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Years of US warnings end in trade blow

NICOLA MILTZ

South Africa's exclusion from a major United States trade programme was years in the making, repeatedly warned about, and, according to critics, entirely avoidable. Now, as Pretoria faces the consequences of its deteriorating relationship with Washington, analysts warn that the loss of preferential trade benefits may be only the beginning.

"The White House is ramping up its negativity towards South Africa," Democratic Alliance founder Tony Leon told the *SA Jewish Report*. "The US has a lot of bullets to fire if it chooses to fire them."

On Monday, 2 November, US President Donald Trump gave South Africa 60 days' notice of his intention to terminate its benefits under the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) from 1 January 2027.

The move follows mounting US concerns about South Africa's trade and investment barriers, domestic economic policies, and foreign-policy alliances, particularly its ties with Iran. The relationship has been further strained by Pretoria's "genocide" case against Israel at the International Court of Justice (ICJ).

AGOA allows eligible African countries to export certain goods to the US duty-free. Losing these benefits threatens the competitiveness of South African exports, particularly in agriculture and manufacturing.

US Ambassador to South Africa Leo Brent Bozell III was unequivocal. "It is regrettable that South African policies led to the termination of AGOA for South Africa. This was a predictable and preventable outcome resulting from the rejection by South Africa's government of real concerns raised by the US government.

"I remain hopeful that we can find a path forward to address our larger bilateral concerns, but the South African government must understand the gravity of the situation," he said.

Washington's five demands centred on stronger action against farm murders, condemnation of the "Kill the Boer" chant, protection of property rights, reform of race-based empowerment policies affecting American investors, and a shift in South Africa's foreign-policy alignment, including its ties with Iran.

Leon described these demands as "not extraordinarily difficult to meet. The fact that the government couldn't bring itself to meet them, is problematic."

For him, the diplomatic implications are more alarming than the immediate economic fallout. "In a quantitative sense, the net effect will be marginal, not huge. There will be losses, but there won't be a huge disruption," he said. "What it signals is very bleak."

Leon warned that Washington had further punitive options, including sanctions against individuals.

He questioned Pretoria's priorities, contrasting South Africa's trade deficit with China against its trade surplus with the US. "South Africa is forming alignments with countries that are hostile not only to America, but to the West in general and democratic freedoms."

Political economy analyst Daniel Silke cautioned against confusing the loss of preferential access with losing the American market altogether. "We haven't lost the US as a market," he said.

Instead, many South African products would become less competitive. "Wine, citrus, and jewellery exports could become more expensive for American buyers, while automotive manufacturing is particularly vulnerable." Even modest losses of market share could translate into job losses in an economy already battling exceptionally high unemployment, he warned.

But, Silke said, the US decision was more significant politically than economically, sending another damaging signal to international investors concerned about South Africa's regulatory environment, including Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) requirements.

Analysts agree that a swing toward the Democratic Party in the US midterms would not, in the short term, bring major change to Washington's approach to South Africa.

The executive director of the Middle East Africa Research Institute, Benji Shulman, said South Africa's AGOA troubles began long before President Trump returned to the White House.

"South Africa was always a marginal case for AGOA because we were considered a little too wealthy for it. But the Americans were happy to go along because it was a signal of a partnership they wanted to have with Africa, and particularly South Africa."

Concerns intensified during the Russia-Ukraine war, when Pretoria's foreign-policy positions began troubling American policymakers.

"This predates the ICJ, but I think the ICJ and the Israel issues really started to put things on the agenda alongside all these other aspects," Shulman said.

It's not so much that Pretoria underestimated the warnings, but "the ANC doesn't want to shift its focus on these core issues, especially international relations", he said.

Continued on page 3>>



Dawn Nathan-Jones and Brian Joffe congratulate each other on their awards

See pages 9 to 34



Six Jewish takeaways from the US midterm elections

AMI EDEN – JTA

The sheer size and geographic scope of the Republican wipeout on Tuesday makes it hard to read anything definitive into the results beyond a nationwide repudiation of President Donald Trump (and his candidate selections). But the fallout will have a range of reverberations. Here are six takeaways that point to what comes next.

A significantly weakened Trump doesn't bode well for Netanyahu

For Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Trump has been a longshot bet that keeps on paying off. It's hard to overstate how significant Trump's improbable wins in 2016 and 2024 were in bolstering Netanyahu's domestic standing and regional agenda. Trump also served as a security blanket, leaving Netanyahu and his allies with a sense that they need not worry too much about skyrocketing Democratic and international anger with Israel.

Whether Netanyahu holds on or chief rival Gadi Eisenkot succeeds in replacing him, Israel is entering uncharted territory. There is little chance that the combination of a weakened Trump and an emboldened Democratic Congress produces similar levels of support for aggressive action against Iran and its proxies, and other policies that a wide spectrum of Israelis see as crucial to their security.

Jeffries and Schumer have a massive headache coming their way

With Tuesday night's Democratic wave, Hakeem Jeffries is on track to become Speaker of the US House of Representatives and Chuck Schumer will likely get a second shot as US Senate Majority Leader. These New Yorkers have longstanding ties to the pro-Israel community and are among their party's strongest Israel supporters, putting them at odds with the growing number of congressional Democrats who want their party to take a much harder line against Israel. It won't be long before members in each caucus are demanding concrete action, including meaningful limits on US military sales.

Both Democratic leaders have ratcheted up their criticism of Netanyahu and his government in the wake of its war on Hamas in Gaza, but they have ultimately voted against various legislative attempts to punish Israel. As leaders of their respective chambers, Jeffries and Schumer will face immense pressure for more such votes and face much tougher scrutiny from the party base over continued support for Israel.

The impact of the anti-Israel vote was diluted

On the other hand, the massive Democratic victory dilutes the power of the anti-Israel lawmakers in Congress. Their numbers will grow, causing problems for party leaders trying to keep anti-Israel measures off the agenda. But they will remain a relatively small subset within a much larger Democratic majority that includes many moderates and Israel supporters.

Not only will anti-Israel members have less ability to hold Congress hostage, the overall issue of Israel loses some of its potency when the broader political winds indicate that all Democrats were boosted.


US President Donald Trump delivers remarks during a campaign rally at Crossroads Arena on 26 October in Corinth, Mississippi

Photo: Chip Somodevilla, Getty Images

Fetterman just lost his juice

Just as the sizeable Democratic House majority makes Jeffries less dependent on anti-Israel lawmakers in his caucus, the next Senate Majority Leader won't need to rely on Pennsylvania Senator John Fetterman. For years, Fetterman has been driving fellow Democrats crazy with his cosying up to Republicans, with progressives especially upset over his die-hard support for Israel. Fetterman has even said that the one thing that could cause him to leave the Democratic Senate caucus would be his party turning decisively against Israel.

Had things broken differently, with Democrats grabbing a narrow 51-49 majority in the chamber, Fetterman's influence would have been hypercharged. Now, not so much.

AIPAC has not found a formula for success

A few years back, the leading pro-Israel lobby decided the best way to counter the initial anti-Israel rumblings in Congress was to jump deep into the campaign fundraising business. Hundreds of millions of dollars later, the number of Israel critics in Congress has grown, with a fresh batch on the way. Moreover, in many races, anti-Israel candidates and AIPAC critics managed to turn the lobby's backing into a liability.

Meanwhile, Trump's seemingly impromptu announcement on Tuesday that his administration would end aid to Israel after this year suggests that Republican backing for such support is dropping alongside Democrats'. And Tuesday's results suggest AIPAC's strong support for the US and Israeli military strikes against Iran is out of step with the American public and many incoming lawmakers.

It was a great night for Jewish presidential hopefuls

Senator Jon Ossoff says he isn't running for president in 2028. But that won't stop the speculation from skyrocketing after his impressive re-election in Georgia, with nearly 60% of the vote. More importantly, he probably just grabbed frontrunner status in the race to become America's first Jewish president. Pennsylvania Governor Josh Shapiro registered a similarly sized re-election victory in a state that Trump won just two years ago, but Ossoff – a fierce Trump antagonist and, increasingly, a critic of Israel's military actions – cemented his rock star status among Democrats this cycle and has demonstrated an ability to bridge the gap between younger progressives and more traditional liberals.

Illinois Governor JB Pritzker also cruised to re-election. In Michigan, moderate Elissa Slotkin, another senator and likely presidential hopeful, may have at least propped open the door to some progressive support by campaigning hard for Abdul El-Sayed.

- *The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the* SA Jewish Report, *JTA, or its parent company, 70 Faces Media.*

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Torah Thought

Is your shul a beach or a gym?


Rabbi Levi Avtzon
Linksfield Shul

Modern romance begins with a thumb. We swipe past a man holding up a fish on a boat, pause on a woman who "loves travel, good food, and deep conversations" (as opposed, presumably, to the shallow kind), and trust that chemistry will sort out the rest. Whether we want the same kind of life is a question we leave for the fourth date, or the second year, or the counsellor's couch, or the Beth Din with attorneys.

Avraham started with the right question. In this week's parsha, he sends his servant Eliezer hundreds of kilometres to find a wife for his son Yitzchak, because the young women next door came from homes built on very different foundations. He understood that the woman Yitzchak married would decide what was spoken about at his Shabbos table and what his children absorbed without ever being taught. A marriage partner is a big deal.

The Torah then tells us what Eliezer looked for at the well. The sign he asked Heaven for was next-level kindness. A young woman who offers a thirsty stranger a drink is polite. One who then offers to water his 10 camels after a long desert road has volunteered for an afternoon of hauling jugs from a well, and the Torah makes a point of telling us she ran. Rivkah chose the heavy lifting, and that is how Eliezer knew she belonged in Avraham's home.

I often ask people whether shul, for them, is a beach or a gym. At a beach shul we choose by comfort: the brocha, the length of the sermon (shorter, please), how cool the crowd is, and the reassuring sense that nobody will ask much of us. At a gym, we find the person who will train us, who can see where we are weak, and knows how hard to push. A session that leaves us exactly as we walked in is a wasted morning. We came to grow!

Thank G-d, Jewish life in South Africa is flourishing, with wonderful shuls, rabbis, and schools, each with its own strengths. As in dating, we should be very intentional about choosing the environment in which we and our families will grow the most. Not just the place with the best kichel and the coolest social scene.

Eliezer could have settled for a pleasant young woman with a cup of water and a lovely smile. He waited to see how she treated the camels. Whether we're choosing a spouse, a school, or a shul, we would do well to ask the same deeper questions. What values will flourish here? What kind of people will we become? Life is a gym. Choose where, and with whom, you train carefully.

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Antizionism prioritised over job creation

TALI FEINBERG

Millions of South Africans are unemployed in what experts call a "national crisis", yet a political party has turned its back on a project that could create thousands of jobs, all because the man proposing the investment, Gary Itzikowitz, is a Zionist.

Forty-four percent of South Africans – or 12 million people – are unemployed, according to labour law expert Ivan Israelstam. "It's never been this bad, and unemployment continues to rise," he says. "Soon, half the working population will be unemployed. This affects every South African."

Local property developer Itzikowitz hoped to make a difference with a 10-year investment proposal that promised more than 100 000 jobs, affordable housing, quality education, medical facilities, farming and fishing opportunities, and business growth for disadvantaged communities.

He signed a non-binding letter of intent with the National Coloured Congress (NCC) on 27 October. The NCC announced this with much fanfare, describing it as a "multibillion-rand investment" and "private investment aimed at building ownership, opportunity, and a stronger future for our people".

But days later, the NCC said it was cancelling the agreement. "When we discovered that the developer was a Zionist, we walked away out of principle," said NCC president Fadiel Adams. "Anything that has to do with Zionism is poisonous, and we don't want it."

But Itzikowitz says "this was business with purpose", using his 30 years of property development experience "to develop property and benefit under-serviced communities at the same time".

He remains willing to work with anyone committed to uplifting local communities and strengthening the South African economy. "Collaboration without bias, prejudice, or discrimination is the essence of tolerance and peacebuilding," he says.

Cape South African Jewish Board of Deputies executive director Daniel Bloch says that rejecting opportunities for community upliftment due to political or religious beliefs "risks depriving local communities of vital resources. Ultimately, it is these very communities that bear the consequences."

Bloch says that the welfare of citizens "should always remain the priority". Yet a conflict thousands of kilometres away "appears to have taken precedence over the immediate needs of fellow South Africans".

Itzikowitz says he met NCC deputy president Larry Varrie more than two years ago, "while doing independent due diligence for an investor on a property. That opportunity didn't pass my due diligence, and a second proposal that he brought to me circa a year later also failed."

Both were declined on normal commercial grounds, says Itzikowitz. "Our relationship was courteous and professional, and it began before Varrie had any involvement with the NCC," he says. "I mentioned to Varrie that investors I worked with were interested in affordable housing and rural retail developments. From the outset we agreed that any project had to be commercially viable, conducted at arm's length, subject to full due diligence, and compliant with all applicable laws."

Varrie then approached Itzikowitz with a property project proposal. When Varrie later joined the NCC, he proposed that it take on the project as a community initiative. "I explored this on the understanding that the project was independent of party politics," says Itzikowitz.

Varrie drafted a non-binding letter of intent on paper with the NCC letterhead, which he sent to Itzikowitz, who reviewed and signed it on 27 October. "Political views were never discussed," says Itzikowitz.

The NCC told its constituents that they have been given empty promises by politicians for 30 years, but "the NCC did not come with another promise. It came with a signed agreement. And it goes ahead whatever the result on 4 November, because our people deserve it either way. Now the focus must be on turning this agreement into real results for our communities!"

Days later, it turned its back on Itzikowitz.

He says the NCC's decision "came from left field and I was, perhaps naively, shocked. I was also disappointed, above all, for the communities that stood to benefit."

Labour law experts say that scuppering a possible job-creation opportunity because of ideology is highly concerning in the current economic climate.

Israelstam says South Africa is approaching "failed state" status, with "unemployment, decaying cities, crime, and starvation" abounding. "We can't turn this country around if people aren't willing to put aside their minor differences in favour of solving major problems. And yet it happens every day, because we are such a divided society."

Although such a project would make only a small dent in unemployment, "we need to take every opportunity to create jobs".

In addition, if investment and job creation are politicised, it will deter further investment, he says.

Fellow labour law expert Michael Bagraim says the project was altruistic and destined to create thousands of jobs. "The concept is what is needed in South Africa.

"To now boycott a deal because one individual happens to be in favour of Israel is nonsensical."


Gary Itzikowitz

South African Zionist Federation national spokesperson Rolene Marks says that the people paying for the NCC's political grandstanding are the communities it claims to champion.

"What changed between signing the agreement and cancelling it?" she asks. "Not those communities' need for jobs. Not their need for investment. The investor's political views became the overriding consideration. The NCC's promises of economic upliftment suddenly came with a condition."

Marks says "the hypocrisy is staggering".

"South Africa maintains diplomatic relations with Israel, yet the NCC treats support for that same country as grounds to reject investment in its own communities. A party that demands inclusion for the marginalised is imposing a political loyalty test on those willing to invest in them."

Marks asks how tearing up an agreement helps a single Palestinian.

"The NCC should stop pretending it puts communities first," she says. That is a betrayal of the people it was elected to serve."

Itzikowitz says that "the project was intended to uplift minority communities who have themselves suffered prejudice. It is an unfortunate irony, and a clear reminder that prejudice of any kind does no good."

He says that he will continue to source land and partners for affordable housing and township and rural shopping centre development. "Demand and funding for this asset class is strong, and I will pursue projects with like-minded landowners, developers, businesspeople, and investors who share the goal of ethical business and community upliftment."

He doesn't intend to act against the NCC.

Bloch emphasises that no South African should have to conceal their identity, religious beliefs, or connection to Israel in order to conduct business, contribute to society, or participate fully in the economy. "Our message to the Jewish community is simple: don't be intimidated, don't withdraw from broader society, and don't feel compelled to compromise your identity or beliefs."

Itzikowitz remains unbowed. To the South African Jewish community, he says, "No matter the challenges, we must never stop being proud, brave Jews and Zionists, and never apologise for our beliefs.

"I am and always will be a proud Jew and Zionist, which will not stop me from working with good people of every background. The best response is to keep collaborating, contributing, and helping to uplift our own communities and the communities around us."

