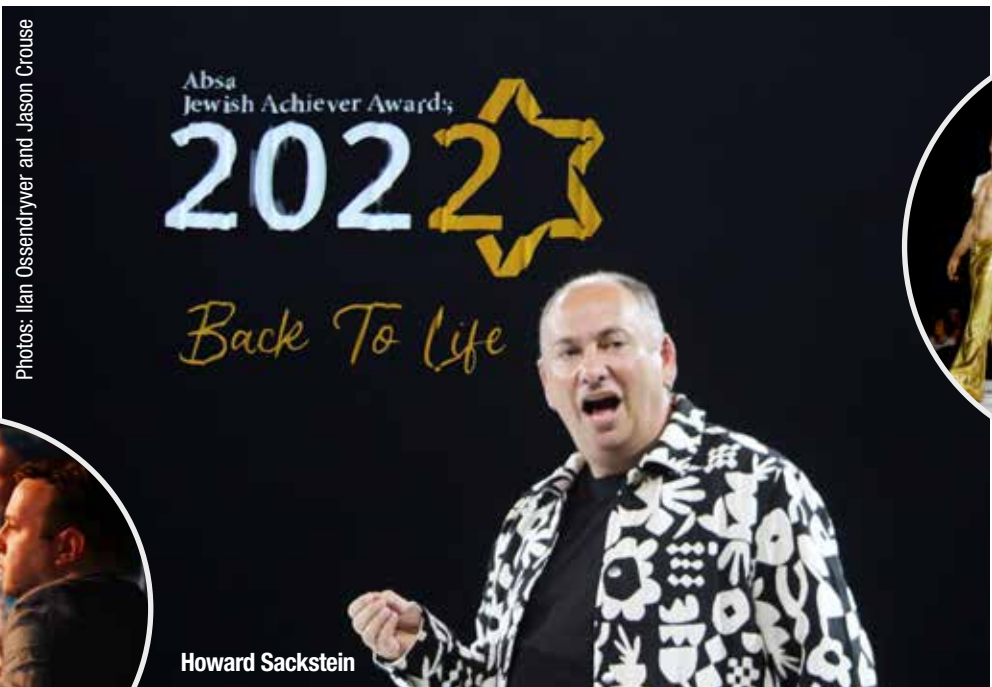
A celebration with a difference, this year’s Absa Jewish Achiever Awards moved from traditional formality to a vibrant party atmosphere. Honouring hundreds of nominees and 10 inspiring winners, the evening was an uplifting look at the hope that our community inspires in a brighter future for South Africa.

“Welcome back to life,” said Howard Sackstein, the chairperson of the Absa Jewish Achiever Awards and the *SA Jewish Report*, opening the evening’s festivities. The first in-person ceremony since the COVID-19 pandemic began, the event exuded positivity and a spirit of celebration that embodied the theme “Back to life”. With hip-hop dancing, aerial acrobatics as well as an aerial, Matrix-inspired fight scene, wall dancing, tap dancing, and musical numbers, the entertainment was on another level.

Multiple bars were dedicated to wine, whisky, gin, Jägermeister, and tequila, while a delicious 10-course meal catered by Delores Fouché, included citrus sea bass, Indian Osso Buco, and “Big Macher” vegan burger boxes. Attended by 914 people and hosted at the Sandton Convention Centre, the awards topped off a recent series of exciting events in South Africa’s small but flourishing Jewish community.

“Whoever is worried about our

Photos: Ian Ossendryver and Jason Crouse



Howard Sackstein

diminishing numbers and the vibrancy of our community just has to look at the past seven days to understand that the dynamism of our community is unparalleled anywhere in the world,” said Sackstein. “Our community simply pulsates with energy.”

“Nowhere else in the world would more than 700 people have been nominated for Jewish Achiever Awards with four panels of judges – 30 judges in total – with more than 8 300 people voting and 11 000 votes cast by members of the public. Our community is remarkable, and we’ll not be defined by size.”

Not glossing over South Africa’s huge problems, Sackstein said that it’s sad

that we’ve learned to live with constant loadshedding. In fact, two of the multiple generators brought in for the occasion blew out, yet each time, the power returned, symbolising South Africa’s resilience. “We deserve a lot better as a nation,” Sackstein said. “Sometimes, it’s a bit difficult to be optimistic in the dark.

Before you get pessimistic, though, look around this room, look at the awards this evening. Look at the nominees



and the winners. If that doesn’t bring you hope, nothing will.” With pumping hits and party poppers, complemented by streamers and balloons falling from the ceiling, the jubilant spirit was palpable. Hilarious master of ceremonies, Harry Sideropoulos, kept the audience entertained, while winners provided inspiration, reflecting on their journey and paying tribute to the pioneers in our community. They expressed a hope in a better tomorrow, something they’re all actively working to realise.

Sackstein recounted a story that Philip Krawitz, a previous Lifetime Achiever Award winner, told him about a meeting he attended with then Israeli President Shimon Peres. When someone asked Peres how he remained an optimist after dedicating his life to peace but only knowing war, Perez answered, “Optimists and pessimists, they all die the same, but they live very different lives.”

And so, said Sackstein, “My wish for all of you tonight is to live a very different life.”

• Money raised by the event supports the free publication of the *SA Jewish Report*. The paper is read by 50 000 people in hardcopy format each week, and its website has been visited by 400 000 people this year so far.



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Back to boerie – the entrepreneur who fired up a brand

JULIE LEIBOWITZ

There's no "Start 101" school that teaches you how to create a business, the secret is just to start, says entrepreneur Miles Kubheka. "It's 90% showing up, 10% when you get there."

These may seem like pat phrases, but Kubheka has certainly showed up, building a food and beverage business up from the ground with no training in the field whatsoever. He told his extraordinary story to the Absa Jewish Achiever Awards breakfast at the Sandton Hotel on 18 November.

Unlike most businesses, which build a brand around a going concern, Kubheka started by finding a winning brand, and built a business around it. The brand was Vuyo's, in a popular TV advert for Hansa Pilsener, which told the story of a young entrepreneur who builds a successful business from nothing, selling boerewors rolls.

Kubheka, then working in IT at Microsoft, first believed that the advert was based on a real person called Vuyo, but after he realised it was pure fiction, he registered the name and went on to build the actual business, Vuyo's Restaurant, selling traditional African dishes like the famed boerewors rolls in the ad, bunny chow, pap, braai meat, and vetkoek – with the addition of his mom's secret chakalaka recipe.