Years of US warnings end in trade blow

>>Continued from page 1

He warned that the consequences would cross political boundaries, affecting citrus and canned-fruit producers for example in the DA-governed Western Cape and automotive manufacturing in the ANC's Eastern Cape heartland.

Sara Gon, a fellow at the Institute of Race Relations, described the AGOA exclusion as "definitely a consequence of poor foreign policy by the ANC".

"Also, the policies that stifle our economic growth must change, and everyone knows it. Even the ANC knows it, but the ANC just won't get rid of red tape, scrap BEE, and remove the provisions for expropriation without compensation."

She was particularly critical of the ANC retaining control of international relations within the government of national unity. "It's been a disaster."

The South African Zionist Federation (SAZF) accused the ANC of sacrificing economic interests for ideological allegiances. "This isn't a misfortune that befell South Africa. It's the predictable result of a deliberate choice," the organisation said.

SAZF national spokesperson Rolene Marks said, "The ANC has run South Africa's foreign policy like a party branch meeting, and South Africans are paying the bill.

"It chose Hamas over hostages, Tehran over trade, and slogans over jobs. Blaming Washington will not restore a single export order. Taking responsibility might."

Trade, Industry and Competition Minister Parks Tau defended Pretoria's efforts to preserve the trade relationship. "This decision doesn't define the broader relationship between South Africa and the United States, however, a solution depends on the willingness of both parties to find solutions."

Tau maintained that Pretoria had offered concessions but accused Washington of introducing additional issues outside the scope of negotiations.

"As a sovereign constitutional democracy, South Africa will uphold its constitutional responsibilities, transformation objectives, and international obligations, while seeking practical solutions to expand trade and investment."

Government figures indicate that AGOA exports accounted for approximately 10% of South African exports to the US in 2025, worth nearly $1.7 billion, compared with $4 billion the previous year.

Bilateral trade nevertheless reached $28.8 billion in 2025, with more than 600 American companies operating in South Africa and supporting approximately 134 600 jobs.

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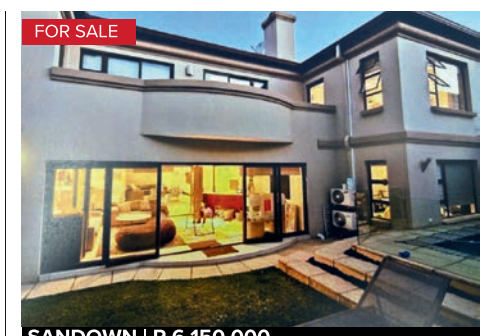

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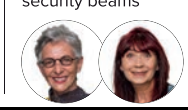

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Frustration and satisfaction on voting day

LEE TANKLE


Voting in the munipal election 2026

Frustration mounted in Glenhazel on the morning of 4 November when members of the Jewish community showed up at voting stations only to discover that there were no more ballot papers and they would have to wait in the sun.

For many, what should have been a quick and straightforward trip to the polls turned into a lengthy and frustrating wait, with little indication of when more ballot papers would arrive. Some questioned how voting stations could run out of papers so early in the day.


Jake and Adam Shapiro

"When I arrived they said it would only take 10 to 15 minutes, and they have said that every 10 to 15 minutes, and it has been an hour and we have gotten no more information," said one frustrated community member at Summerwood Primary School.


Ian and Meloday Port

"It's been the longest 10 minutes of my life," said another, at Glenhazel Primary School.

It wasn't just one but many voting stations in Jewish areas of Johannesburg that ran out of ballot papers and had to wait for more to be escorted by metro police. When they finally arrived, everyone was grateful finally to get out of the sun.

Gabi Farber Cohen, youth liaison for the South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD), explained that when the ballot papers ran out in Glenhazel, no one could get hold of the elections area manager, making the process even longer.

"The area manager then only delivered the PR [proportional representation] ballots and it was further delayed. The issue was the area manager for Glenhazel," she said. "However, through the process I was impressed by the voting station staff really trying to do everything in their powers to get the ballot papers delivered. The presiding officers have really been on top form."



Many voters explained that they had come to vote at around 09:00 or 10:00 so that they could get on with the rest of their public holiday, but now that they would have to wait, they didn't want to go home because the queue might be even longer later.

Those who were at voting stations before the ballot papers ran out spoke highly of the efficiency they had experienced, with voting taking about 15 minutes from start to finish.

SAJBD national director Wendy Kahn, who was an election observer at Jabula Recreation Centre in Sandringham, said she had never been so impressed by a presiding officer and her team.

"There haven't been the snaking queues we normally see and voting began at 07:00, without the system failures we have seen in the past," she said.

When the PR ballots ran out, they had immediately contacted the Independent Electoral Commission, as did the other voting centres in the area, Kahn said. "It took approximately 30 minutes for them to arrive. We heard the sirens of the police cars as they approached. It's puzzling why sufficient ballot papers weren't supplied as they know voter numbers. In saying that, people overall were understanding and calm. They quickly processed the backlog," she said.


Waiting to vote at Summerwood Primary

In other areas, people were able to get their voting done, albeit after standing in long queues.

"I came prepared with a large water bottle, a hat, lots of sunscreen, and a book so I am prepared," said one Sandton voter who estimated that she would be waiting for about two hours.

A voter in Greenside explained that she had had no issues with voting, but she did see that the ANC representatives present were being crowded by people asking questions about Johannesburg.

Danielle Klaff, a DA candidate in Cape Town, said that although there were some hiccups, like the voter management device not working at some stations, people had come out in droves to vote.

Many young voters around Johannesburg were excited not only to make their mark and hopefully make a difference to their city, but also to have the opportunity to speak to the different parties at their voting stations and maybe get some merchandise too.

"If you don't vote you can't complain," said one voter in his 20s.

Similarly, a young Joburg artist explained that she wanted to vote because "Helen is an icon and I want to see her make Joburg better".

Israelis wait for a coalition or second election, maybe war



OPINION **ROLENE MARKS**

I don't envy President Isaac Herzog. This week, the president will sit down for consultations with each faction that will represent the Israeli electorate in the Knesset and receive their recommendations of who they believe is best suited to form a government. Will it be Benjamin Netanyahu, the incumbent prime minister, or Gadi Eisenkot, who heads the change bloc? In the interests of full transparency, the president will broadcast these meetings via his office's YouTube channel. We can all be a fly on the wall.

The big question Israelis are asking is will we have a functioning government or could we be headed to the polls again?

One thing of which Israelis can be certain is that there is no absolute certainty. While the horse-trading and political musical chairs are underway, other issues loom – a possible renewed war with Iran and a win for the Democratic Party in the US midterms, which could challenge Israel and the US's iron-clad alliance.

Israel's election results and the aftermath have come with significant surprises.


Photo: Kobi Gideon; GPO

Israel's President Isaac Herzog receiving the results of the elections to the 26th Knesset

Currently, it seems that Eisenkot will be the candidate most likely tapped by the president with the unenviable role of forming a coalition.

While Likud may have won the most seats, the "Pro-Netanyahu" bloc fell short of the majority. In a shock development, the ultra-Orthodox party United Torah Judaism (UTJ), which won seven seats, said that it is unlikely to recommend Netanyahu to form a coalition, leaving Bibi with Shas and the far-right Otzma Yehudit and Religious Zionist Party, headed by Itamar Ben-Gvir and Bezalel Smotrich respectively.

The ultra-Orthodox (Haredi) parties underperformed, but the Arab parties, comprised of The Joint List and Ra'am, won 19 seats, making them the third biggest bloc. It is important to note that Arab voters aren't homogenous and while some (not all) of the parties are politically and ideologically opposed to the other factions, many in the Arab communities don't vote for them. Israel's Arabs see high crime as one of their most pressing concerns – and don't want a repeat performance from Ben-Gvir.

The "anti-Bibi" or "change bloc", headed by Eisenkot, also fell short of the majority, accumulating 48 seats, but is likely to be offered to form a coalition first.

There is the possibility that the Arab bloc and UTJ sit outside of the coalition. The change bloc realises it has to move very fast. This week, leaders of the various factions met and released the following statement, "We are coordinated and will act immediately to replace the 7 October government with a national emergency government, and realise the clear parliamentary majority in the Knesset. The party leaders are coordinating regarding the need to establish a Zionist government based on the four principles set forth by Eisenkot, as soon as possible."

Nobody wants to go to another election.

Can there be compromise? Could there be a unity or broad-based government? Highly unlikely because much like a family wedding where people refuse to sit with each other, there are those who refuse to sit with Netanyahu. Avigdor Liberman, the Arab bloc, Eisenkot, Yair Golan, and possibly UTJ have said they will not sit with Bibi.

Israelis are feeling the shifting sands and the uncertainty. We need change. We are war-fatigued and very wary about the future – and Israel's global reputation, which has been decidedly mismanaged. At the time of writing, conversation has become less about the election results and more about the possibility of renewed war with Iran. Will it be today? This weekend? The war drums beat louder and the rhetoric on all sides becomes more strident. We are also watching the US midterms very closely. A projected Democratic win could have very serious consequences for our "unshakeable alliance", with members of that party increasingly hostile towards the Jewish State.

In the meantime, while the war drums bang, the negotiations continue and we brace for a seismic change in the US, singer Boy George is in Israel to perform. Israelis will do what we do in times of uncertainty and change. We will dance again.

- *Rolene Marks is a Middle East commentator often heard on radio and TV and is the co-founder of Lay of the Land and the SA-Israel Policy Forum.*

Remembering SA's Jewish WWII heroes

CLAUDIA GROSS

More than 10 000 South African Jews volunteered to fight in World War II. Many never returned, while others came home carrying experiences they rarely discussed. Decades later, their remarkable stories are still emerging, thanks to the work of one researcher.

Dr Naomi Rapeport, a retired physician from Johannesburg now living in Israel, has spent years documenting the contributions of South African Jews who served during the war. Her research has uncovered thousands of names, acts of bravery, and family histories that might otherwise have disappeared.

She attended the South African Jewish Ex-Service League's memorial ceremony on Sunday, 1 November, organised in partnership with the South African Zionist Federation (SAZF). Titled "Hope and Heroism", the event honoured Jewish men and women who served during the war.

Rapeport's involvement began through her interest in genealogy and family history. She previously worked with the South African Jewish Museum on its Jewish Digital Archive Project, which collected historical photographs and family records.

She was struck by the number of photographs depicting soldiers. "Ten thousand volunteered. That was 10% of our Jewish population. They weren't conscripted, they weren't drafted, they volunteered," she said. Rapeport believes this contribution deserves far greater recognition.

Her research gathered momentum after she obtained letters written by a relative while he was a prisoner of war. She arranged them chronologically and published a book titled *Letters in a Shoebox*.

The letters documented his journey from military service to captivity in Britain, Italy, and eventually Dresden, Germany. The project also revealed how little his family knew about his wartime experiences. "His children weren't aware of a lot of things that he did in the war because he didn't talk about them," she said.

Many veterans remained silent about what they had experienced. Their stories emerged years later, when relatives began examining photographs, letters, and military records.



Craig Pantanowitz, SAZF national chairperson; Holocaust survivor Lionel Fluss; Major Marcus Goldring from the SA Jewish Ex-Service League; and SAZF president Avrom Krengel

Rapeport's work eventually attracted the attention of organisers establishing a museum in Israel dedicated to Jewish participation in World War II. They wanted to document the contribution of Jewish soldiers from Allied countries, including South Africa.

She agreed to help trace these histories and has since documented more than 4 000 South African Jewish servicemen and women. There is no official list of every Jewish South African who served, making the research particularly challenging.

The wider international contribution is equally significant. According to Rapeport, approximately 1.5 million Jews from Allied countries served during the conflict, with about 250 000 losing their lives. "World War II, we always think of it being the story of the Shoah," she said. "Here you had 1.5 million Jewish men and women from around the world who actually went and fought to get the Nazis defeated."

The research also highlights how veterans helped establish Israel's military capabilities following independence in 1948. Their wartime experience provided valuable knowledge to the emerging military forces. South Africans were among those who contributed. Some served in the Jewish Brigade, while others later volunteered through Machal, the programme for overseas volunteers.

Rapeport highlighted the contribution of South African doctor Lionel Melzer. During the Battle of Sidi Rezegh in North Africa, Melzer operated a medical station amid intense fighting. He encouraged medical personnel and stretcher bearers to continue treating wounded soldiers despite the danger.

He later received military honours for his service. After moving to Israel, he helped establish field hospitals and contributed his wartime medical experience to the developing medical corps.

The decision to volunteer was particularly significant given the antisemitism present in South Africa during the 1930s. The country experienced the rise of the Greyshirts, an antisemitic organisation promoting Nazi ideology, alongside immigration restrictions affecting Jewish refugees.

Rapeport also highlighted the political climate. Oswald Pirow, who served as minister of defence before the war, had expressed admiration for Adolf Hitler. Jewish South Africans were increasingly aware of the danger facing their communities. Many understood the threat Nazi Germany posed to Jewish survival.

Rapeport has uncovered remarkable stories of women who served, including Rose Vandecar, a nursing sister who received the Florence Nightingale Award. She eventually traced Vandecar's family and obtained a book documenting her wartime service.

Another discovery involved Bernard Friedlander, who helped rescue approximately 1 800 South African prisoners of war from a sinking ship. His bravery earned him a military award, yet his descendants, too, knew little about his actions.

"People are really surprised at times to discover they had a family member who fought in the war. He was a hero, and they didn't know about it at all," Rapeport said.

The memorial ceremony also highlighted the personal connections that make this history relevant to younger generations. SAZF national chairperson Craig Pantanowitz told the gathering about his grandfather Sunny Kuper, who trained as a pilot with the South African Air Force before joining the Royal Air Force.

Kuper served in North Africa and flew photographic reconnaissance missions over Europe, photographing Nazi installations and identifying targets for Allied bombing operations. During one mission, his Spitfire was shot down. He managed to crash-land and was rescued.

"Because he was rescued, he returned home. He built a family. And I am able to stand before you today and tell his story," Pantanowitz said.

He also remembered black soldiers who served alongside Jewish servicemen. These included 644 Sotho, Tswana, and Swazi members of the African Auxiliary Pioneer Corps who died aboard the SS Erinpura alongside 140 Jewish soldiers from British Mandatory Palestine.

SAZF president Avrom Krengel reflected on South African soldiers' contributions to the establishment and defence of Israel. He urged visitors to Israel to remember those buried at Mount Herzl and other military cemeteries.

For Rapeport, documenting these histories remains an ongoing responsibility. The museum in Israel provides a permanent home for the research, with exhibitions covering the war, Allied contributions, Jewish resistance, and the establishment of Israel.

She believes these stories deserve recognition beyond the battlefield. Many survivors carried the psychological consequences of war for decades without discussing their experiences. "You do not have any victory at the end of the day because of what people endure," she said. Through her research, Rapeport hopes to ensure that the sacrifices of these servicemen and women are recognised, and that future generations understand the role they played in Jewish history.

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south african Jewish Report

Women's place is among the winners



When Dawn Nathan-Jones walked onto the stage on Sunday night to receive her Business Icon Award at the 2026 Investec Jewish Achiever Awards, my eyes welled up with tears. No, she isn't a close friend, but she is someone I admire for her extraordinary accomplishments and her belief in and work towards women flying high in what is still, at its core, "a man's world".

It was a historic moment as the first female business icon in the history of the Jewish Achiever Awards was honoured. And it was this former chief executive of Europcar, a social entrepreneur, and leader, who had never won a Jewish Achiever business leader award before. She had been nominated, often as the only woman, but never won.

Her own experience made Dawn realise how important it is for women to go through the Jewish Achiever nomination and interview process. She put her then company's support behind creating what is now the Europcar Women in Leadership Award. She recognised that it was an empowering experience that brought out the competitive spirit in women and built their confidence, whether they won or not.

Dawn is a visionary and an exemplary business leader. And the point was clear: women were not really winning business leader of the year at the Jewish Achiever Awards.

Many incredible women have since won the Women in Leadership Award, but few have won the business leadership, entrepreneurship, or other non-gender specific but clearly male-dominated business awards. Hopefully the tide has turned.

However, Dawn would be the first person to tell you she is not the only woman of her calibre and should not have been one of only few winning such awards.

Perhaps women choose not to accept their nominations, as is their right, perhaps because they are already spreading their time and energy thin across their careers and other responsibilities.