"SAB had first-name rights on the brand, but it wasn't a trademark," Kubheka says. He wasn't challenged by SAB – even though it had spent R70m on the brand. As he puts it, "In life, it's better to ask for forgiveness than permission." The move was pure genius – in one fell swoop, Kubheka had a well-known brand. His marketing campaign had been done for him. All he needed to do was, well, show up.

It wasn't always easy. "I started fires, and my first boerie rolls were dodgy, but I got to be comfortable with failure. I learned and continually learned," he said. "I didn't overthink it. I started with a 'minimal viable product' – three types of boerie roll – and used customers' money to improve."

Soon, a R30 product went up to R150 with fries and – who knew – sesame seeds! Vuyo's went from the local Fourways Farmers Market to start its own restaurant in Braamfontein.

But this self-starter is no marketing novice. When



Miles Kubheka

business slowed, he hired a machine to "make it snow" outside his restaurant in December. Then, he wrote a story about it and called the *Sunday Times*. It appeared, with one tiny edit, on the front page of the newspaper. "Good stories are hard to find," Kubheka says. "Journalists write so many negative stories because they're not hard to find. Inspiration is addictive, it's a catalyser of getting things done."

He was contacted by industry veteran Robbie Brozin, who went on to be one of his greatest mentors. Kubheka decided to build food carts, which he "sent everywhere", and soon, business was pumping. He started a trucking business called Mother Truckers, and eventually exited Vuyo's in 2018.

He's now built a food and beverage accelerator for entrepreneur founders called Wakanda Food Forever, based on – you guessed it – the mythical African land of Wakanda in Marvel's *Black Panther* movie series. "I loved what the film stood for, and trademarked it," Kubheka said.

The accelerator offers training in everything from business and funding strategies to marketing and leadership. Wakanda was built at the height of the

COVID-19 pandemic, and Kubheka realised he could start solving bigger things like ending hunger in South Africa where, he points out, more than 40% of people go to bed hungry every night.

It led to a partnership with Gidon Novick's SA Harvest, which rescues surplus food, supplying trucks and 13 million meals across communities.

But ultimately, Kubheka doesn't believe in charity, which he says undermines human dignity. So, he started a business named Gcwalisa, which sells food from premises set up for food safety in the non-government sector. The clinch is that people buy as much food as they need, in containers they bring from home. "Our model helps solve the problem that food

is much more expensive for those who can afford to buy only in small quantities," he says, and it reduces litter as well. "It gives people the opportunity to run businesses and maintain their dignity."

Kubheka's ability to self-propel to the stratosphere of whatever he gets involved in was reflected in the mood of the breakfast, summed up by Absa Jewish Achiever Awards Chairperson Howard Sackstein.

"The government won't help us or save us," Sackstein said. "That role has become ours. We create role models, fill potholes, and provide private services like ambulances."

Describing the Jewish

community as "disproportionate" – too small in numbers, but too big or disproportionate to South Africa – he said, "We bring the ruins of a broken land back to life."

Certainly, South Africa is going through a tough patch, said Absa Senior Economist Miyelani Maluleke, and the biggest culprit is Eskom, which has managed to provide barely 60% of energy availability this year, with no improvement in sight.

Though overall economic growth has rebounded back to 2019 levels, energy intensive industries like mining, manufacturing, and construction have been hard hit by the electricity crisis.

But, Maluleke is confident that with the scrapping of the need for generation licenses, private-sector investment will improve the situation five years down the line.

Other factors impeding growth, which is expected to be just 1.1% next year, are a consumer under pressure, which slows demand, and employment below pre-pandemic levels. Added to the Ukraine war, which is slowing growth internationally and raising food and fuel prices, inflation is expected to rise, which could lead to a rise in interest rates, putting further pressure on consumers.

"It's tough, and it will need to get tougher," Maluleke said. But based on the skills, resilience, and innovation of the people in the room, he's confident in the future.

Sackstein echoed these sentiments, describing the Absa Achiever Awards as an awe inspiring process. After 10 months, 707 nominations, 30 judges, 70 interviews, more than 8 000 people casting 11 000 votes, and an audience of 914 people on the night of the awards, Sackstein said, "We celebrate the people who start businesses in this country, who keep us safe, who farm, and do our contracts. We do it because our country needs heroes and role models."



Nomsa Moeketsi

Miyelani Maluleke



Sean Jammy, Benji Porter, and Mark van Jaarsveld



Gabriella Farber, Mark Oppenheimer, and Rabbi Julia Margolis



Julia Sotirianakos and Mervyn Serebro



Howard Sackstein, Ambassador Eli Belotsercovsky, Ambassador Dainius Junevicius, and Faisal Mkhize



Shalya Katzett, Asha Lala, Romy Waters, and Joanne Civin



John Tshabalala, Stephen Seaka, and Miyelani Maluleke



Ann Nurock and Helen Lieberman



Hayley Glasser, Glynne Wolman, Corinne Ossendryver, and Galit Cohen



Fred Kadish and John Tshabalala



Stephen Seaka and Robyn Kramer



Deena Pitum, Dr Dina Simmonds Gulan, and Herschel Jawitz



Grace Harding and Stephen Seaka



Carol Steinberg and Lauren Segal



Myron Krost and Anthony Orelowitz

The gutsy move that built an empire

SAUL KAMIONSKY

Grant Friedman and brothers Justin and Greg Blend of Africrest Properties took a gutsy move at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, and it paid off.

The team, which won the Entrepreneur Award at the Absa Jewish Achiever Awards on 19 November, agreed to an unconditional deal on the PwC building called The Apollo in Sunninghill, Johannesburg, even though its cost and prospects of success scared others away. “We were also in the heart of the financial COVID-19 meltdown. It was a massive but calculated risk, and it paid off,” they said. The Apollo went on to be named the International Property Awards’ best residential redevelopment in South Africa.

“The conversion of the old PwC head offices in Sunninghill into 700 apartments is our flagship development,” Greg said.

Friedman would have loved Nicholas Katsapas, the co-founder of Africrest with Justin, to have also received an award. “But the problem with trying to convince Howard Sackstein that Nicholas was Jewish was that he’s six foot four. At almost 50, he

has a six-pack and a full head of hair,” he joked.