"I don't think it's a reflection of lack of talent or ability," said Dawn. "I think historically women have had fewer opportunities. Maybe they've been less visible, and sometimes less confident in putting themselves forward."

Dawn believes that women make exceptional leaders, naturally bringing a different perspective to the table. "We have a lot of strengths that our male counterpart don't have. We have a lot of empathy and can be far more collaborative, although I don't believe there is one style of female leadership. What matters is their competence, courage, integrity, and the ability to bring people along with them."

I know this may not be popular thinking and perhaps I may even be called sexist for saying it, but I live in this world. My experience of what my "sisters" live through in South Africa makes it clear that, while we may have the most progressive Constitution in the world in terms of gender equality, everyday realities reflect a society where men still hold disproportionate power.

In the Johannesburg Stock Exchange's (JSE's) top 40 companies, only three of the chief executives are women, with 27% of the executive roles taken up by women, and six of the 40 board chairs female. In the JSE's top 200, only 8% of chief executives are women. There is no doubt this is an improvement on 10 and 20 years ago, but there is still a clear disparity.

I hope that this year's awards herald change. In addition to Dawn, three other women were recognised, Ariella Kuper, who won the Women in Leadership Award, Joan Block for Community Service, and Kim Berman, in the Art, Sport, Science, and Culture category.

And while the Jewish Achiever Awards are always based in Johannesburg, it is very much about the national Jewish community. It is as wonderful that this year there were four winners from Cape Town: Dawn; Paul and Saul Berman, who won the Entrepreneur Award; and Kuper. We also had a winner from KwaZulu-Natal, our Rising Star, running champ Adam Lipschitz.

For anyone who was at the awards ceremony, or perhaps watched it online, it was truly uplifting and an evening that evoked such intense pride in who we are and the calibre of people we have in our community. More than 800 people came to celebrate the winners. But what is so important to note is that while there were only 10 people recognised at the event, the number of phenomenal people who were nominated and didn't win was incredible. Each one of them has a unique and incredible story of achievement.

Behind the scenes are the judges, each of whom in their own right is someone to be proud of. They give a substantial amount of time to ensuring they go through everything they can to decide the best winners of their category. It is a tough ask, but they do it with such aplomb and willingness. As for the sponsors of the awards, there aren't enough words of thanks.

Throughout this year, we have dealt with so much unpleasantness towards Jews, both in South Africa, and abroad. It is such a wonderful experience to be able to set that all aside for a night to celebrate all that we are and all we have achieved.

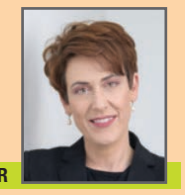
It was also exciting to be able to celebrate Jews from around the world in our theme, décor, and delicious food. There is something internationally bonding in doing this, considering how our Jewish world has grown smaller thanks to rising antisemitism.

Being able to honour Jews from all the different parts of the world leaves a real sense of warmth. Not to mention the different flavours and cuisines that warmed our insides.

Kol hakavod to everyone concerned!

Shabbat Shalom!
Peta Krost
Editor

7 October inquiry can go ahead already



OPINION PAULA SLIER

Israelis have voted, but who will form the next government remains uncertain. So does the answer to a question that ran through the campaigns: who will investigate the failures surrounding 7 October?

The hostages have been brought home, the living and the dead. But their return hasn't settled arguments over the government's handling of their captivity, whether deals could have brought them back sooner, or who bears responsibility for delays in securing their release.

Lieutenant Colonel (Res.) Dr Amir Blumenfeld worked with the families of hostages during their loved ones' captivity, assessing the risks to the hostages' health and calling for their return. He previously headed the Trauma and Combat Medicine Branch of the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) Medical Corps. For him, the dispute goes beyond who wins an election or forms a coalition. A credible investigation, he believes, is essential to rebuilding trust in Israel's leaders and institutions. Leaving those failures unresolved risks allowing feelings of betrayal to deepen the country's polarisation and mistrust.

"On the Saturday before the election, I attended the rally at Hostage Square in Tel Aviv," he says. "Every speaker was either directly affected by 7 October or a family member of someone murdered or taken hostage. They all expressed the same anger and disbelief: three years after the massacre, Israel has still not established an independent, comprehensive national inquiry into what happened."



Lieutenant Colonel (Res.) Dr Amir Blumenfeld

Such an inquiry, he argues, could help separate facts from competing political accounts. "The trauma is shared, but the story we tell about it has split." Blumenfeld chairs SAHAR, an organisation providing online emotional support, and spoke to the *SA Jewish Report* in his personal capacity. "Above all, the families are waiting for the truth," he says.

The election may have opened a way to begin that investigation without waiting for a new government. Last week, Gadi Eisenkot, the former IDF chief of staff who leads Yashar, announced that his party was preparing legislation to establish a state commission of inquiry. Yashar won 21 seats, making it the second-largest party after Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's Likud. But Eisenkot's Jewish opposition bloc holds only 48 of Parliament's 120 seats. He needs support beyond it to form a government. Before the election, Eisenkot promised that an inquiry would be the first decision of a government he led. But does he need to become prime minister to help establish one?

Hebrew University constitutional law professor Barak Medina says Parliament has another route. Under the conventional state commission model, the government establishes the inquiry and defines its scope. The president of the Supreme Court appoints its members, with a serving or former Supreme Court or district court judge as chair. Another route exists through the State Control Committee of the Knesset, Israel's Parliament. It requires an appropriate comptroller's report and committee support.

But Knesset members (MKs) could also change the law. The election determines who sits in Parliament; coalition negotiations determine who forms the government. The new Knesset is scheduled to take office on 10 November, after which its members can advance legislation even while coalition talks continue. Lawmakers would need to establish the committees to consider an inquiry bill and secure enough votes to pass it. Parties could support an investigation without agreeing to govern together. To do that, Medina expects MKs to propose a law specifically establishing a 7 October commission, rather than give Parliament a general power to establish commissions. The law would also specify what investigators must examine. "I believe that the Knesset has the power to enact such a law," he says.

An earlier attempt failed. Netanyahu's coalition rejected a similar bill from Yesh Atid MK Meir Cohen in July. It proposed appointments by the Supreme Court president, which Netanyahu opposes in favour of political selection. That rejection ordinarily prevents a similar proposal returning to a vote within six months, although the Knesset speaker can permit an earlier vote if circumstances change. Medina considers the election results and the government's caretaker status sufficient grounds. Whether Eisenkot will follow Cohen's model remains unclear. His team had not responded to a request for clarification at the time of writing.

The outgoing government remains in office until a successor takes over, but its caretaker status limits its freedom to act. Medina explains that court rulings generally restrict it to necessary decisions that cannot wait. The court has not specifically ruled on establishing a commission, although he considers those restrictions applicable. Medina expects Eisenkot to try forming a government and turn to legislation if that effort fails. That is his assessment, rather than a timetable announced by Eisenkot.

For Blumenfeld, the cost of waiting extends beyond politics. "Establishing the facts, understanding what went wrong, and acknowledging responsibility are necessary first steps towards rebuilding trust and beginning the healing process in Israeli society." He argues that those whose conduct could be investigated must not influence appointments. "I believe it must be a formal state commission of inquiry, with members appointed by the president of the Supreme Court, as provided for under Israeli law."

How far investigators could look matters too. Yashar's programme calls for examining the preceding decade and the conduct of the war. Medina expects similar subjects in legislation, including political responsibility. That scrutiny could reach people demanding an inquiry. Eisenkot commanded the IDF from 2015 to 2019 and later served in Israel's wartime leadership. Decisions during his command could fall within an investigation covering the preceding decade.

The IDF has conducted internal inquiries, but those do not provide the comprehensive examination of political and military responsibility campaigners seek. A state commission can compel testimony and documents, identify failures, and recommend changes. It cannot convict anyone of a crime.

Bereaved families don't all agree: some oppose the judiciary-appointed model. Blumenfeld doesn't suggest an inquiry can repair everything. "Its findings may not convince everyone. But its process must be one that Israelis across the political spectrum can recognise as fair and credible. We don't have to agree on everything to rebuild a shared future. But we must be able to trust that the truth matters to all of us."

• *Paula Slier is an international journalist, war correspondent, and speaker who has reported from conflict zones across the Middle East, Africa, and Europe. Her work focuses on geopolitics, modern conflict, information warfare, and the battle for truth.*

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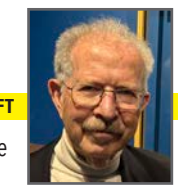
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A flickering light in an ever-darkening darkness



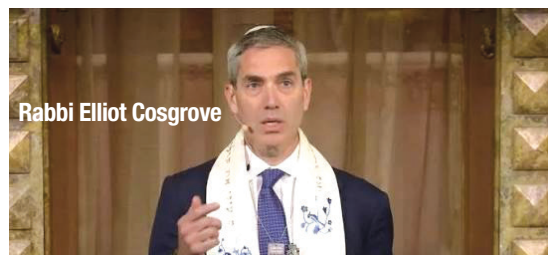
OPINION

MENACHEM Z ROSENSAFT

Ever since the passing of Auschwitz survivor and Nobel Peace Prize laureate Elie Wiesel in 2016 and the death of Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks four years later, world Jewry has been without a clarion moral voice in the prophetic tradition.

At a critical moment in Jewish history, Rabbi Elliot Cosgrove has emerged as precisely such a voice. Most recently, he zeroed in on the ultimate challenge posed by the results of last week's Israeli elections. It was not whether the opposition to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu could cobble together the necessary 61 Knesset votes to form a government. Nor was it whether "Netanyahu and his opponents could find a way to form a national unity government, setting aside their differences in the interest of the country".

Instead, Rabbi Cosgrove discussed the significance of the 19 Knesset seats now held by The Joint List, a political alliance of Arab-majority Israeli political parties, and Ra'am, a separate politically more conservative Arab party. These parliamentary seats represent hundreds of thousands of non-Jewish, that is Muslim and Christian, Israeli citizens who have roared into Israel's political reality with a vengeance. "We are here and we're not on



Rabbi Elliot Cosgrove

the sidelines," observed Ra'am head Mansour Abbas as the results were coming in.

As the spiritual leader of New York City's Park Avenue Synagogue for almost two decades now, Cosgrove has long shown exceptional courage in squarely taking on the complex, often politically and ethically divisive issues facing the Jewish community, the State of Israel, and society as a whole. Through his live-streamed sermons and articles published in *The Forward* and elsewhere, his words and teachings reach far beyond the physical walls of his congregation. (In the interest of full disclosure, he is not only my rabbi but a valued friend.)

A staunch and unapologetic life-long Zionist, Cosgrove has not shied away from criticising the Israeli government's policies when they diverged with the values and principles that brought the modern Jewish State into being in the first place. Thus, he was one of the principal speakers at a demonstration outside the United Nations on 22 September 2023, protesting against Netanyahu's proposed scuttling of Israel's independent judiciary.

"We are here," he declared on that occasion, "because of our commitment to an Israel, as stated in Israel's Declaration of Independence, based on freedom, justice, and peace as envisioned by the prophets of Israel. We are here to remind and affirm to the world the principles upon which Israel is founded: A Jewish and democratic state."

In his sermon this past Shabbat, Cosgrove noted that "with the exception of Yair Golan and his Democrats, the major Jewish-led opposition parties have rejected the possibility of being in coalition with Arab parties. It is one of the prickliest paradoxes of Israeli democracy: Israel's Arab citizens have voted in extraordinary numbers, sending 19 representatives to the Knesset, yet the very parties whose votes could break the political deadlock are the parties that much of Israel's political establishment refuses to consider as governing partners."

After laying out the historical and political predicates to the present "dilemma from hell", including the 7 October and post-7 October "massacres, the hostages, the war, the continuing grief and fear", he went on to ask "a question as old as the Jewish people itself: Can the Jewish family find room in its household for those who do not share its Jewish identity? Can we secure our own destiny while acknowledging the presence of another? Can we remain faithful to who we are without casting out those who are also part of our family?"

Therein lies the crux of the crossroads at which Israel finds itself after the election. One of the opposition leaders, the hawkish Avigdor Liberman, who controls a critical seven Knesset seats, refuses to sit in a coalition with either Netanyahu or any Arab party. He rejects the possibility of a minority government backed by Arab parties from the outside. But the inexorable maths appears to be that without Liberman's seven seats, the opposition to Netanyahu cannot command a majority in the Knesset.

Writing in the Los Angeles *Jewish Journal*, my friend Thane Rosenbaum, with whom I rarely agree on anything political, asks what on its face appears to be a reasonable question, "Can Israel afford to have a Muslim politician who is agnostic about terror serve in the Cabinet and attend security briefings?" But Rosenbaum conveniently ignores the corollary to this quandary: can Israel afford to once again – ever again – have the fascist Itamar Ben-Gvir, who encourages settler violence against Palestinian civilians in the West Bank, "serve in the Cabinet and attend security briefings?"

As Cosgrove correctly points out, "A coalition that includes Arab political representatives would not, by itself, settle the Palestinian question, erase inequality, or address every accusation laid at Israel's feet. Those determined to hate Israel will continue to find reasons to do so. But imagine what it would mean for the Jewish State's democratic promise to be reflected not only in the right of Arab citizens to vote, or in the oft-cited number of Arab pharmacists in Israeli society, but in Arab representatives sitting at the very table of government. And for those of us who spend so much of our lives defending Israel in the public square, it is a delicious thought to imagine the dividends such a coalition might have – the message it would send, the assumptions it would challenge, and the possibilities it might open for how Israel is seen by the world."

Cosgrove's 2026 sermon echoes the sentiments expressed by Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin in a television interview only a few days before his assassination, "The question, 'do you have a Jewish majority?' is one of the questions that is most outrageous to me because in my eyes, Judaism and racism contradict each other at their core. The Jews were the ones who were persecuted because of their religion, who were discriminated against, and we, in the Jewish State, are going to discriminate?"

Cosgrove emphasised that it is not his place "to advocate for any particular coalition arrangement. I do not live in Israel, serve in its military, pay its taxes, or vote in its elections. It could be the opposition entering into a coalition with Arab parties. It could be Netanyahu doing so. It could be a national unity government. Different as each scenario may be, each would require political leaders to reconsider commitments made before the election. Each would involve difficult compromises, but each also holds the possibility of breaking the deadlock and opening new horizons for Israel's future. A crossing of red lines, a challenging of long-held assumptions, a reconsideration of what is politically possible."

And so, he concluded, "It is the great 'what if' of our people, from the first Jewish family to the present day. What if Abraham had found a way to keep Hagar and Ishmael in the fold? Tragic as it is to contemplate what might have been, the Torah invites us to imagine what might yet be. We cannot change Abraham's decision, but we can decide what kind of tents we build today. May Israel's leaders have the wisdom to recognise the possibilities before them, may its citizenry have the grace to give their leaders room to act, and may all have the courage to build a Jewish and democratic state capacious enough for all its citizens."

And those of us listening to or reading his words can only add, may Rabbi Cosgrove's words be a light, however flickering, in what appears to be an ever-darkening darkness May what he envisages as possible indeed come to pass.

- *Menachem Z Rosensaft is visiting professor of the practice at Cornell Law School and lecturer-in-law at Columbia Law School. He is the author, most recently, of* Burning Psalms: Confronting Adonai after Auschwitz.

Imagine an Israel of unity and coexistence



OPINION

DANIEL YAKCOBI



AI-generated image

Picture a family gathered around a Shabbat table. The candles are lit. There is bread to share. Then an argument begins. Soon, nobody is listening, and the blessing that brought everyone to the table is lost beneath the noise.

When I think about Israel, that is the picture that comes to mind: a family with so much to give, its members struggling to hear one another when its future depends on doing precisely that.

I was born in Jerusalem and raised on Kibbutz Sde Eliyahu. Today, from South Africa, I carry Israel with me. I also carry a conviction rooted deeper than politics. Psalm 133 speaks of brothers dwelling together in unity, and of the Lord commanding His blessing there. I believe our Father in heaven calls us towards that place. We cannot demand His blessing while refusing to make room for one another.

That is why I'd like to see Benjamin Netanyahu and Gadi Eisenkot sit at the same table and choose a shared purpose. We should support Bibi leading a government of national unity, with Eisenkot as a genuine partner entrusted with meaningful responsibility. Both would have to surrender something of their pride. Both would have to listen.

Imagine what that decision could tell a weary nation: we have argued, we have wounded one another, but our children's future matters more than our rivalry.