The Blend brothers, meanwhile, paid tribute to their late father, Steven, who was involved with the Achiever Awards since it began.

“Seventeen years ago, I attended these awards for the very first time,” Justin said. “I was 22 years old. I had just started out in business. My late father, a judge of these awards, brought me along. I was

an award.” Justin never missed a single Jewish Achiever event for the next 16 years. “Now, in my 17th year in attendance, that dream has become true. I just wish my father could have been here to see this moment.”

While Justin, Greg, and Friedman were walking around Braamfontein as students 17 years ago, they realised the area was ripe for rejuvenation, Justin recalled. “We started buying dilapidated office buildings in the area and converting them to eighth-grade office buildings.

From there, we moved over to the northern suburbs. We saw the opportunity of converting office buildings into apartments.” Starting out in Braamfontein meant that the trio could combine their knowledge and experience to convert office buildings in the northern suburbs of Johannesburg, Justin said.

They put up a Randburg-based building for rent, and within three hours of advertising it online, they received 50 calls about the building. “Wow, we knew electricity had struck. This was the future,” Justin reminisced.

Since then, they have bought approximately 130 000m² of offices, and converted it into

roughly 3 000 apartments, Greg said. Justin says Africrest tries to give its tenants an incredible experience. “If you have a large estate with 700 apartments, the tenants want a work-from-home facility, unbelievable gym, soccer courts, swimming pools. You’ve got to give your customers what they want.”

“I’m proud of what we built,” Friedman said. “I know we’ll continue to build Africrest into something we, our family, friends, and the community can be proud of.”

“When I think how we have built this business, I realised how crucially important one’s community is and the people you surround yourself with as they push you in the direction that will ultimately result in the life you live,” Justin said. “With this in mind, I realise how lucky I am to be part of this incredible community.”

He thanked his mother, Zoe, for pushing him and Greg to do their best. “Mom, you’ve been the greatest influence in my life.”

Greg, speaking of his and Justin’s dad, Steven, said, “My dad’s greatest strength was his impeccable reputation. He taught us that your reputation is one of the few things you can control. We try our best to emulate him every day and one day, to leave a lasting legacy like he has. Last year, we declined the nomination for this award, as we didn’t feel ready to be considered among such a disproportionately talented community and we believed my father would have more time with us. Here we are this year without my father, having learned a valuable lesson. Never put off celebrating an achievement or a milestone with your loved ones.”



Photo: Ilan Ossendryver

Justin Blend, Grant Friedman and Greg Blend

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Holding the torch for a brighter future

GILLIAN KLAWSKY

Known as “the saint of the townships”, Helen Lieberman, the founder of Ikamva Labantu, delivers social support services to township communities. Meaning “future of the people”, the organisation embodies Lieberman’s commitment to empowering South Africa’s most vulnerable.

Helen Lieberman and Herman Mashaba



“In many cases, because of the poverty and the history of our country, the real people of our country are still suffering and living in the most terrible way,” said Lieberman. “For the rest of my life, if I can, I will continue until I can see that every person has something in their lives that enables them to survive.”

With three million meals provided annually, 1 900 children impacted by early childhood development training programmes annually, and 1 200 needy elders reached daily, Ikamva Labantu helps her to fulfil this mission.



Mic Mann and Daryn Mofsowitz

Nick Katsapas and Grant Friedman



In accepting the Kirsh Family Lifetime Achiever Award in honour of Helen Suzman on 19 November, Lieberman gave the Absa Jewish Achievers a sobering dose of reality. Expressing her gratitude for the award, which she described as a humbling experience, she highlighted the unspeakable hardship that much of South Africa’s population still endures. Lieberman’s journey started with daily visits to the townships during the apartheid era. “She couldn’t stand by and see the devastation going on around her, she had to make a difference,” said Philip Krawitz,

protector of the Ikamva Labantu Charitable Trust. Beaten up by the apartheid police, she nearly lost the sight in one eye, yet she remained dedicated to facilitating change. “My experience is that we haven’t understood the wonder of our African people, people that I have worked with for 60 years,” she said. “I’ve done so as a volunteer and I’ve done so in the spirit of knowing that each day, I get up very early because I know that the people I’m holding hands with, are also getting up. I need to be there early, to hear what we need to do and how we need to do it. “We allow our communities to lead us to the point where they need our intervention,” Lieberman said in explaining Ikamva Labantu’s collaborative approach. “And then our intervention is respectful. All we do is create the right environment and

the right skills within the community. And they get on with it. We’re able to become participatory in a way that nobody feels threatened and everybody can’t but give of their best.” Encouraging the event’s attendees to commit to doing just one deed to uplift someone outside of our community, Lieberman suggested giving school shoes to a child or funding an extra lesson for a student so that they can matriculate and study further. “Or leave here saying, ‘I’m going to look at an old person living in a piece of tin, a person that served us as a domestic and scrubbed and cleaned and has remained with nothing because we don’t pay our domestics what they deserve,’” she said. “I’m not being judgemental, it’s just

that I carry it every day. “I don’t pray, but as a Jewish woman, I live every day for what I’ve read in our teachings that we as Jews should do. I’m hoping that my not-so-kind speech will allow you all to hold the torch with me in our future for South Africa.”

The SA Jewish Report team



The healing power of dreams

GILLIAN KLAWSKY

“We ultimately have choices. We can allow ourselves to become immobilised by a sense of hopelessness, or somehow draw on our inner strength and provide support to those who are sadly travelling the road that we’ve already travelled.” So said Mervyn Serebro, the winner of the Bertie Lubner Humanitarian Award in honour of Chief Rabbi Cyril Harris for the organisation he chairs, Reach for a Dream. Serebro joined Reach for

Mervyn Serebro and Marc Lubner



possibility of recovery and that instilling hope in a child is an integral component of healing.” Serebro and the Reach for a Dream team have witnessed miracles, including a young man who had lost the ability to walk, whose dream was to go to Disney. “He went to Disney. He began to walk very slowly with interventive support. He’s now fully recovered.”

He also shared the story of a young boy who was on four-hourly morphine injections. Yet, he met his hero, Formula One legend Lewis Hamilton, who promised to win for him. “And he did. They put his wheelchair on the podium, and Hamilton walked over to this young man and put the cup in his hands. He died a few months later.”