That unity must carry resolve. Netanyahu and Eisenkot need to work together, alongside Israel's allies, to finish the job of confronting the Islamic Republic's machinery of terror and help bring its rule to an end. The goal must be a free Iran whose people can choose their own government, with a serious plan to protect civilians and prevent another tyranny taking its place.

The Iranian people deserve our solidarity. Picture an Iranian mother imagining her daughter's future: able to speak, worship, dress, and live without fear of the state. Her longing for freedom belongs in our story too. A victory that leaves her forgotten would fall short of the peace I seek.

Our stand is against the regime and the violent jihadist ideology that sanctifies repression and terror. Muslims who reject that ideology belong beside us in defending freedom. The freedoms I cherish – speech, expression, religion, and coexistence – draw deeply from the Judeo-Christian inheritance that helped shape Western democracy. We honour that inheritance when we defend those freedoms for everyone.

I believe firmness against tyranny and compassion for people belong together. Loving our neighbour cannot require us to leave that neighbour at the mercy of those who would silence or kill them.

The story need not end with a regime's fall. Picture Saudi Arabia joining the Abraham Accords. As the home of Islam's two holiest cities and a leading power in the Muslim world, its embrace of coexistence could carry extraordinary weight. Difficult negotiations would remain, including over Palestinian statehood. Yet a Saudi decision to make peace with Israel could change the conversation in mosques, classrooms, and governments far beyond its borders.

That choice could also confront Qatar with a reckoning. Investigative reporting has alleged that Qatari money helped finance Hamas's military apparatus. Qatar denies this and says its aid was coordinated with Israel; that history demands accountability from everyone involved. But Doha's hosting of Hamas leaders is established. So is its financing of Al Jazeera, whose record includes broadcasts of antisemitic incitement documented by the Anti-Defamation League. Providing terrorists with hospitality, or hatred with a publicly funded platform, deserves unequivocal condemnation. Propaganda that glorifies terror helps hatred survive long after the shooting stops.

A Saudi embrace of Israel could make that conduct harder to excuse. Qatar would face a clearer choice: join a region building peace, or risk deeper isolation by continuing to accommodate those who undermine it. Saudi influence cannot dictate Doha's decisions, but it could raise the political price of financing extremism and spreading hatred.

Now bring the story closer to home, to a classroom in Hebron or Shechem. Imagine a child opening a book that teaches Jewish history honestly and treats a Jewish neighbour as a person with whom a future can be shared. Imagine that child's teacher speaking of dignity without teaching the erasure of another people.

Scholar Dr Mordechai Kedar's Emirates proposal offers one disputed route towards a different local order: self-governing city-states rooted in local families and clans in the Judea and Samaria and Gaza, making agreements with Israel. These would have local Arab leaders, not rulers imported from the United Arab Emirates. The proposal is contested, and local consent, rights, and security would matter enormously. Within such a future, local leaders working with Israel could make education for coexistence a practical responsibility. Arab citizens of Israel, meanwhile, would retain their citizenship and equal civic rights; their towns are not the Palestinian emirates but one state Kedar proposes.

Across the world, Muslims form the majority in 53 countries and territories; the Jewish people have just one tiny state. Picture that small country making room for neighbours of different faiths who accept its existence as a Jewish State and share in its future. Muslim Arabs belong in that peaceful picture, with their dignity, religious freedom, and equal citizenship protected. But nobody should be allowed to poison that shared life by inciting hatred or organising violence. Those who do must face firm consequences under the law, whatever their religion. The existence of so many Muslim-majority societies makes the refusal to accept even one Jewish State all the more troubling. Disputes over land of 53 countries versus a tiny Jewish State is nothing but radical ideology, and no border agreement can satisfy an ideology that rejects Jewish sovereignty anywhere here. Peace requires that rejection to end.

A child learning to accept a Jewish neighbour could grow into an adult who refuses that hatred. And a Jewish child learning respect for an Arab neighbour could help make coexistence mutual. That is how a political opening might become a different daily life.

And then we must build. Security should make possible homes where children sleep peacefully, businesses that trade across borders, and neighbours who discover that shared prosperity serves them better than inherited hatred. I believe we are all connected through Him. Compassion turns that belief into something another person can feel.

I return to that Shabbat table. The candles are still burning. There is still a place for everyone willing to live in peace. But someone must lower their voice, pull out a chair, and make the first move.

If we believe our Father commands a blessing where there is unity, what are we personally willing to surrender so that unity can begin?

- *Daniel Yakcobi is the executive director of South African Friends of Israel, an entrepreneur, and a community leader. Born in Jerusalem and raised on Kibbutz Sde Eliyahu, he works to strengthen relations between South Africa and Israel and build bridges across faith communities.*

Celebrating a Jewish tapestry of achievement

GILLIAN KLAWANSKY

It seems fitting that this year's Investec Jewish Achiever Awards honoured a markedly diverse group of winners. Aptly themed "Le Festival des Juifs – A Tapestry of Jewish Culture", the spectacular awards evening included toe-tapping musical performances, delicious eats from around the world, and a massive dose of Jewish pride.

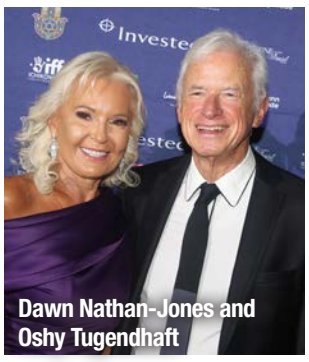

Hayley and Ruby Ichikowitz

Armed with colourful passports and boarding passes, the more than 800 attendees at the 2026 Investec Jewish Achiever Awards on 1 November embarked on a journey through Judaism's multicultural heritage. Entering the Sandton Convention Centre ballroom, designed to provide an international sensory experience, guests were welcomed with a food festival curated by Food By Flavours.

Reflecting the evening's theme, it featured stations offering authentically delicious dishes from Eastern Europe, Spain, Ethiopia, China, and India. Plated "in-flight" dining included a Middle Eastern smorgasbord of breads and dips, a Moroccan main meal featuring lamb couscous, and a Western European dessert of Sachertorte, raspberry macaroons, and berries.


Yehuda Lazarus, Mikhala Kangisser, Khomotso (Mo) Manaka, Phindile Nyokani, Jessica Kallenbach-Merber, and Maria (Gogo Lazarus) Mnculwane

Yet at the centre of it all was the dynamic group of honourees. With more female winners than ever, and winners hailing from Cape Town, Joburg, and Durban, the event highlighted contributions from all facets of the South African Jewish community.


Dawn Nathan-Jones and Oshy Tugendhaft


Colleen Makhubele and Ofentse Moalusi


Tali and Marc Romberg

From the Berman brothers, who have built a groundbreaking property development company, to Dawn Nathan-Jones, the first female winner of the Business Icon award, there was no shortage of inspirational stories. Those honoured embodied the power of a Jewish community rooted in self-belief, determination, and a genuine desire to give back to both the Jewish people and the country that raised them.


All photos by Ilan Ossendryver and Zandi Goeieman

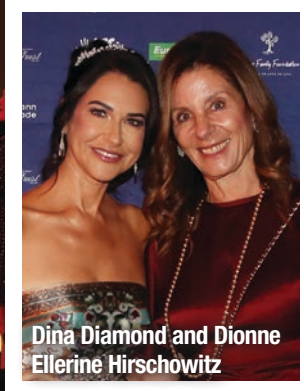

Marc Hirschowitz with Raymond and Kim Goss

Opening the evening's festivities, Howard Sackstein, chairperson of the Jewish Achiever Awards organising committee and of the *SA Jewish Report*, spoke of the origins of South Africa's Jewish community. Founded in 1841 in the shadows of Table Mountain, the community is part of the soul of this special country, he said.

"Our fingerprints and our DNA are all over this land, in its soil, in its buildings, and most importantly, etched into its history," Sackstein said. This remarkable land that we call home has allowed us to flourish and contribute to building this nation, he said.

Testament to this is the fact that this year's Investec Jewish Achiever Awards generated a total of 861 nominations. Five panels of esteemed judges interviewed 104 finalists. More than 11 000 people voted online for their favourites. Ultimately, 10 worthy winners were selected.

In his address, Marc Romberg, chief executive designate of Investec Wealth and Investments, the event's title sponsor, explained how the night's winners exuded Investec's core philosophy of being "out of the ordinary".


Dina Diamond and Dionne Ellerine Hirschowitz

"A community exists because people choose every day to walk through it and to show up for one another," Romberg said. "I often marvel at the success of our Jewish community in South Africa. Small in number, it makes an extraordinary contribution to the country that is far out of proportion to its size.


Herschel Jawitz and Benjy Porter

"We salute a community that not only opens doors but walks hand in hand through them," he added. "A community that is truly out of the ordinary."


Marc Lubner, Muzi Kuzwayo, and Michael Kransdorff

Spectacular musical performances featured the talents of Craig Urbani, currently starring in *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* in Johannesburg, and Moshe Lichtenstein, renowned frontman of The Chupa Band. Urbani, who also served as MC for the evening, praised the Jewish community's support of the arts. He and Lichtenstein performed a rousing rendition of Israeli second-place Eurovision entry *Michelle*.

Another highlight was the young musicians from the Penny Whistle and String Quartet from the Morris Isaacson Centre for Music, named after one of South Africa's preeminent Jewish community leaders. Choristers, dancers, and post-ceremony entertainment by drummer Pano Nicolaides and DJ Zack Tobias in the Persian lounge rounded off a truly memorable evening.


Nicole Schapiro and Cy Jacobs


Micaela Cohen and Dina Swartz

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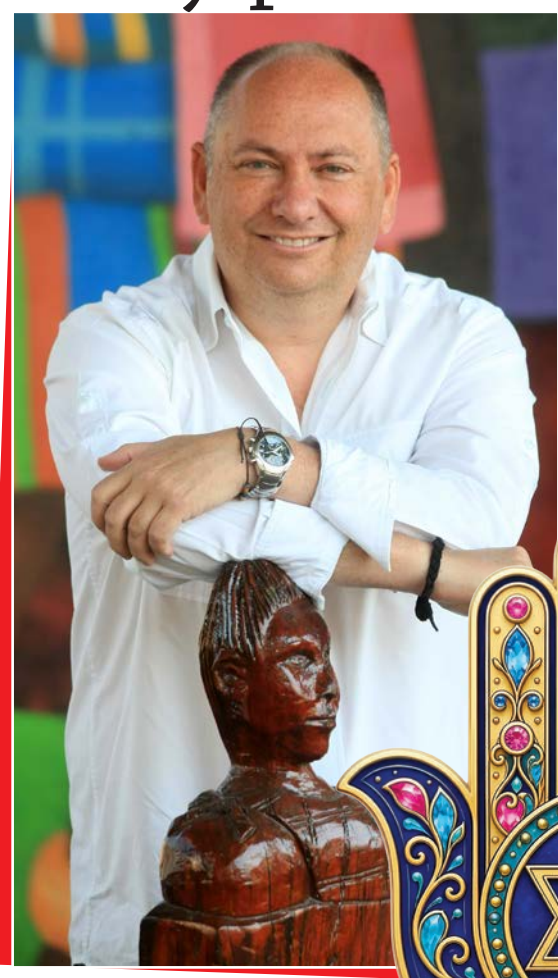
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Jews inextricably part of this place we call home

HOWARD SACKSTEIN



At the Investec Jewish Achiever Awards, we celebrate the remarkable and ongoing contribution made by the South African Jewish community to our country.

This year, 861 members of our community were nominated for 10 awards, 104 finalists were interviewed by our five panels of judges, and nearly 11 000 people voted for their favourite nominees.

But the awards don't happen without a large team of people, many of us volunteers, who believe that we can build a stronger community by celebrating each other's successes and by creating role models for all of South Africa.

Our thanks to Investec, our title sponsor, which has an unbreakable bond with our community, as its trusted banker and investment partner.

But as Jews we are a family and so many of our sponsors are the families that have built our community and our nation. We thank our extended family, the Kirsh family, the Ellerine family, the Lubner family, the Ichikowitz family, the Mann family, and our relatives at Europcar. These are the great entrepreneurs whose names are synonymous with business and philanthropy in South Africa; they are the bedrock of our nation.

I also thank our teams of judges who give selflessly of their time and, most especially, I thank all of our volunteers and professional staff.

To the glamorous and brilliant Dina Diamond, the magician that is Dori Weil, who proves that nothing is impossible, the creative genius that is Marc Hirschowitz, the nurturing force feeder that is Jodi Kramer, the resilient spirit that is Tammy Brower, and our professional team of Britt Landsman, Sandy Furman, Gilana Lab, Odi Mashishi, Sandiswa Memela, and Peta Krost. Our music maestros are Vicky Friedman and Jonathan Birin, our video producer, Andrea Baker, and our talented photographic director is Adi Loveland. Our event manager, Felicity Kantor, is our rock and the safest pair of hands in the business.

This year, we honour the rich heritage that is the tapestry of Jewish communities around the globe, each community expressing its identity through its own music, flavours, aromas, art, and traditions. Across geography, each Jewish community has held onto the golden thread of Jewish faith, culture, and tradition, which connects us all through time and place.

By some quirk of fate, the Jews who arrived in South Africa came from Eastern Europe where Jews are pale. But Jews have no colour; in fact, they have every colour.

For more than 2 000 years, Jews have lived in every corner of the world. From the shtetls of Eastern Europe to the highlands of Ethiopia; from the Atlas Mountains of Morocco to the bustling cities of India, the Silk Road in China, and the bustling markets of Persia; from the rubber plantations of the Amazon to the frozen tundra of Alaska. Everywhere, Jewish communities have thrived and enriched the societies in which they have lived.

The first formal Jewish Hebrew congregation in South Africa was established in the shadows of Table Mountain in 1841. Then came the diamond and gold rushes, which brought in Jewish labourers from England and Jewish financiers from Germany. Oppression, pogroms, and persecution in Eastern Europe sparked mass emigration in the early 1900s, which enriched our community with the trade unionists, the communists, the industrialists, the entrepreneurs, the shopkeepers, the smouses, the academics, the doctors, and lawyers who define our community today.

But there is no greater evidence of the roots of our community in the dusty red soil of Africa as we commemorate the 50th anniversary of the Soweto uprising.

In 1976, pupils gathered at the Morris Isaacson High School to protest the imposition of Afrikaans as the medium of instruction in African schools. Morris Isaacson was a Jewish philanthropist who had donated and rebuilt the school to uplift the quality of black education in the township.

Things soon turned violent. Police opened fire on the protesters, ultimately killing 575 people. The mob turned for revenge on anyone they could find, attacking Dr Melville Edelstein, a Jewish social worker and community activist who had returned to Soweto to try rescue some of his staff from the uprising. We were honoured at the awards to be in the presence of Dr Edelstein's daughter, who mourns the murder of her father 50 years ago.

The Morris Isaacson school hall was rebuilt by Mendel Kaplan and his family from the company Cape Gate. It was Joy Coplan who brought the idea of creating the Morris Isaacson Centre for Music to the Kaplan family. The centre's penny whistle ensemble opened the awards gala dinner and its female string quintet performed as well. We were delighted that both Coplan and Jill Kaplan joined us on the evening. Also significant is that Wayne Sussman chairs the Morris Isaacson Centre for Music.

This remarkable land has been our community's home for 185 years. For all its chaos and troubles, it has allowed us to flourish, to contribute, to build this nation. Our fingerprints and DNA are spread over its soil, its buildings, its stores, and its history.

We have connections to our spiritual home, we have friends and family in the far reaches of the planet – but for us, this piece of earth, the dusty cornfields of the Free State, the red soil of Africa, the lightning in a Highveld sky, the smell of fynbos in the Cape, the ancient baobabs of Limpopo, and the rolling hills of KwaZulu-Natal, for us, this will always be home.

• *Howard Sackstein is the chairperson of the Investec Jewish Achiever Awards.*

Investing in individuals



It is with great pride that Eric Ellerine Trust Proprietary Limited once again sponsors the Entrepreneur Award at the Investec Jewish Achiever Awards, reaffirming our commitment to recognising and celebrating entrepreneurial excellence.

This award honours the enduring legacy of Eric Ellerine, a pioneering entrepreneur whose success was defined not only by the businesses he built, but by his passion for creating opportunities for others.