In accepting the award, Serebro paid tribute to “exceptional” Reach for a Dream Chief Executive Julia Sotirianakos, his beloved wife and children, and his late son, Darren. “You were taken from us in the spring of your season,” he said. “I sense your presence this evening, and I know that you will be so proud of what we continue to do in your memory.”

Serebro said that accepting an award named for the late Bertie Lubner was an honour. “His passion and generosity of spirit honestly knew no bounds, not only within our community but universally. There was this aura of goodness, *menschkeid* that was just a



part of him. “To be acknowledged by our own community is truly the most indescribable moment in my own journey,” Serebro said.



Musi Kuzwayo and Reeve Forman



Penny Cavaleros and Harry Sideropoulos



Oliver and Ann Nurock

a Dream after losing two of his own children. He chose to dedicate his life to fulfilling the dreams of those with life-threatening illnesses, and the organisation has helped foster his own healing. Having lost

one child to cot death and another to acute myeloid leukaemia, the Reach for a Dream chairperson has walked an unimaginable path. “The loss of a child is permanent. It’s not something that improves with time, you find a place for it in your head and heart,” Serebro said. He has been driven to enhance the lives of others by creating the South African Bone Marrow Registry and chairing Reach for a Dream. “I’m passionate about ensuring that every child who is experiencing a life-threatening situation has the privilege of meeting our team, requesting the

Professor Mervyn Mer and Howard Sackstein



Barbara and Geoff Rothschild



Clive and Jodi Zulberg

Ingrid and Stanley Seeff





Charl Potgieter and John Tshabalala



Jessica and Mark van Jaarsveld



Arlene and Jules Schneid



Lee-Anne and Brad Greenfield, Reeve Forman, and Ronnie Mbatsane



Julia Sotirianakos and Mervyn Serebro



Orli and Dr Hanan Bushkin



Jessica and Jonathan Blackburn



Ruth and Clive Sacks, Tom Zeitoun, Daniel Zada, and Yoave Dayan



Simone and Samuel Seeff



Greg and Hayley Magid

The farmer – and family – who feed a nation

SAUL KAMIONSKY

“I’m overwhelmed with emotion,” said the owner of Fremax Farms, Fred Kadish, aka the potato king of South Africa, on receiving the Absa Business Icon Award at the Sandton Convention Centre on 19 November.

“I would like to thank the Absa Jewish Achiever Awards for this most prestigious award. I enjoyed the build-up to this evening. Winning is the cherry on the top.”

Fremax Farms is located in Mpumalanga and guarantees food security for Africa. It cultivates potatoes, maize, cattle, and soya. “Our farming is known as precision farming,” the 85-year-old Kadish said. “We have the latest farming techniques. We export crops into Mozambique, and our other crops are all here locally.”

Kadish said Fremax Farms had built many dams and frequently farmed under irrigation. “We’re looking to produce three or four times as much as on dry land. Drought is a major challenge. We face a lot of challenges, and there’s always something going against the crops. We need to be organised.

“We have a school on a farm with just more than 400 kids. We bus the kids in and

give them breakfast. The results have been pretty good.”

After matriculating, Kadish started working on his dad’s farm of 600 hectares. “Today, we have increased that to close to 10 000 hectares,” Kadish said. “I’ve got my grandson with me and a nephew who is farming with us as well, which is really good for continuity.

I’m a third-generation farmer, and they are fourth-generation farmers. I just hope their farming will go from strength to strength, providing food for the country. Our staff is also third and fourth generation.”

Kadish accepted the Absa Business Icon Award not just for himself, but also for his late dad, Lazar, and brother, Max. “Together, we built up Fremax Farms, hence I’m still the boss and I can now hand over to the children and grandchildren to keep my father’s legacy alive. As far as I’m concerned, we’re all winners here tonight. As Jews, we stand together for the betterment and advancement of our beautiful South Africa. *Nkosi Sikelel’ iAfrika* [Lord, Bless Africa].”



Photo: Ilan Ossendryver



Ambassador Dainius Junevicius, Joan Joffe, Diane Wolfson, and Asta Juneviciene



Darryl and Taryn Marcus



Danny and Daryn Mofsowitz



Gavin Milner, Viv Metz, Mike Metz, and Adam Fleisher



Rami, Gabi, and Shana Sassen



Greg and Gabi Blend



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Photos: Ilan Ossendryver and Jason Crouse

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“Never doubt the value of a Jewish education,” says RMB wunderkid

SAUL KAMIONSKY

“There are many successful and talented nominees here today. I really can’t see how I deserve to stand out,” said Rob Leon, 38, the youngest ever head of investment banking at Rand Merchant Bank (RMB), on winning the Absa Business Leadership Award at the Sandton Convention Centre on 19 November.

“But I appreciate this. There are many ways I could try and justify why I’m here tonight. The biggest reason is that my parents made a great call. They put me and my sister into the King David school system. Even though it was a real financial ask, never underestimate the power of a great Jewish education and an even stronger Jewish neighbourhood,” Leon told attendees at the Absa Jewish Achiever Awards.



Rob Leon

questioned. “We all know the challenges that we as a community and a country are required to confront. I’m hopeful that the banks, along with the rest of the private sector, can help solve them. We need to be deliberate in our actions, and tackle the issues head on.”

Many countries and economies experience headwinds, but South Africa is unique in that its citizens are the most resilient people in the world, Leon said.

“We thrive in adversity, when no one else knows where to start. I have no doubt that the Jewish community will not only lead from the front, but also make an outsized contribution relative to its size.”