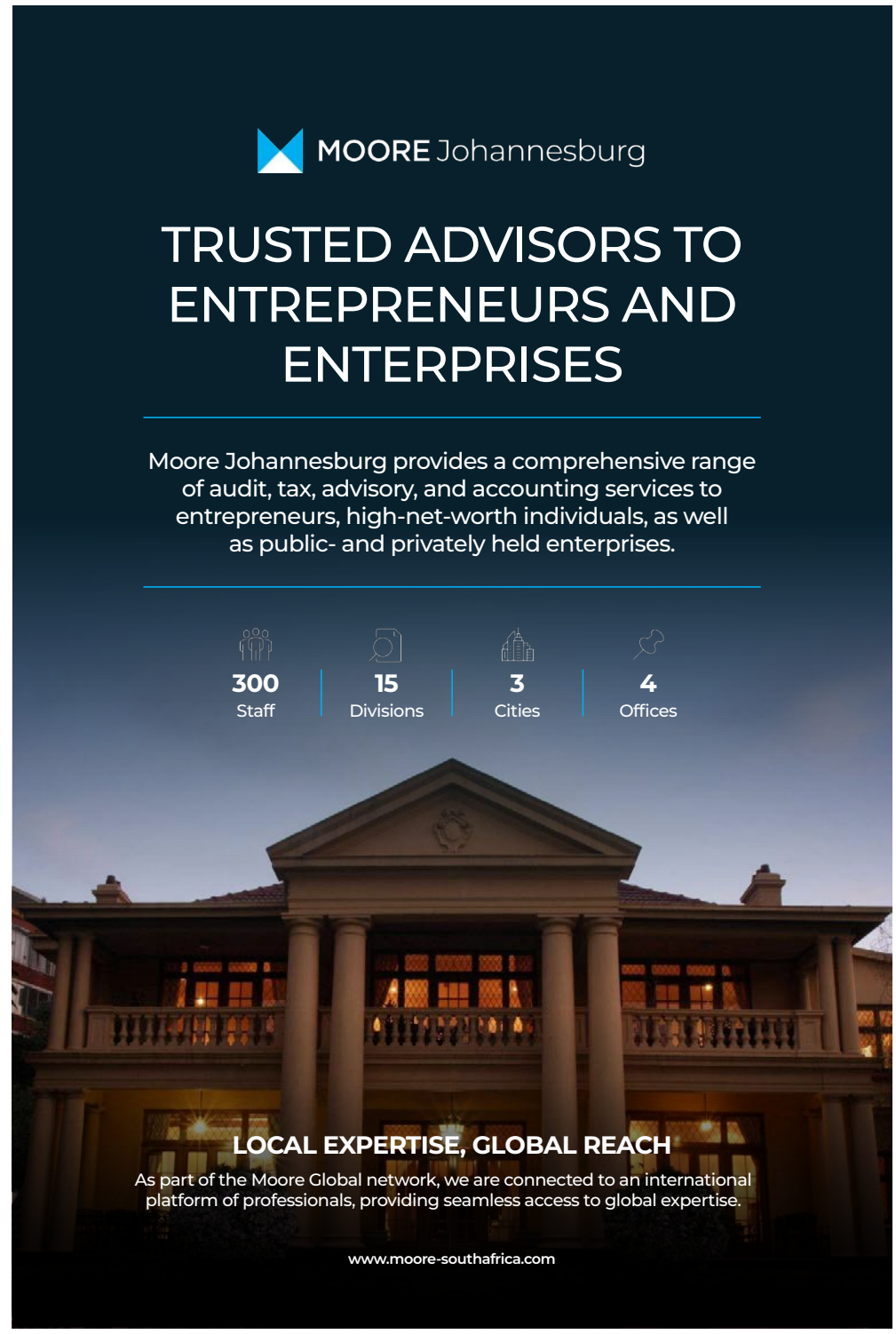
Eric's entrepreneurial journey began at 16, when he used his Barmitzvah money to open a single furniture store. He grew this modest beginning into Ellerine Holdings, one of South Africa's most successful retail enterprises, with a national footprint and a listing on the Johannesburg Stock Exchange. Eric's belief in South Africa was reflected in his dedication to creating jobs, investing in people, and empowering aspiring entrepreneurs. This philosophy continues through Eric Ellerine Trust Proprietary Limited, the investment holding company through which Eric and his family have supported, and continue to support, ambitious entrepreneurs and businesses.

At its heart, this award celebrates the qualities that Eric embodied throughout his life: resilience, hard work, and a commitment to excellence. It recognises individuals who have the courage to pursue opportunities, navigate challenges, and build businesses that create lasting value – not only for themselves, but also for their employees, communities, and the broader economy.

We are proud to support a platform that showcases the achievements of South African Jewish entrepreneurs. By recognising those who turn ideas into successful businesses and ambition into tangible impact, we hope to sustain the entrepreneurial spirit that remains central to Eric's legacy.

We congratulate all the nominees and thank the Investec Jewish Achiever Awards for continuing to celebrate the individuals whose ideas, determination, and achievements make a meaningful contribution to South Africa's future.

Dionne Ellerine Hirschowitz



Using what we have for others


Marc Lubner

The Lubner Family Foundation is proud to sponsor the Bertie Lubner Humanitarian Award in honour of Chief Rabbi Cyril Harris. This award recognises an individual or organisation whose sustained commitment to uplifting others has achieved lasting impact. It celebrates service rooted in compassion, guided by purpose and demonstrated through action.

At the heart of all our family charities is responsible kindness. This core value brings compassion together with thoughtful action, respect for human dignity, and accountability. It asks us to listen carefully, use resources wisely, and consider the lasting consequences of our giving. Across our family's charitable work, it guides how we care, serve, and create opportunities.

Our theme, "Giving with Purpose – Impactful philanthropy with purposeful outcomes", resonates with Jewish values. *Tzedakah* connects giving with justice and responsibility. It reminds us that helping others is an obligation grounded in our shared humanity, and that every person deserves dignity, care, and the opportunity to flourish.

The Jewish aspiration of *tikkun olam*, repairing the world, gives this responsibility direction. We each contribute by responding to suffering, widening opportunity, and strengthening our communities. Purposeful philanthropy translates this aspiration into thoughtful, sustained work that responds to real needs and supports lasting change.

For our family, this award carries personal meaning. It honours our late father, Bertie Lubner, and recognises Chief Rabbi Cyril Harris through a celebration of humanitarian commitment. Their names invite reflection on a question central to Jewish ethical life: how can we use what we have, and who we are, in the service of others?

The teaching in Pirkei Avot that we are not required to complete the work, yet are not free to abandon it, speaks powerfully to this award. Humanitarian service demands perseverance. Challenges are complex and results may take years to emerge.

Nevertheless, we remain responsible for doing our part with courage, consistency, and care.

We also draw inspiration from the Jewish emphasis on helping people towards greater independence. Responsible kindness means respecting individual aspirations and creating opportunities for people to shape their own futures. Meaningful impact requires clear intentions, thoughtful stewardship, and a willingness to learn from those whose lives we seek to uplift.

Our family's core community initiatives, including Afrika Tikkun, Smile Foundation, Sabrina Love Foundation, and Field Band Foundation, express these values across different areas of need. Their work reflects our belief that care, education, inclusion, and development can open pathways towards greater dignity and belonging.

Lubner Family Foundation

TO GIVE TO LOVE TO LIVE

To every nominee, we extend our heartfelt appreciation. Your sustained efforts embody compassion, integrity, service, inclusion, and accountability. Your contribution is reflected in the lives you have helped uplift and the possibilities your work has created. Jewish tradition teaches the preciousness of every human life, calling us to extend our concern across communities, backgrounds, and beliefs.

May this award celebrate achievement and inspire renewed commitment. Together, we affirm a legacy expressed through action: accepting responsibility, pursuing justice, and helping others flourish. This is responsible kindness in practice, and the enduring spirit of giving with purpose we are proud to celebrate.

Marc Lubner, Chairman of the Lubner Family Foundation

Our futures are ours to build

There's a question I hear far too often from young South Africans, particularly young Jewish South Africans: Is there still a future for me in this country?

My answer has never changed: Of course there is a future, and it is bright!

But the future isn't something we inherit or wait for politicians to deliver. It's something we build ourselves.

Believing in South Africa has never meant ignoring its difficulties. We have lived through uncertainty, division, political disappointment, and economic hardship. We have watched extraordinary opportunities squandered and too many talented young people leave our shores in search of something better.

Yet, for all its frustrations, this remains an extraordinary country. A country rich in talent, ingenuity, and human possibility. A country that has given generations of Jewish South Africans the freedom to build businesses, raise families, practise our faith, serve our communities, and contribute to national life.


Ivor Ichikowitz

Our family has always believed that being proudly Jewish and proudly South African aren't competing loyalties. They are complementary responsibilities. Our heritage teaches us the value of education, enterprise, resilience, and community. South Africa gives us the opportunity, and the obligation, to put those values to work.

Over the past few years, Jewish communities around the world have faced increasingly hostile environments. Antisemitism has become more visible, increasingly normalised in certain circles, and more difficult to dismiss.

We are fortunate that South Africa hasn't followed this trend to the same extent. Despite our challenges, we remain a community that can live openly and proudly as Jews, welcomed as an integral part of South African society.

We are not spectators in the South African story. We are woven into its rich tapestry, and we have a responsibility to help shape its future.

Through the Ichikowitz Family Foundation's work across Africa, particularly our research into the aspirations and attitudes of African youth, I have become convinced that one of the greatest forces for change is the young people and their determination to shape their own future.

Yet determination alone is not enough. Young people need opportunity, encouragement, investment and, above all, the confidence that their contribution matters, which is why our family is once again proud to sponsor the Ichikowitz Family Foundation Rising Star Award at the Investec Jewish Achiever Awards.

This award recognises young people who aren't simply waiting for their moment, but who are already making a difference. Entrepreneurs, innovators, artists, athletes, community leaders, and extraordinary individuals whose achievements remind us how much talent exists within our relatively small community.

Last year's winners, Caleb and Judah Levitan, demonstrated beautifully that age is no barrier to excellence and that extraordinary achievement can begin with curiosity, discipline, determination, and the courage to dream beyond what others consider possible.

My hope for this year's Rising Star nominees is not just continued success, but that you use your success to create opportunities for others, strengthen communities, solve problems, and inspire those who follow.

Do not allow the pessimists to convince you that your ambitions are too big for South Africa!

Do not allow those who question our place in this country to dictate the limits of your contribution.

To every Rising Star nominee, mazeltov!

You represent the very best of what our community can offer this country. Be ambitious. Be courageous. Be proud of who you are. And above all, make sure that when South Africa's next chapter is written, you have helped to write it.

Ivor Ichikowitz, Chairman of the Ichikowitz Family Foundation

iff ICHIKOWITZ FAMILY FOUNDATION

Consistent kindness makes a difference


Mic, Kevin, and Shayne Mann

Mann Made is deeply honoured to continue our longstanding sponsorship of the Community Service Award at the Investec Jewish Achiever Awards. For several years, this award has held a special place in our hearts, recognising extraordinary individuals and organisations whose compassion and selfless service make a meaningful difference within the Jewish community and broader South African society.

This year, we are especially proud to congratulate Joan Block, the 2026 Community Service Award winner, whose unwavering dedication to the Selwyn Segal Gift Centre embodies the spirit of this award.

As a longstanding volunteer and key driving force behind the gift centre, Block has devoted her time and energy to supporting the Selwyn Segal home, which provides specialised care, accommodation, and therapeutic enrichment for 120 residents with intellectual and physical disabilities. Through the sale of bespoke gifts, Judaica, and lifestyle products, the gift centre raises vital funds that go directly towards supporting the care and well-being of its residents.

Block's remarkable contribution reminds us that meaningful change does not always come from grand gestures. Often, it is the quiet, consistent acts of kindness, generosity, and commitment that have the greatest impact. Her dedication is an inspiring example of what it means to put community and service before self.

At Mann Made, our identity as a family-run business has always shaped our belief in the importance of people, connection, and community. Through storytelling, creative production, and meaningful partnerships, we strive to create experiences that move people and inspire positive change. Supporting this award is a natural extension of these values, allowing us to celebrate those whose actions truly make a difference.

mann made

As we reflect on this year's awards, we celebrate not only Block's outstanding contribution, but also the remarkable individuals and organisations recognised for their service to others.

To Joan Block, our heartfelt congratulations on this well-deserved recognition. To all the nominees, thank you for your compassion, generosity, and tireless commitment to uplifting those around you. Your actions strengthen our communities, inspire future generations, and remind us of the extraordinary difference one person can make.

On behalf of everyone at Mann Made, thank you for lighting the way.


Howard and Heidi Feldman


Deputy Minister Jack Bloom and Howard Sackstein


Della and David Lawrence


Brian Joffe



The lies we tell ourselves that inhibit success

LEE TANKLE

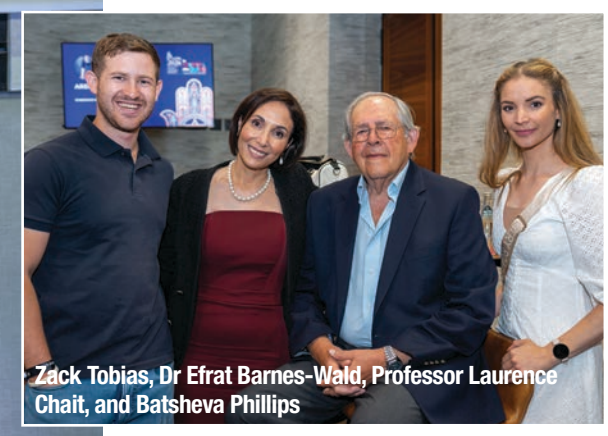
For psychologist Dr Hanan Bushkin, the difference between success and failure is not how we feel, but how we act.

"Successful people wrestle with life; they lean in. They don't allow life to dictate what they will do. They wrestle with their marriages, their businesses, and their kids. And I don't mean wrestle as in fighting; I mean that you don't simply accept average," he said at the Investec Jewish Achiever Awards Business Breakfast at Investec in Sandton on 30 October.

Bushkin explained that over his years in practice as head of The Anxiety and Trauma Clinic, and exposure to the different kinds of people who come through his doors, he hears many things that successful people tell themselves that are actually deceptions.


Photos: Zandi Goeieman

Dina Diamond (Investec Bank) and Dr Hanan Bushkin


Zack Tobias, Dr Efrat Barnes-Wald, Professor Laurence Chait, and Batsheva Phillips


Kelsey Buchalter, Nicci Nathanson and Aimèe Mica Komorowsky

Bushkin uses the psychological term "Barnum effect" to show that many of the fears and insecurities people believe are unique to them are actually universal. Fear of failure, wanting to be liked, imposter syndrome, or struggling with relationships resonate with almost everyone.

Rather than trying to eliminate these natural feelings, he argues that people should focus on how they respond to them. He describes this as the difference between a "chin-down" and "chin-up" approach: unsuccessful people dwell on their difficulties, while successful people acknowledge them and ask, "What can I do next? How can I improve my life?"

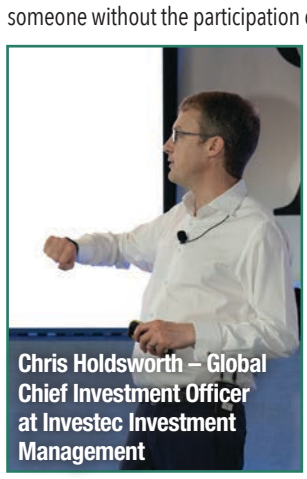

Cumesh Moodliar – CEO of Investec South Africa

The first "lie" Bushkin identifies is that successful people can overcome temptation through willpower alone. Using the story of Odysseus and the Sirens, he argues that the key is not resisting temptation, but recognising and preparing for it.

"No one is stronger than temptation. Out of eight billion people, how many have temptations? How many have sirens in their lives? Eight billion," he said.

"For some people, it's drugs and alcohol. For others, it's stepping outside their comfort zone, speaking to the wrong people, exercising, or setting boundaries. Everybody has temptations, and if you think you're stronger than them, life will punish you."

The second lie is that people believe they can change someone without the participation of the other person.


Chris Holdsworth – Global Chief Investment Officer at Investec Investment Management

"Unfortunately, successful people sometimes think that because they have so much influence, they can change people without their participation. But you cannot change someone who isn't prepared to change. I'd rather you believe an ugly truth than a beautiful lie.

"Some people will not change, and it's your job to invest your time and energy in the things that create the most value. If someone isn't prepared to participate in their own change, you're wasting your energy.

"Sometimes we believe people because of what they promise or say, but saying something isn't a character trait. Stop asking the scorpion to be a frog."


Peta Krost and Prudence Mashalane – Head of Investec Banking Johannesburg

The last lie that Bushkin mentioned is people postponing life in pursuit of success. People can become so focused on reaching the next milestone – earning more money, achieving a certain level of success, or advancing their career – that they tell themselves they will start prioritising the things that matter once they get there.

"Sometimes we chase the things we already have because we're more addicted to the chase than we are to appreciating the here and now. How many people chase success so they can have better health, better relationships, or a richer, more meaningful life?

"Sometimes, what we need is what we already have right now. And I'm all for chasing success, but we can have both. We can chase what we want while being grateful for what we have. We can do both.

"Life is short and unpredictable. Anything can be taken away from us at any moment. So you lean in. That's what successful people do – they lean in and wrestle with life," said Bushkin.

Cumesh Moodliar, chief executive of Investec Bank, reflected on Investec's renewed association with the Jewish Achiever Awards, saying the partnership is particularly meaningful because of the bank's strong connection to the Jewish community.


Gabrielle Onay

He told how he had called Investec co-founder Stephen Koseff on the morning of the breakfast to ask what message he would give attendees. Koseff emphasised the importance of remembering and supporting the community, while also characteristically reminding the audience not to forget about Investec.

"For us as an organisation, there comes a moment of truth, a moment when you have to take a stand for what you believe is right," said Moodliar. "Our association with these awards is significant for a number of reasons. Investec has a rich Jewish heritage; our founders were Jewish and imbued the organisation with much of that tradition and culture."

Chris Holdsworth, global chief investment officer at Investec, said global markets had remained surprisingly resilient despite war, high oil prices, inflation, and rising interest rates. While equities have performed well, bonds have struggled, although higher yields are now creating new investment opportunities.

However, the apparent strength of the global economy was misleading, he said. Artificial intelligence and major technology companies are driving much of the growth, while consumers and consumer-facing businesses are struggling. High energy costs are also keeping inflation elevated, forcing central banks to consider higher interest rates, which puts even more pressure on consumers.

Holdsworth explained that particularly in the last six years, South Africans have changed how they spend money. A growing share of household income is going towards debt repayments, utilities, cars, gambling, and offshore retailers such as Shein and Temu, leaving less money for traditional South African retailers. He is particularly concerned about the growth of gambling, saying South Africans' net gambling losses reached about R100 billion, compared with roughly R40 billion before COVID-19.

Despite these pressures, he sees signs of a structural improvement in the economy. Commercial construction is picking up after years of limited development, state-owned enterprises (SOEs) are performing better, and higher commodity prices are generating additional government revenue.


Dionne Ellerine Hirschowitz and Lesley-Anne Gatter – Global Head of People and Organisation at Investec

"South Africans have an appetite to spend. There's pent-up demand that we haven't been able to express. The next three months are going to be difficult, particularly for businesses exposed to SA Inc," he said. "But beyond that, things should start to improve. We're seeing structural changes in South Africa: we're building more, easing some of the constraints on growth, and seeing improvements in our SOEs. Add to that the prospect of interest rate cuts in the next six to nine months and, hopefully, tax cuts, and the outlook starts to look better."



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Joffe built an empire of opportunities

NICOLA MILTZ

Hundreds of deals. Acquisitions spanning continents. Tens of thousands of jobs. And not one, but two corporate giants.

Few South African entrepreneurs have built at the scale of Brian Joffe, the unconventional dealmaker who spotted opportunity where others overlooked it and had the boldness, judgement, and business nous to turn it into something formidable.

Yet ask the legendary business builder what he considers his greatest achievement and he doesn't point to the billions or the strategic acquisitions.

"If I look back, the single greatest achievement in my mind is that I left a lot of people much better off than they were before I met them," Joffe says.

It is perhaps this sentiment, as much as his extraordinary business record, that captures why Joffe, 79, founder of Bidvest and Bidcorp, is the recipient of the 2026 Investec Jewish Achiever Lifetime Achievement Award in honour of Helen Suzman.

Those who've occupied a front-row seat to his career describe a businessman difficult to replicate.

Andy Leith, former managing director of Investec South Africa and a longtime friend, confidant, and corporate finance adviser to Joffe, describes him as "probably the best all-round businessman that I've ever met".

"You don't often get what he had in one person," says Leith. "Sometimes you get a guy who's very good with the numbers but has no vision. Then you'll get another guy who has all the vision but doesn't understand the numbers.

"He's the real deal. He saw things other people never saw," said Leith. "He would always work out not what the business was like in its current form, but what it could be like."

Joffe founded Bid Corporation in 1988 with the acquisition of Chipkins and Sea World. The business evolved into Bidvest, with acquisitions including Steiner, Safcor, Waltons, Rennies, and McCarthy, while its food-service interests expanded internationally.

In 2016, the food-service operations were unbundled into separately listed Bidcorp, while Bidvest continued as a diversified services, trading, and distribution group.

Today, the companies together comprise more than 250 businesses and employ more than 130 000 people across several countries. For the financial year ended June 2026, Bidcorp reported revenue of R242.2 billion and Bidvest R130.3 billion.

Veteran banker and former Investec chief executive Stephen Koseff says Joffe's business instincts were apparent from their first serious meeting in 1988, when Joffe was looking to raise money for the Chipkins acquisition.

"It took us 30 seconds to back the guy," Koseff recalls. "He was a stand-out entrepreneur. There's only a few of them. He had a powerful personal brand. Brian could've taken any business and made a success of it."

Joffe, he says, built a highly decentralised, entrepreneurial model.

"He wasn't hierarchical or autocratic," Koseff says. "Instead, he empowered people to run their businesses, creating an environment in which talented individuals could flourish. People who worked with him loved him and stayed with him for decades."

Through Bidvest and Bidcorp, Joffe helped build two major listed companies whose combined market capitalisation, Koseff estimates, approaches R250 billion.

"He became one of the biggest employers in South Africa. Just imagine adding value to so many different people's lives. He has made a proper contribution. We all learned a lot from Brian."

At the legendary Bidvest gatherings, Leith remembers hundreds of executives from different businesses and countries united by an almost palpable sense of belonging.

Trust was fundamental. For decades, Leith worked with Joffe on transactions without a formal mandate. The fees might be argued about afterwards – and, Leith laughs, Joffe was no enthusiastic payer – but the relationship rested on something more basic.

Koseff says Joffe's serious exterior could be misleading. "Once people got to know him, they knew that grumpy look was just a façade. Underneath was someone fiercely loyal and generous to colleagues and friends."


Brian Joffe

Born in Johannesburg and raised in Greenside, Joffe remembers sport dominating his childhood, and initially wanting to become a schoolteacher. His mother had other ideas: she wanted a doctor.

He began studying BSc subjects, but lasted about six weeks before his first encounter with dissecting a rat or frog brought his mother's medical ambitions to an abrupt end.

Joffe instead qualified as a chartered accountant after graduating from the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits) in 1971 and would eventually receive honorary doctorates from Unisa and Wits. When his mother was in her 80s, he delightedly informed her that her son had finally become a doctor.

"I had fantastic parents. Very demanding, in a nice way," he says. "At home, entrepreneurialism was a feature because business was discussed at every single meal.

"Being a mensch, I guess, was something that was more important to them than me being successful as a businessman."

In 1978, Joffe borrowed R49 000 to acquire an interest in a pet-food manufacturer, eventually taking full ownership and building the business with limited resources and makeshift production equipment.

After selling it, he spent time in the United States playing golf – "I wanted to turn pro," he says – before returning to South Africa and joining industrial group Weil & Ascheim. There he developed the reputation for business acumen and integrity that Koseff would recognise when Joffe approached him in 1988.

What followed was an extraordinary succession of acquisitions.

His wife, Lee, to whom he has been married for about 50 years, was part of the journey from the beginning. "Lee bought into it. Even in the early days, she used to come in and drive the forklifts."

Today, Joffe's life is quieter. Though retired in Israel, Joffe keeps one foot firmly in South Africa, where his family, friends, and business interests remain. One commitment has remained constant: giving back.

His uncle Benny Weinstein impressed upon him the Jewish principle of giving at least 10% to *tzedakah*. It stayed with him, as did the significance of *chai*, the Hebrew numerical value of 18, associated with life. "Every deal was linked to *chai*," he says.

Joffe has supported numerous philanthropic and communal causes, generally preferring to avoid publicity.

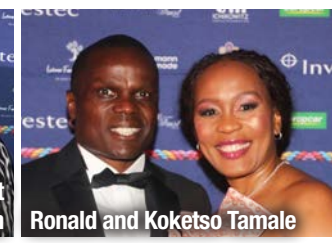
"I like seeing people being elevated and causes being elevated. It's not only giving back in money terms. It's giving back in opportunity. And I've tried to do that," he says.

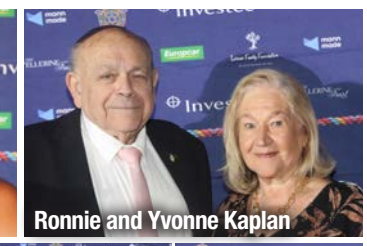
Koseff believes this desire to build rather than merely accumulate wealth was central to Joffe's motivation. "Obviously, money is always a factor, but I think it was building. Building things."

For Leith, Joffe's contribution is difficult to overstate.

"He built an international legacy that I don't think, definitely in our lifetime, we'll see again. He is a special man."


Robyn van der Riet and Kim Berman

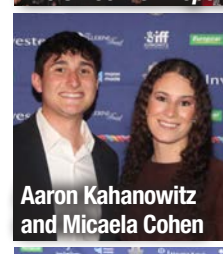

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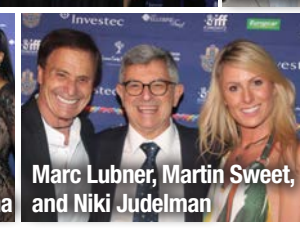

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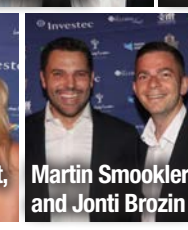

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Joffe says giving back is the Jewish way

GILLIAN KLAWANSKY


Brian Joffe

Brian Joffe, Bidvest Group founder and former chief executive, told the Investec Jewish Achiever Awards audience that he may have built a business empire from the ground up, which now employs more than 160 000 people, but he never forgot the importance of giving back.

Accepting the Kirsh Family Lifetime Achievement Award in honour of Helen Suzman on Sunday, 1 November, Joffe recalled how his Jewish mother had been desperate for him to become a doctor. "After 30 days or so I had to dissect the first rat and that was the end of me and medicine," he joked. "I then switched to accounting and I think it was a very good grounding for me for the rest of my business career."

Considering that Joffe went on to establish corporate giants Bidvest and Bidcorp, he clearly took that "very good grounding" to stratospheric heights.

His entrepreneurial journey started with the purchase of a 50% interest in a pet food business. "After a very short period of time in the canning business, I had quite a big share of the market and I decided to go on my own, and that's when we started Bidvest," he said.

In a video honouring Joffe, Bidvest Group's current chief executive. Mpumi Madisa, said that while many people dream and have vision, few actually make it happen. That's what sets great businessmen like Joffe apart, she said.

Forming a partnership with Stephen Koseff, former Investec chief executive and now Bidcorp chairperson, Joffe helped redefine the concept of focus. "They used to say the business was unfocused because we were involved in multiple activities, but what they didn't realise was that the customer was the focus rather than the product," Joffe said.

"Stephen and I never wrote down a single agreement," he added, speaking of his relationship with Investec. "We agreed everything on a napkin, and I'm talking about big-money deals. I had a special relationship with them and still have a special relationship with Stephen."

While he stressed the importance of being hands-on in running any business that one buys, Joffe also emphasised the need to trust others, ultimately giving them purpose and shaping their careers. "There's no such thing as 'I'm doing everything by myself'."

He joked that one of the criteria for receiving the Lifetime Achievement Award is to be old. Speaking from the heart, Joffe thanked the people integral to his life, including his wife, children, and extended family.

He also honoured the Bidvest and Bidcorp teams. "There were 140 000 employees at the company when I left," he said, "and having to look after 140 000 people and their families is like looking after a city. So, it was quite challenging going to bed at night knowing that a whole city was dependent on the decisions I would make."

Reflecting on the difficulties facing the Jewish people, Joffe said that while these can be overcome, we face considerable hurdles in handling the new world of antisemitism. "It's critical from that point of view that Jews all over the world, and especially South African Jews, stick together, work together, live together, and help each other out," he said. Now living in Israel, Joffe said that the future of that country and of the wider Jewish world is uncertain, with hard work required to move beyond challenges.

Joffe acknowledged that philanthropy doesn't always come naturally as people accumulate wealth. "One of the responsibilities of entrepreneurship isn't only making, it's also giving," he said. "To all the people who can afford to give, it's a great privilege to be able to do that. You feel good and you get back more than you give. It's part of the Jewish way."

Joffe also highlighted the value of supporting the *SA Jewish Report*, calling it the backbone, spokesperson, and glue in helping South Africa's Jewish community, and those around the world, overcome the challenges they face. Ultimately expressing hope in our collective future, he concluded his speech with the words "*Am Yehudim Chai*" (the Jewish people live)".

Bermans' grit fuelled by painful childhoods

GILANA LAB

"I have no doubt that the immense hardships that we faced created the hunger and the fire to succeed" were the words brothers Paul and Saul Berman shared when accepting the Investec Business Leadership Award at the 2026 Investec Jewish Achiever Awards.

The award recognises their decades in construction and property development. For them, it's been a remarkable business partnership after a childhood marked by loss, separation, and financial hardship.

Their father, a property developer and attorney, died when Paul was five and Saul was just two-and-a-half. Because their mother couldn't afford to raise both boys under one roof, they spent part of their childhood apart, but their bond remained strong. "Our story is one of resilience, determination, unequivocal trust, and an unbreakable bond forged in the face of adversity," Paul said. "We started with nothing, limited hope, and scarce resources. All we had was a fierce determination, a resilient spirit, and an unyielding fortitude."


Saul and Paul Berman

Those early experiences shaped their approach to business. "We used the pain as fuel, not as an excuse," Paul said. "The road was tough, the hours long, and the learning curve steep. But through every hardship, we stood by each other's side, finding strength in our bond, and drawing inspiration from each other."

Their careers initially took different directions: Paul studied law, while Saul pursued construction, developing his technical expertise despite struggling with dyslexia. In 1994, Saul invited Paul to join his business after securing a contract to upgrade Cape Town International Airport ahead of the 1995 Rugby World Cup. Their complementary skills transformed the company, with turnover increasing from R3.5 million to R35 million in their first year together. Over the following decades, they expanded into property development, constructing thousands of homes across the Western Cape.

Saul's dyslexia has shaped his outlook on education and the value of practical skills. Choosing to speak from the heart rather than read his prepared notes, he joked that artificial intelligence had arrived too late for people like him. "Dyslexic people are born with a mind that can see things in 3D," he said, emphasising the importance of human creativity and the ability to visualise and build. "You need power, you need ventilation to cool your systems down. We just need each other."

His belief in the value of tradespeople has become central to the brothers' ambition to transform technical education in South Africa. Saul outlined their efforts to introduce practical subjects into schools, allowing pupils to consider vocational pathways from Grade 9 and study trade-related matric subjects in later grades.

"We plan to build the biggest educational foundation in the history of South Africa," Saul said. His vision includes expanding skills training for children who may struggle in conventional academic environments, ensuring that pupils with different abilities can access opportunities within the same education system. "Please help us. Join us and change the South African landscape," he urged, calling for support to create employment opportunities for young people completing their training.

For Saul, the foundation of everything they have achieved remains his relationship with Paul. Describing his brother as his "lifelong partner" and "best friend", he reflected on a business partnership built without formal agreements. "No contract, handshake, trust. I trusted him," he said. Having their sons at the ceremony made the occasion particularly meaningful, as the brothers looked towards the next generation of their family and business.