The fine art of sport and exercise medicine

SAUL KAMIONSKY

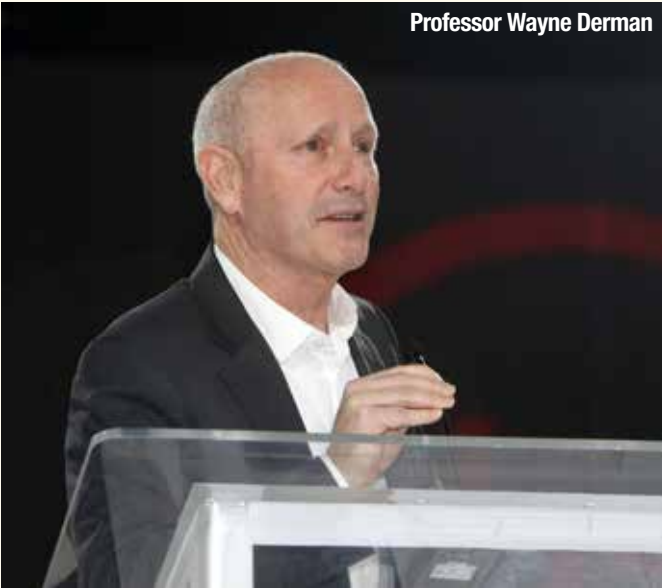
“The field of sport and exercise medicine is about getting people to perform at their best. It’s a challenge and a balancing act which sometimes I get right, and sometimes I don’t,” Professor Wayne Derman, chief medical officer of Team South Africa, told the Absa Jewish Achiever Awards at the Sandton Convention Centre on 19 November.

Derman was awarded the Absa Professional Excellence Award.

Derman, who described himself as humbled and honoured to receive the award, served as chief medical officer for Team

South Africa at the 2000 Olympic Games in Sydney and the 2004 edition in Athens, before applying for the position at the 2008 Olympics in Beijing.

“When I got my letter of appointment,



Professor Wayne Derman

I was allocated to be medical officer for the South African paralympic team,” he recalled. It taught him a lot about himself as a human being. “The Paralympics became my passion. I then went on to do service at the International Paralympic Committee, heading up its research to try and make sport a safer endeavour for people with disabilities. I’ve never looked back,” Derman said.

“What the Paralympic work taught me is that ability and disability are part of a continuum. We decide where we want to function each day from a physical, mental, spiritual, and emotional perspective.”

He said one of his most extraordinary experiences was being part of two-time Olympic gold medallist Caster Semenya’s legal and medical defence team. He also feels fortunate to have been part of some of the committees that oversaw the delivery of a safe Olympic Games in Tokyo last year.

“This year has been an incredibly busy one on a national level,” he said. “It has been about the new speciality of sport and exercise medicine, and starting to get universities around South Africa geared up to have a registrar training programme that trains young doctors in this exciting area.”

Derman paid gratitude to his parents for giving him “a wonderful, privileged foundation”. “My mother is with us this evening. My father, unfortunately, passed away this year, but he would be *klebbing nachas* right now. I would like to thank my beautiful wife for her love, friendship, and support, and putting up with the amount of overworking and travel I do.

“I would like to thank my grandfather, Ted, who, when I was 12, put a doctor’s bag into my hands, and said, ‘My boy, you will be a doctor. In fact, you are going to be a psychiatrist because we have enough pathologists in our family for a whole convention.’ I also would like to thank Elliot Wolf, my principal, who encouraged me to be a doctor even though I was a ‘straight-C’ student at school.”

Derman also thanked his mentor, Professor Asher Dubb from Baragwanath Hospital. “He told me, ‘Wayne, take your passion, sport, and exercise, and combine it into your career – medicine – and you will be very successful.’ And he thanked Professor Tim Noakes, his mentor for many years, and his “wonderful friend” Martin Schwellnus, a professor of sport and exercise medicine at the University of Pretoria, who shared the journey with him.



Ronnie Kaplan, Cindy Herring, and Yvonne Kaplan

Jenna and Grant Friedman

Howard Sackstein with Pranita Ranchhod, Iffy Shaik, Yesthiel Singh, and Brent Shahim

Avi and Romy Levy and Richard and Danielle Rovetti

Stephen Rich, Penny Caveleros, and Alistair McWade

Victor and Onyi Nwaneri

Nadine Hocter, Dimitri Martinis, Lynn Joffe, and Simone Lipshitz

Kadish, Levy, and Sass families

Kevin and Lisa Fine

Anthony Orelowitz with sons Saul, Joshua, and Luke

Dina Diamond, Sharon Wapnick, and Frank Kramer

Peta Krost and Herschel Jawitz

Professor Anton Harber

Howard Sackstein

Sharise Weiner, and Darryl and Taryn Marcus

Karen and Steven Schneid

Jacques Burger and Mike Abel

Amy Isenberg and Sheryl Benjamin

Wayne and Leigh Sussman with Shaun Matisonn

Lisa and Greg Solomon

Saul Joseph, Dean Chaitowitz, Josh Norman, Bethia Milner, Natanya Porter, Dani Sack, and Leora Porter

More brain, less brawn – a win for CAP Security

GILLIAN KLAWSKY

Since the inception of Community Active Protection (CAP) Security, violent crime has gone down almost 90% in the areas it protects. Now, CAP Chief Executive Mark van Jaarsveld and his team are on a new mission.

“We want to eradicate violent crime in Johannesburg,” said Van Jaarsveld, who was awarded the Mann Made Media Community Award together with the CAP management team at the Absa Jewish Achiever Awards at the Sandton Convention Centre on 19 November. “Some might think this is impossible, but I’m telling you this evening that it will be achieved. With the support of our community, broader society, corporate South Africa, and working in partnership with the authorities, we have begun to build the capacity and capability to achieve it.”

It’s this can-do attitude that has made CAP such a powerful force in the communities it serves. Officially started in 2006 when crime in Glenhazel had brought a disproportionate level of violence, the community led by Chief Rabbi Dr Warren Goldstein came together, and CAP was formed.

The CAP team started to see the same people perpetrating robberies over and over again, and so its mantra of “more brain, less brawn” was born. “We had to get smarter, we had to understand them better,” said Van Jaarsveld.

That’s why CAP has moved into targeted intelligence, working to pre-empt crime, taking the fight to the criminals rather than waiting for them to perpetrate violent acts in the communities it serves. Having arrested 277 suspects, recovered 54 firearms, 145 hijacked and



Rebbetzin Gina and Chief Rabbi Dr Warren Goldstein



Mark van Jaarsveld

Photos: Ian Ossendryver and Jason Crouse

stolen motor vehicles used in the commission of crime, and seizing R55 million in stolen assets in the last eight months, CAP clearly has a winning strategy.

“We have more than 100 informants that give us information

about incidents that are about to take place or have taken place,” said Van Jaarsveld. “That’s what’s happening every single day, and many people don’t see it and don’t understand that’s what CAP is doing. It’s not a cowboy mentality. We do it because we care.”

risk. We do it because we’ve seen what happens when evil prevails. You wake up every morning, driven by a purpose to ensure that it never happens again. You speak through action.”

Van Jaarsveld is grateful to his wife, who he honoured for her understanding and for holding down the fort without complaint while he was largely absent.

Ending with a message to the community, he said, “Don’t be afraid. Don’t let a few thousand criminals overwhelm and scare the millions of good and honest South Africans. Stand behind us to help achieve a city in which violent crime doesn’t exist.”



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By design: Anthony Orelowitz builds opportunities through challenges

GILLIAN KLAWSKY

The man behind some of the most recognisable buildings along the Sandton skyline, architect Anthony Orelowitz, has always had vision. In accepting the Art, Sport, Science, and Culture Award, the founding director of the Paragon Group said that the most considerable challenges often yield the biggest opportunities.

From the ground-breaking Norton Rose building to the innovative S-shaped Sasol headquarters, Orelowitz and his team spent 15 years developing six of Sandton's most iconic commercial properties.

"There's much more to our buildings, it's about the quality of the space and the life inside," said Orelowitz, in accepting the award. "The physical space is designed to enhance how organisations function, how culture is manifested, and to help organisations thrive." With a design ethos rooted in efficiency, the Paragon Group works with young minds, using cutting-edge technology like 3D printing and augmented reality to visualise the buildings they design.

It's this emphasis on innovation that inspires Orelowitz to seek new possibilities even in the toughest of circumstances. "The COVID-19 pandemic has brought many challenges to our industry," he said, "but those challenges release a myriad of opportunities. Ironically, due to the pandemic, we have had to re-strategise how to create spaces to entice people back to work. With the need for commercial buildings having waned, other avenues have opened up. So, we must find new typologies to explore, and at 57, this is an exciting prospect."



Anthony Orelowitz

One of the things Orelowitz loves most about architecture is the fact that it's a vocation. "You can be a better architect when you're 40, and an even better architect at 45," he said. "I look forward to seeing what kind of architect I can be in my 70s – I think that's the beauty of architecture as a profession. It can sustain you your whole life."

In recent years, Orelowitz and his team have pursued work outside the corporate space, doing schools, student housing, flats, and industrial warehouses. "Whatever we design, we're always looking to find the edge and how that manifests back into our buildings."

However, it took time to build a winning formula. Leaving his job in Standard Bank's property division to start his own practice 25 years ago, Orelowitz initially struggled to secure projects. Winning an architectural competition at Melrose Arch proved to be a powerful launchpad. "We started off renovating toilets and lobbies, and we've ended up developing buildings like the Sasol building in Sandton," Orelowitz said, paying tribute to his partners, directors, and colleagues.

Orelowitz's dedication to excellence is embodied by the man to whom this award was dedicated this year – the late Steven Blend. A judge on the Absa Jewish Achiever Awards for more than 20 years, Blend spearheaded the thriving partnership between Absa and the Jewish Achiever Awards.

Although South Africa has undeniable challenges, we shouldn't forget to acknowledge the many wonderful things our nation is doing, Orelowitz said. This is why events like the Absa Jewish Achievers Awards must be celebrated.

"We need to tell an alternative narrative about this country, one that doesn't sugar-coat our situation, but looks at the positives, celebrates the exceptional, and gives us a cause to look towards a brighter future."

"Put on your armour, and do what's right"

GILLIAN KLAWSKY

Advocate Carol Steinberg reflected on the importance of speaking out against injustice when she accepted the Europcar Women in Leadership Award at the Absa Jewish Achievers on 19 November.

"You can't moan from the sidelines, put on your armour, and try and do what's right," said Steinberg in her acceptance speech. "You always find allies who also want to do what's right."

Steinberg's belief in using language to make a meaningful difference has underpinned her varied career. From being a successful playwright, to helping to establish the first department of arts and culture in South Africa's democracy, to becoming a senior advocate at the Johannesburg Bar, Steinberg has always believed in the power of words.

Also a member of the Judicial Service Commission, she uses her passion for words to make compelling legal arguments. "I love words, I love language, and I love working with words to persuade," she said in her Absa Jewish Achiever Awards video.

Specialising in constitutional and public law, Steinberg has honed the art of persuasion in her freedom of expression cases and anti-corruption work. "The wonderful thing about working in South Africa is there's a never-ending supply of meaningful work to do," she reflected.

Having passionately argued before the Constitutional Court in the Bongani Masuku antisemitic hate-speech case, Steinberg tapped into her legal lexicon and Jewish identity to secure a guilty verdict.

Asked by a judge to explain why the swastika – which featured during a march where offensive language was used – is a symbol of hate, she realised that not every



Advocate Carol Steinberg

judge knew about the Holocaust. "I just threw away my prepared notes and spoke about what happened," she recalled.

When the Masuku judgment came out, she flipped to the end, and saw that her side had won. "When I read the full judgment and got to the last sentence, I burst into tears. It was written by the judge who had asked me to explain the significance of a swastika. It said that it would be apt to end with some words from the Torah: 'Life and death are in the tongue.' And that's something this judge had gone out and found."

That's why Steinberg is so passionate about giving a public voice to the voiceless – something the courtroom facilitates. "I always remind myself about Nazi Germany because all it took was for ordinary people to be silent. Justice should be seen. That's back to life," she said, reflecting on the theme of this year's awards.

"There's nothing as meaningful and gratifying as being honoured and recognised by one's own," said Steinberg, on accepting the award, pointing out that the desire to make a difference was shared by the event's inspiring nominees.

"That day in the Constitutional Court, I turned to Michael Katz, my instructing attorney, and I said to him, 'Do you know we're the only two Jews in this whole massive group of lawyers? If we hadn't been here today, there wouldn't have been a Jewish voice at all in a case about antisemitic hate speech.' Michael said to me, 'If not us, then who?'"

The winners and nominees share this philosophy, Steinberg said. "This is a group of people who say, apropos South Africa, 'If not us, then who?' People who are role models and heroes and have stood up at the right time to do the right thing. And that's an amazing thing about this very powerful and vulnerable community."

Congratulations

to all the nominees and awardees
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Pfizer chief honoured for fearlessly “getting us back to life”

SAUL KAMIONSKY

Jewish Greek American Dr Albert Bourla knew that his multinational corporation, Pfizer, had saved the world when he heard that the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine had a 95.6% efficacy rate in preventing COVID-19 cases.