Paul shared that appreciation for their partnership. "We had no idea where this journey would take us, but through it all, we had something particularly special, the privilege of building a business together as brothers."

Beyond their commercial success, the brothers have maintained a commitment to giving back, with Paul having spent decades involved in Jewish welfare. His acceptance speech also reflected on the challenges facing Jewish communities worldwide. Having recently returned from Israel, where he attended the Board of Governors of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, he spoke about the importance of standing proudly as Jews in the face of rising antisemitism.

"We must never lower our heads in the face of antisemitism. We must stand taller, hold our heads higher, and remain relentless in our resolve," Paul said. "We must never allow hatred to define us, fear to silence us, or prejudice to diminish our extraordinary contribution to humanity. Our response to darkness must be light. Our response to hatred must be humanity."

For Paul, business leadership and community responsibility are closely connected, requiring the courage to act when others hesitate and the compassion to make a difference wherever possible. His gratitude extended to their families, colleagues, and Investec, whose partnership with the brothers has spanned more than three decades.

Despite their achievements, neither brother considers their work complete. As Paul reflected, "We aren't extraordinary. We're ordinary brothers doing extraordinary things." Saul was equally focused on the future, telling those gathered, "We're just beginning."



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Scalpels meet sculpture for Professor Chait

GILLIAN KLAWANSKY

From crafting famous sculptures, including Max the Gorilla at the Johannesburg Zoo, to successfully treating countless children with lip and palate deformities, Professor Laurence Chait has built two celebrated careers. A revolutionary plastic and reconstructive surgeon and a sculptor, Chait is this year's Investec Professional Excellence winner, proving that it's possible to pursue multiple passions.

The son of a general practitioner who enjoyed painting, combining his two talents wasn't a foreign concept to Chait. While his painting skills were questionable, it was through sculpting cement, stone, wood, and bronze pieces that he found his creative outlet. In a 2018 interview with the *SA Jewish Report*, he said, "Art was a release for me, and I was never concerned that it would detract from my professional life as a surgeon."

Having achieved considerable acclaim in both fields, it's clear he was right. "From early in my plastic-surgical career, I became very interested in the management of babies born with cleft lip and palate deformities and children with cerebral palsy," Chait says. He was involved in two groundbreaking research projects in the management of cleft lips and palates. One of these, titled the "Ultimate Straight Line Repair for Unilateral Cleft Lips", revolutionised such treatment and was adopted in many centres around the world.

Through multiple prize-winning papers and chapters in peer-reviewed local and international journals and books, as well as presentations at medical conferences around the world, Chait has made an indelible mark on the medical field. He also has a special interest in hand surgery and cosmetic and non-cosmetic nasal reconstruction, and has pioneered treatments in microvascular surgery.

Chait is also known for his considerable charity work in line with his medical speciality. Through the Netcare Cleft Programme, he has personally treated 315 patients pro bono over 20 years. Many patients needed two to three operations. In addition, he has been involved in managing children with cerebral palsy at Forest Town for almost three decades.

Asked about his greatest professional achievements, Chait cites the large number of people he's healed both functionally and cosmetically. He has also bettered his profession through his significant original research and improvements in surgical techniques.

In terms of his artwork, he's particularly proud of his sculpture of Max the Gorilla at the Johannesburg Zoo. The real Max famously survived being shot and wounded as he fought an armed robber who had jumped into his zoo enclosure.

Max the Gorilla is one of Chait's nine public sculptures in Johannesburg and surrounds. His pieces are also in corporate and private collections around the world.


Professor Laurence Chait

Having sculpted for almost 60 years, he places equal importance on his artistic and medical careers. The two often intersect, with his work exhibited at the Wits Medical School, the Children's Burn Units at Chris Hani Baragwanath Academic Hospital, and the Red Cross Children's Hospital in Cape Town. He famously did a bust of his treasured former lecturer Professor Phillip Tobias. This is displayed in the Amphitheatre of the Sterkfontein Caves in the Cradle of Humankind, where Tobias led palaeontological digs.

Another commission that stands out for Chait is intrinsically linked to his Jewish identity. "What was especially pleasing to me was being asked to make a sculpture of the Lions Shul for its centenary celebration in 2006," he says. "This was cast in bronze and 40 of the replicas were auctioned to raise funds for the Lions Shul."

Chait believes being a good Jewish citizen ties into being a good person. "Not holding grudges, not sweating the small stuff, and always helping where I can would help society in general," he says. "I'm really proud of who I am in my beliefs and convictions."

Chait has contributed significantly to the academic world as a plastic surgery professor at the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits) Department of Plastic Surgery and at the Johannesburg group of teaching hospitals. He became an honorary professor at Wits in 1999.

"Apart from managing to restore people's abilities and health, I have spent many years teaching medical students and plastic-surgical registrars to gain the know-how to practise their skills," he says. His original work in this field also helped improve the equipment, medicine, and resources at their disposal.

Going beyond medicine, Chait even offered his students artistic training. "For a number of years, I gave the plastic-surgical registrars at Wits Medical School sculpture lessons," he recalls. "These were wonderful times in an off-duty environment."

Despite Chait's many accomplishments, his path has not been without hiccups. But it's the way he chooses to see such hurdles that sets him apart. "My whole life has been full of challenges, but I have never considered them as such," he says. "I followed what I wanted to do to achieve the goal set." This ties into his personal philosophy, "to keep going regardless".

Asked what he believes he's done professionally in the past few years to inspire others, Chait says, "Managing to carry on doing the same work that I have loved and devoted my life to." In the years to come he aims to continue doing just that through his plastic-surgical practice for as long as he can, and through creating new pieces of art. Alongside his continued work, he ensures he has more than enough time for family and community commitments.

Chait believes South Africa has a bright future but feels progress has not been made quickly enough. "I would be happier to hear 'We have done it' rather than 'We need to do it' from the powers that be," he says.

Chait credits SA for a lifetime of achievements

CLAUDIA GROSS

When Professor Laurence Chait accepted the Investec Professional Excellence Award, he expressed gratitude for the opportunities South Africa had given him and the people who helped him make a difference.

"I'm grateful to have lived and worked in this wonderful country of ours, South Africa," he said on Sunday night, 1 November. "She afforded me the opportunity to achieve all this." He added that he believed he could have achieved only half as much had he lived anywhere else in the world.


Melissa Ho and Professor Laurence and Irene Chait

Chait's career in plastic surgery has spanned more than five decades. Over the years, he has operated on hundreds of children born with cleft lips and palates.

One of his proudest achievements is developing a straight-line repair technique for cleft lips and palates. He described the research as groundbreaking and said it had produced some of the best surgical results he had seen.

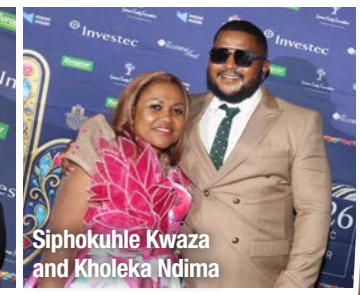
But Chait's professional life extended beyond medicine. Sculpture has been an important second passion, bringing him commissions and opportunities to create bronze artworks.

He paid particular tribute to the Netcare and Vodacom foundations for funding and supporting the cleft lip and palate programme at Park Lane Clinic in Johannesburg. "This transformed the lives of hundreds of children and their families over many years," he said.

Despite his decades in medicine, Chait said he had no intention of retiring. "I can still operate and can still drive 200 miles in a day. I don't have any intention to retire yet."

He ended his speech with an unexpected thank you – to two men who direct traffic at the corner of Riviera and Oxford roads in Parktown. "When Eskom is down and the traffic lights aren't working, they so expertly direct the traffic, allowing me to get to work in the morning on time," he said. The anecdote brought his speech to a close, reflecting his characteristic humour and appreciation for the many people who've played a part in his journey.


John Brand and Herschel Jawitz

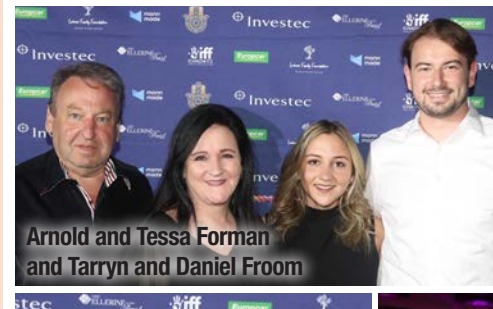

Siphokuhle Kwaza and Kholeka Ndima


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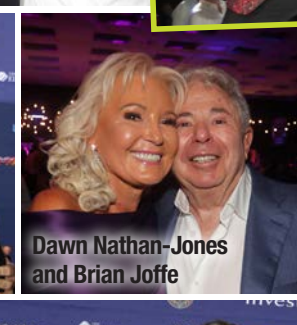

Witness Mdaka and Nyiko Nkuna


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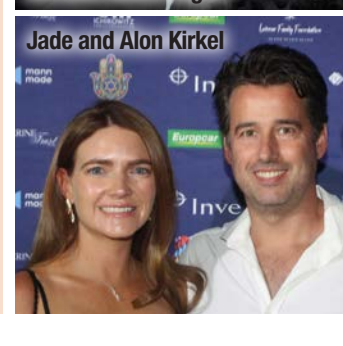

Arnold and Tessa Forman and Tarryn and Daniel Froom

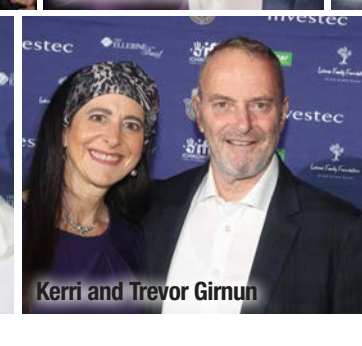

Craig Urbani and Cathy Del Mei

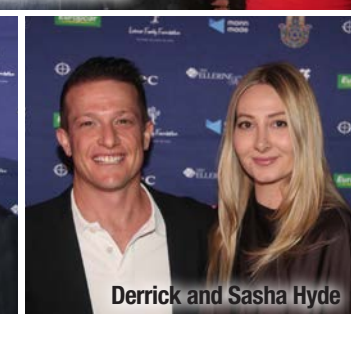

Avi and Amira Kagan


Dawn Nathan-Jones and Brian Joffe


Doug and Stacey Dembo and Peta Krost


Jade and Alon Kirkel


Kerri and Trevor Girnun


Derrick and Sasha Hyde

Nathan-Jones on a life of 'learning, earning, and returning'

GILLIAN KLAWANSKY

From helping to take Imperial Car Rental global with Europcar to today empowering South Africa's next generation of entrepreneurs, Dawn Nathan-Jones remains driven by purpose. Winner of this year's Investec Business Icon Award, she explains why she divides her life into three parts: "learning, earning, and returning".

Now in what she terms her season of returning, Nathan-Jones is focused on giving back. "The last 10 years have been very different from the corporate life I led," she says. "They've been much more intentional and purposeful. It's about giving up-and-coming entrepreneurs an opportunity to be mentored and to get assistance in terms of how to run a business and where to take their ideas."


Dawn Nathan-Jones

One of four siblings, Nathan-Jones had an early passion for business. "I had very humble beginnings and grew up in Durban, where I was honoured to have a good education, my initial learning," she says. "I knew from a very early age that I could sell and market, and I was always quite ambitious. I was about 15 when I started selling my first products and making money, which gave me this inspiration to do something more with my life."

In 1980, Nathan-Jones was given an opportunity to help pioneer a start-up, Imperial Car Rental. Just 21 at the time, she says this kickstarted her career and her "season of earning". Her mentor and Imperial's founder, Carol Scott, took a chance on her as she hadn't yet studied, which she ultimately did in her late 30s.

Her early professional education came directly from the coalface of building a new business, one that was intrinsically entrepreneurial. "By 23, I became a director, and then I moved to Johannesburg and took on many more leadership roles," says Nathan-Jones. There were four pillars of the business, she recalls, each of which had its own chief executive who was empowered to run it as their own business.

"For many years, I was chief executive of the car rental division, and we had many different brands and companies. I learned so much and it was an incredible way to be introduced to business at such an early age. It was remarkable for me to have that opportunity."

In her chief executive position, Nathan-Jones spearheaded the 2009 transition from Imperial Car Rental to Europcar, one of the world's largest car rental networks, a process that took two years of negotiation. Having always maintained a focus on customer service, she was determined not to lose one customer through this process.

"It was the best thing we did for the brand," she says of the transition, "and working with all the operators throughout the world and having their input was amazing. My philosophy is not to see other businesses as your competitors but as opportunities to collaborate with other people."

However, in her early years in the business, she wanted to control everything, Nathan-Jones recalls. She soon realised the value of decisive leadership and in allocating tasks. "Discovering how to let go was a massive learning for me. Yet once you see the results, it becomes an obsession because you see others growing, which is far more meaningful to me than to see that in myself. By lifting others, great leaders rise themselves."

When she eventually stepped down in 2016, the company had grown exponentially from an initial handful of cars to 25 000 vehicles, with a turnover of just more than R3 billion. Today, Europcar in Southern Africa operates as a division of the Motus Group.

Intending to slow down after her resignation, Nathan-Jones, a single mom, moved to Cape Town with her son. She quickly learned that rather than finding a balance, it was about harmonising her personal and professional lives.

Soon after her move, she was thrust into the spotlight as the only female judge on entrepreneurial reality show *Shark Tank South Africa*. Reticent to be in the limelight, she initially refused M-Net's offer, but later asked a rabbi for advice. "He said that opportunities only come your way once and suggested I look at this as another door opening to something that I hadn't been exposed to."

Not only was the show a highly rewarding experience for Nathan-Jones, it inspired the next phase of her life. "I came out of filming feeling that I needed to give back to young entrepreneurs in South Africa who have passion and talent but lack leadership and business knowledge."

She partnered with businesswoman Lesley Waterkeyn, who had just started Over the Rainbow, running multiple programmes to support aspiring entrepreneurs. To complement this work, Nathan-Jones later started the Entrepreneurs' Network organisation, connecting people in similar stages of their businesses of various sizes.

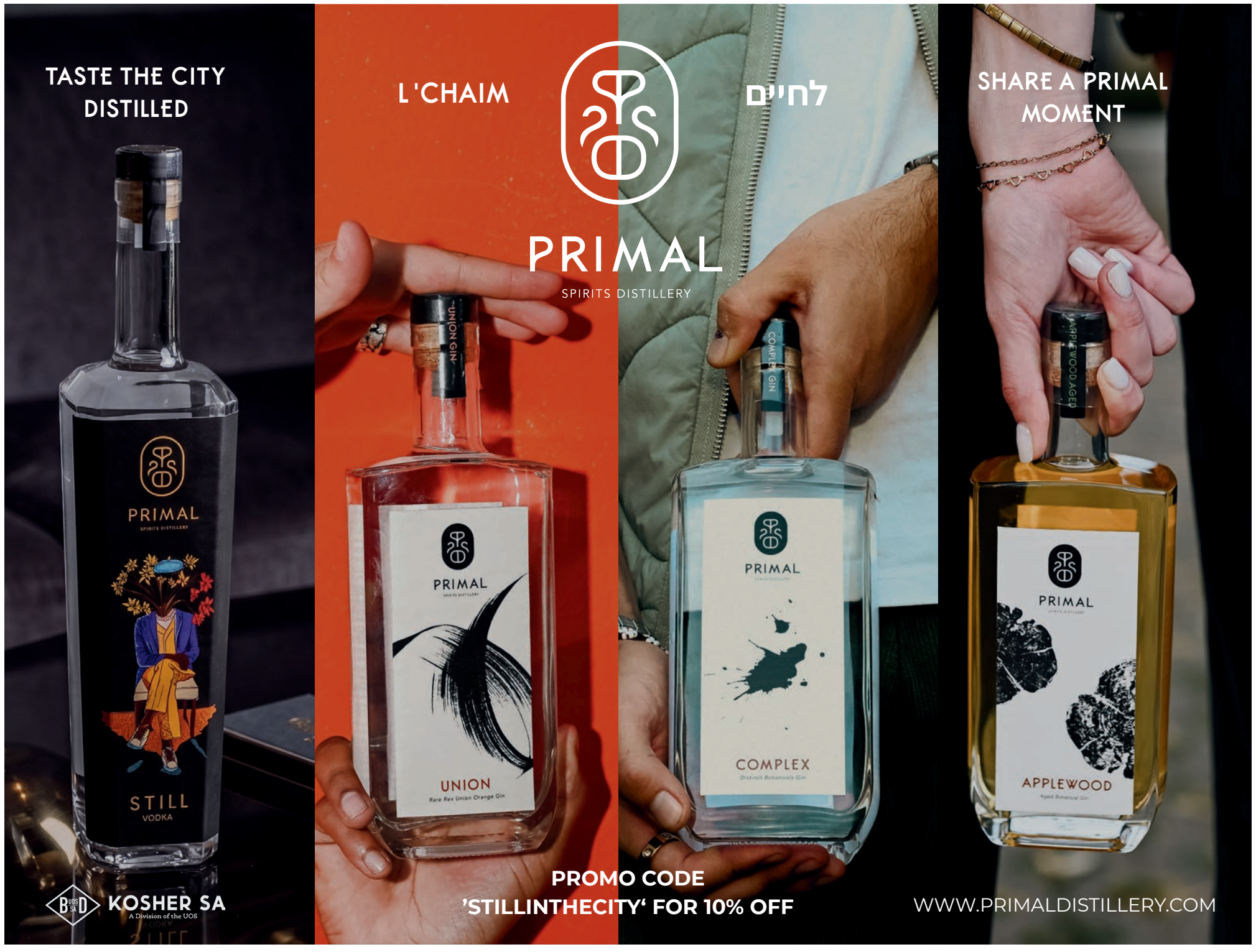
"It's like peer-to-peer learning where they can share ideas," she explains. "I believe, no matter how big or small your business, the learning, mistakes, and challenges are the same." Now operational for four years, Entrepreneurs' Network serves a few hundred people.