Bourla, the chairperson and chief executive of Pfizer, felt “deeply honoured” to receive the Special and Extraordinary Award at the Absa Jewish Achiever Awards on 19 November.

“It’s not often that the *SA Jewish Report* grants a special and extraordinary award,” Howard Sackstein, the chairperson of the *SA Jewish Report*, said. “We do so to recognise remarkable individuals not necessarily part of our community, but individuals who have enriched all our lives. We gave this award to Nelson Mandela, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, and maestro Benjamin Zander, conductor of the Boston Philharmonic Orchestra. This year, coming out of two and a half years of darkness into light and back to life, we want to acknowledge that moment and someone who has shown us the marvels of science and what can be achieved if humanity put its heads together against a common enemy.”

Sackstein said Bourla was “the active ingredient in allowing us to get back to life”.

Said Professor Barry Schoub, the chairperson of

the Ministerial Advisory Council on vaccines, “We have come out of the deep and dark pandemic, but there has really been one shining light – the COVID-19 vaccine story. This is one of the most spectacular achievements in biological engineering in the history of medicine. Many scientists can take credit for this, and one of the foremost in that field is Albert Bourla.”

Bourla was determined to galvanise all of Pfizer’s capabilities to create a vaccine in record time. “It was something that had never been manufactured before in the world,” he said. “But we manufactured it in the midst of a pandemic. In those celebratory moments, I often thought of my parents, Mois and Sara Bourla. They experienced so much in their lives. I have always wanted to honour their memory in any way I can.”

Bourla said he’s proud of his Jewish heritage and of being Greek. “What existed in Thessaloniki [where he was born in 1961] was a very vibrant Sephardic community and one of the most vibrant in the world.

“Both my parents turned their experience of surviving the Holocaust into something positive and life-affirming. This helped shape my worldview and ignited my desire to pursue a purpose-driven career which will benefit others.”

Sue Desmond Hellmann, a Pfizer board member, said, “What struck me was how high the stakes were, how visible the risk was, how big the investment was, and how fearless Albert was in taking that risk and demonstrating the confidence he had in his colleagues and the importance of their work to the world.”

Adrian Gore, the founder and group chief executive of Discovery, said, “Pfizer was a remarkably good partner. It wanted to open access to developing countries, it listened to our pleas for vaccines, and crossed many different aspects of the complexities.”

Bourla thanked Sackstein, the *SA Jewish Report*, and the Jewish Achiever Awards for “this truly humbling recognition. Never as a child growing up in Greece, would I have ever imagined being mentioned in the same breath as people like Mandela, Tutu, and Zander,” he said.

Bourla described it as an “incredibly exciting time to live”, in which “science is increasingly demonstrating the ability to take on the world’s most devastating diseases”.

“My 80 000 Pfizer colleagues are working every day, trying to start a course towards such a future. Inspired by the success of our COVID-19 vaccine, which we delivered in just nine months rather than the traditional eight to 10 years, they are bringing an unwavering focus and incredible ingenuity to delivering breakthroughs that can help patients suffering from other equally debilitating conditions.”



Dr Albert Bourla



Top: Bryan Hirsch, Richard Hirsch, Simone Hirsch
Bottom: Joanne and Stephen Dallamore, and Marion Hirsch



Taryn Forman, Cassie Forman, Sebi Cohen, and Isabella Miller



Jake and Loren Shepherd



Zoe Blend



Dean Kovacs, Daniel Shapiro, Mark van Jaarsveld, Ben Doron, Ricky Schoeman, and Dean Immerman



Stavros Nicolaou and Howard Sackstein



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CT mayor calls on Jews to “keep the faith” at Shabbat of Hope

TALI FEINBERG

Though some may have lost hope in the future of South Africa and the Jewish community, others are looking to the next 180 years and beyond. This was the motivation behind the Cape Town Hebrew Congregation’s “Shabbat of Hope” celebration on 18 November.

Popularly known as the Gardens Shul, the event dedicated the historic entrance of its Great Synagogue as the “Gateway of Hope” to “express our continued hope for the future of the Gardens Shul and South African Jewry, as we celebrate 181 years, beginning the next cycle of 180 and beyond”, according to congregation leader Rabbi Osher Feldman.

Cape Town Executive Mayor Geordin Hill-Lewis echoed this optimism. “For almost 200 years, Cape Town’s Jewish community has been a backbone of civic life in our city. For the past 181 years, the Gardens Shul has stood at its spiritual and historical heart. This is South Africa’s mother shul, the place from where all of South African Jewry’s immense contribution to our society ultimately arose,” he said.

“It would be easy to stand up here tonight and talk about the past. It’s more difficult, especially at this point in time in South Africa, to talk about the future. I suspect that most of us here have experienced the painful reality of loved ones leaving South Africa. And I also know that most of us have experienced anxiety about the future: will we and our children be safe? Will we have electricity and water to supply our homes and conduct our businesses? What will happen to our economy?”

A year in as mayor, “I’m more confident than ever that Cape Town can and will be a beacon of hope for all in South Africa,” said Hill-Lewis.

“The Gateway of Hope symbolises two important things. First, that people will pass through this gateway on their way to prayer, life-cycle events, joining friends for lunch, and communal meetings. They will pass through it on their way to celebrating community. The action that community enables is crucial for building thriving cities.



Chairman of the Shul, Robert Broll; Rabbi Osher Feldman; and President of the Shul, Albert Glass

“Second, it’s recognition that hope isn’t something that simply exists, especially when circumstances seem dire. Rather, we have to build hope.”

Hill-Lewis said he was “inspired daily by a concept that comes from Jewish liturgy, the *Aleinu* prayer. *Aleinu* translates into English as ‘it’s on us’. Surrounded by an imperfect and broken world, it’s on each of us to do what’s necessary to fix it.”

As a city, “we’ve decided that we can’t sit around waiting for the national government to do something about the disuse, disrepair, and disorder that has become a trend in South Africa”, said Hill-Lewis. “It’s on us to do what we can to make our city safer, cleaner, kinder, happier, and more prosperous.”

“The Gardens Shul was founded in 1841 as the Cape Town Hebrew Congregation. Benjamin Norden gathered a *minyan* for the Kol Nidrei service on 24 September 1841, precipitating the founding of the first Jewish congregation in sub-Saharan Africa,” says Feldman.

“The original Hebrew name of the congregation was Tikvat Yisrael [the Hope of Israel], and this continues that theme of hope – so important in these times,” he says. “On the Shabbat of Hope, we unveiled a Tree of Life representing the past, and a Tree of Hope representing the present and future, where people inscribe names of loved ones.

“The Great Synagogue was opened in 1905 by the then mayor of Cape Town and president of Gardens Shul, Hyman Lieberman. In a certain sense, symbolically,

the Gateway of Hope is a continuation of that initial consecration,” Feldman says. Incredibly, “a stroke of *bashert* [fate] is that Lieberman’s great-niece happened to be in Cape Town last week – she has been living in Hong Kong – and visited the Gardens Shul the day before the event,” says Feldman. “She was present for the unveiling of the Trees of Life and Hope and for the consecration of the

Gateway of Hope. It was as if her unexpected presence was a message of continuity, support, and blessings from leaders of the past.” To those who have lost hope in the future of the community and South Africa, Feldman says, “Hope is one of the pillars of resilience. If we can maintain our hope in spite of the difficulties, we give ourselves our best chance for the future.”

Girls aren’t always made of sugar and spice

No one tells you that baby girls will one day turn 12. And that for the next five years, they will love and hate you in equal measure. They will also weep as much over a visit to the hairdresser as when a pet dies. They will have the ability to torment you with the ferocity of an axe murderer, before falling into your arms as if they were once again just a little girl who wants nothing more than to watch *Frozen* with her dad.

That’s not strictly true. I was warned. Though in my defence, it was already too late.

“*Mazaltov!*” said my friend, who called to congratulate me on the birth of our daughter 18 years ago. “Enjoy the early years!” A statement I didn’t quite understand, tried to ignore, but which nagged at me until I understood it.

After four sons, we were a little amazed when my wife gave birth to a member of the female species.

And very excited. Which is why I didn’t pay as much attention to the throwaway warning as I should have.

The early years were, indeed, a joy. She slept, she ate, she smiled, and she happily wore pretty dresses. The only challenge was ensuring that she survived her older brothers, who weren’t averse to using her as a human shield when the opportunity arose. Or who would make her repeat after them that “girls can’t drive”.

And then, one day, the sweet princess went into her girly room and disappeared. What emerged was someone who looked similar, sounded the same, but who had been captured by a body snatcher so fierce and so unpredictable, that for once, her brothers took cover. Around her there were no sudden movements, there was no reference to anything that might anger, and they learned very quickly how to evacuate a



INNER VOICE
Howard Feldman

room at the first sign of danger. Parents of teenage daughters know that it’s wise to start a rolling *tehilim* group a day ahead of a hairdresser visit. They come to know the Superbalist delivery guy as well as they know their other children. They understand the dangers of a visit to Dis-Chem, and that they’ll need to spend hours decoding what it means to be blue ticked on a WhatsApp message. They will also know love, devotion, and care. They will know what it is to have your children worry about you, and to be reprimanded by your daughter for being out late when she thought “you were dead!” It’s quite possible that you could well be dead for three to four months before any of your sons noticed. And then, they would only notice because the leftover lamb curry was finished. Not only did our daughter, Abby, finish school this month, but this week, she also turned 18. In spite of matric finals and all the stress of the year, Abby seems to be back. She’s not asking to watch *Frozen*, but her brothers are able to move freely around her without the terrified hypervigilance they displayed over the past few years. There were many times during the past teenage years when a glass of wine (or bottle) seemed to be the only way to cope. Now, when we raise a glass, it’s to toast her future and in gratitude for having been blessed with a daughter. Even beyond the early years.

A column of the SA Jewish Board of Deputies

Historic moment for Catholic-Jewish relations

This week, I attended my first World Jewish Congress (WJC) executive committee meeting in Rome. It was a remarkable experience meeting contemporaries from around the world in person, seeing how we’re all grappling with similar issues, and experiencing the solidarity of a global Jewish community.

South Africa is well represented on this prestigious body. As home to one of the world’s 12 largest Jewish communities, it has a permanent ex-officio place on the WJC executive, and as the chairperson of the South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD), I sit on the committee in that capacity. Currently, two other South African members sit on the committee: SAJBD National Vice-President Mary Kluk, and former National Vice-Chairperson Marc Pozniah. Both were elected in their own right. Prior to that, Kluk served in her capacity as SAJBD national chairperson and then president. For a number of years, she has chaired the WJC security committee. Pozniah, for his part, was elected to the executive after completing his term as chairperson of the WJC’s Jewish Diplomatic Corps. All three of us, along with National Director Wendy Kahn and the Board’s political and social justice liaison, Alana Baranov, attending in her capacity as a member of the Jewish Diplomatic Corps, were present at what was an historic occasion.

The opening evening took place, appropriately enough, at Rome’s historic Great Synagogue, but the main conference, extraordinarily enough, was held in the synod room inside the Vatican. We also had an audience with Pope Francis, which was unique and special. That a meeting of world Jewish leaders should be hosted by the prestigious, internationally recognised headquarters



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of the Catholic faith is a striking demonstration of the revolution in Jewish-Catholic relations that has taken place since the adoption under Pope John XII of the famous Nostra Aetate declaration in 1965. Nostra Aetate represented a decisive departure on the part of the Church in terms of how it viewed the Jewish people and their history and beliefs. Previous teachings of contempt and delegitimation were replaced by an acknowledgment of past wrongs, and a wish to reach out to those the Church had previously rejected. The declaration paved the way to a process of reconciliation and bridge building between Jews and Catholics that continues to this day.

The importance of world Jewry reciprocating these overtures was emphasised by Noemi Di Segni, the head of the Jewish community in Italy. As she said in her profound speech at Monday’s opening session, “The enhancement of a long-standing bond is a challenge also for the Jewish community that needs to find courage and trust – to learn about the Catholic culture, read its thoughts, books, and language to better understand the meaningfulness of the changes reached or proposed.”


The WJC is in the process of creating an equivalent document to Nostra Aetate, titled “Kishreinu – Our Bond”, which will be presented to the pope in due course. For me, and no doubt my colleagues, it was an extraordinary privilege to have been part of this historic moment for Catholic-Jewish relations.

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