"It's the sustainability of taking them from incubation into this lifetime-of-learning phase," Nathan-Jones says. "We try to keep it quite small so that we can focus our attention on each individual. Seeing the level and the talent of these young entrepreneurs, who are mainly from the townships, gives me so much hope for South Africa."

Now also the vice-chair of the Cape South African Jewish Board of Deputies, Nathan-Jones is known for having initiated the Europcar Women in Leadership category at the Jewish Achiever Awards. "I felt that women needed their own platform, their own voice, and recognition for their work." She's consistently blown away by the calibre of the nominees.

Nathan-Jones still has her foot in the corporate world. Among her multiple business interests is her role as chair of Totalstay, a hotel and serviced apartment management company. "I enjoy the corporate world, but I'm passionate about working with the youth and with young start-ups," she says. "The impact is incredible."

While she says she feels uncomfortable receiving accolades, Nathan-Jones is dedicating the Investec Business Icon Award to those who've helped her along the way. "This award goes to the thousands of people that I've worked with through the years because without them, I wouldn't be where I am today." Reflecting on her legacy, Nathan-Jones says she'd like to be remembered as "somebody who inspired others to reach greatness". It seems she's well on track.



Nathan-Jones finds her purpose beyond the boardroom

CLAUDIA GROSS

Dawn Nathan-Jones built a career spanning more than three decades in business, but she told the 2026 Investec Jewish Achiever Awards that her most meaningful work began after she left corporate leadership.

Nathan-Jones received the Investec Business Icon Award at the ceremony on Sunday evening, 1 November, in recognition of her business leadership, entrepreneurship, mentorship, and service to the Jewish community.

"I am completely overwhelmed and filled with immense gratitude," she said in her acceptance speech. "Looking back, I never dreamed that a journey that began at the age of 21, with such humble beginnings, would lead me to stand here tonight to receive this award."

Nathan-Jones credited the role models she encountered early in her career at Imperial Car Rental. These included founder Carol Scott and former chief executive the late Bill Lynch, who went on to win the World Entrepreneur Award.

Their influence helped shape a career in mobility, car rental, and tourism. Nathan-Jones eventually became chief executive of the car rental division, helping build it into a R3 billion business with a fleet of more than 25 000 vehicles.

Nearly a decade ago, after stepping down as chief executive, she decided to leave corporate life and pursue a more purposeful path. That decision led to an unexpected opportunity as one of five judges on M-Net's *Shark Tank*, where entrepreneurs pitch their business ideas to potential investors.

The experience introduced her to young entrepreneurs, many from disadvantaged backgrounds, who had enthusiasm and promising ideas but lacked the practical experience and tools to build sustainable businesses. "Working alongside these entrepreneurs and helping them grow their business became my next true calling," she said. "My journey was far from over. I'd found my purpose."

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Nathan-Jones co-authored *Hope Stories*, celebrating entrepreneurs who adapted and persevered through uncertainty. The book aimed to preserve their experiences for future generations.

Her commitment to service also extended to the Jewish community. She joined the Cape Jewish Board of Deputies during the pandemic, when communities were coming together to support vulnerable people.



Dawn Nathan-Jones and Nick Riley

Following the events of 7 October and their aftermath, she continued serving the community through efforts to combat antisemitism and advocate for Cape Town's Jewish community. "Serving our community, combatting antisemitism, engaging with and advocating for the rights of our Cape Town Jewish community have been most meaningful and rewarding," she said.

Nathan-Jones also highlighted her passion for job creation, investing in start-ups, mentoring entrepreneurs, and promoting women's empowerment.

She thanked the *SA Jewish Report*, its chairperson, Howard Sackstein, the event sponsors, and the many colleagues and mentors who had supported her throughout her career. Reflecting on the award, she admitted that she had initially questioned whether she deserved it when Sackstein had called to tell her the news. However, looking back, she recognised the difference she had made in other people's lives.

Nathan-Jones reserved a special tribute for her son, Daniel, thanking him for his kindness, patience, and understanding when work had taken time away from their time together.

"I hope that one day you look back at this evening and feel inspired to pursue your own dreams with the same determination and passion," she said. "This award belongs to you as well as all the people, and there are many, who have stood shoulder to shoulder with me along the way." She ended her speech with the words "*Am Yisrael Chai*".

Berman brothers build on their unbreakable bond

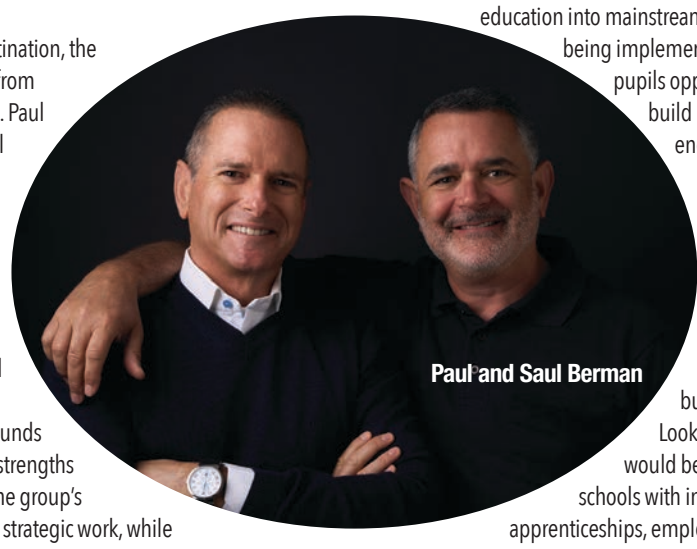
GILANA LAB

After 32 years of building side by side, Paul and Saul Berman have a new achievement to celebrate. The brothers behind Berman Brothers Group (BBG) are the 2026 winners of the Investec Business Leadership Award, another milestone in a journey that began with humble circumstances and grew into one of Cape Town's established property development businesses.

Behind their decades in business is a story the brothers continually return to. "The strength of our partnership comes from knowing that, no matter the challenge, we are in it together. There is an unequivocal trust and understanding that only we can share based on our history."

That history includes losing their father when they were young, an experience they say could easily have derailed them. They describe starting with "nothing, limited hope, and scarce resources", but say they had determination, resilience, and each other.

"We began our journey in the humble trenches of construction, armed with little more than our hearts, a relentless determination, and our shared vision. The road was tough, the hours long, and the learning curve steep," they say. Their desire to honour their father's legacy and create a better future for themselves and their families helped drive them through those early years.


Paul and Saul Berman

Though they shared a destination, the brothers arrived in business from markedly different directions. Paul attended Herzlia High School before completing a BA LLB at the University of Cape Town in 1988, while Saul attended Herzlia until Grade 10, qualified as an electrician at a technical college, and established Saul Berman Enterprises in 1989.

Those contrasting backgrounds became one of the defining strengths of BBG. Paul leads much of the group's conceptual, commercial, and strategic work, while Saul brings technical expertise, hands-on construction knowledge, and a focus on execution. They say their partnership "has always been built more on trust than formality", and after more than three decades of making major decisions together, their two very different journeys have become central to how BBG operates.

As their ambitions grew, Cape Town's Atlantic Seaboard became what they describe as their canvas. BBG went on to create residential, commercial, and mixed-use developments, with projects including The Herschel, The Legacy, The Odyssey, The Point Mall, Station House, The Estate, The Kings, Suro, The Sage, Dolce Vita, and Mont Reve. Through changing markets and economic downturns, resilience and adaptability allowed them to continue moving forward, they say.

They have never measured the leadership now recognised by their Investec Business Leadership Award purely in terms of what they've built. BBG has retained interests in many developments, remaining involved in their management, maintenance, and long-term quality. They've also invested in developing staff and built relationships with contractors, professional teams, and partners that have endured across numerous projects. "Trust, integrity, attention to detail, and a refusal to compromise on quality" are central, they say, to the culture of the business.

More than three decades in property have inevitably included difficult periods, from economic uncertainty and changing markets to construction risks, regulatory delays, and COVID-19. The brothers say navigating those periods reinforced the importance of remaining close to the detail, communicating directly, and refusing to delegate accountability. They challenge each other, divide responsibility according to their strengths, and, once a decision has been made, stand together behind it.

"Difficult periods taught us that calm, transparency, and decisive action matter more than optimism alone. They also reinforced a principle that has guided us throughout our careers: reputation is built in difficult times, not easy ones."

Their approach to their team follows the same thinking. "In hard times, a leader cannot disappear behind hierarchy or vague communication," they say. Saul remains closely involved on site, while Paul works across BBG's commercial and strategic operations, with both believing that "teams follow leaders who are prepared to share responsibility, give credit, and face problems alongside them".

While their Investec Business Leadership Award celebrates what they have accomplished over 32 years, Paul and Saul are increasingly focused on what their experience can create for others. In 2024, they founded the Hands On Foundation Charitable Trust to introduce technical and engineering education into mainstream South African schools. The model is already being implemented in partnership with LEAP schools, giving pupils opportunities to discover practical abilities and build pathways into construction, trades, and engineering.

The initiative has particular resonance given their own different routes into their careers. "The property and construction industries depend on practical competence, yet too many young people are never exposed to the trades, engineering, or the dignity of making and building things with their hands," they say. Looking back, one thing they would change would be to have begun this work sooner, connecting schools with industry and creating more pathways into apprenticeships, employment, and entrepreneurship.

Their understanding of leadership also reaches into the Jewish community. Paul has spent decades involved in Jewish welfare in Cape Town, including Jewish Community Services, Jewish Care Cape, and the Cape Jewish Welfare Trust.

"For us, being a good Jewish citizen means translating values into action," the brothers say. "It means community responsibility, care for the vulnerable, education, dignity, integrity in business, and a willingness to give time as well as money."

Winning this award gives Paul and Saul a moment to celebrate how far that journey has taken them, but their attention remains firmly on what comes next. They want to continue building, mentoring younger people, strengthening their team, and gradually transferring knowledge and responsibility to the next generation.

"We want to be remembered not only for what we built, but for the people we developed, the opportunities we created, and the confidence we helped inspire in South Africa's future."

After 32 years of backing one another through difficult beginnings, growth, uncertainty, and success, the Investec Business Leadership Award gives the Berman brothers one more milestone to share and, fittingly, one they get to celebrate exactly as they built their business: together.



Martin Sweet and Kone Gugushe


King David Prefects


Marc Romberg



Mic Mann, Howard Sackstein, and Kevin Mann



Dr Mpho Phalatse and Ayanda Dlamini

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Ceiling-breaker wields her hammer for charity

TALI FEINBERG

As South Africa's leading female auctioneer, who is deeply grounded in her Jewish identity, Ariella Kuper is showing women how to survive, thrive, and give back while taking on male-dominated industries.

Growing up in a Torah-observant home in Johannesburg, this year's Europcar Women in Leadership Award winner was taught from an early age to contribute to her community and beyond, be grateful for every blessing, and show up as her best self.

Now living in Cape Town, Kuper is a collection of contradictions: her husband is not Jewish, but she keeps kosher and goes to shul. She has faced cancer three times while building businesses, leading organisations, and conducting record-breaking charity auctions. She is passionate about the arts but also loves economics and business. And as a feminist, she tells other women that they can enjoy womanhood while still demanding the same rights, roles, and responsibilities as men.

Every morning, Kuper says *Modeh Ani*, acutely aware of the blessings of a new day, and the opportunity it provides to leave the world different from how you found it.

Kuper admits that pure *chutzpah* got her where she is today, from completing multiple degrees to breaking into the steel industry, learning as she went along, and always aiming high. She started at Macsteel by procuring a rare opportunity to speak to the chief executive, and when he said there were no jobs available, she responded, "I don't want a job, I want a career."

And a career she built. One of five female global steel traders in 1995, Kuper spent 10 years with Macsteel International, where she ultimately ran its South American operations. She returned to South Africa in 2006 and entered the male-dominated maritime and mining auction sector.

Despite surviving three rounds of cancer, she continues to dominate the maritime judicial arrest auction sector, with multibillion-rand sales of oil tankers and vessels.

Continuing to push boundaries, she became the first female auctioneer for Cricket South Africa's Betway T20 auction of players in 2023.

Major banks regularly call on Kuper for her advisory skills in the mining sector, to help dispose of distressed assets, and to feature as a keynote speaker at business and leadership conferences.

In business, Kuper believes that an industry with fewer women is not a barrier to entry, but an opportunity, because women shine in arenas that are male-dominated. "You are unique, a novelty, you stand out, and you have your own style," she told the *SA Jewish Report* in 2019. "If you are good at what you do, you quickly earn respect and are readily remembered and admired."

She advises women not to try to be a "copy" of someone else, because that will always leave them two steps behind. Rather, they should bring their best selves to the table and "land with impact".

Her true passion is charity and outreach, and conducting charity auctions brings her the most joy. She devotes her time, energy, and skills to charitable endeavours precisely because she is contributing to something without any strings attached.

She believes that if Hashem has blessed a person with the skills, ability, and position to ask for money for those less fortunate, it is both a privilege and an obligation to do so.

Kuper never hides her Jewish identity when engaging with organisations and South Africans because she believes it is action and intention that shows what the Jewish community is about. Through her charity work, she has encouraged organisations to take staff that may never have heard Jewish history to visit the local Holocaust centres.


Ariella Kuper

In the past 15 years, she has raised more than R200 million for charities through auctions.

Her Imibala Trust auction raised a record R14.25 million, and she was awarded the SA Institute of Auctioneers Charity Auction of the Year Award in both 2025 and 2026.

Her charity auction work includes milestone events such as the 2010 FIFA World Cup charity gala dinner, Francois Pienaar's Make a Difference Foundation dinners in New York and London, Nelson Mandela's 83rd birthday celebrations, and the Sharks Foundation UK Inaugural Gala Auction with Siya Kolisi in April this year.

She is also a sought-after keynote speaker, focusing on turning adversity into opportunity, and the role of women in leadership and business.

Kuper's academic achievements include an MBA from the University of Cape Town's Graduate School of Business, where she was class president, an exchange scholarship to Columbia Business School, and joint Honours in Economics and Economic History from the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits). Kuper was possibly the first person at Wits to do such a "joint honours".

She has won many awards for leadership and entrepreneurship. Kuper served three terms as vice-chair of the Maritime Law Association's Cape Region, and has been appointed to its national executive. Until recently, she sat on the board of ORT SA Cape, a major charity focusing on teacher training and mathematics and science education for underprivileged children in South Africa. She is a lifetime member of WIZO (the Women's International Zionist Organisation) and is also extensively involved with the United Jewish Campaign.

Kuper knows that one person cannot save the whole world, but she believes they can change the world for some people, and every person should use their unique skills and talents to do good.

As a hard-nosed and driven businesswoman, she is constantly chasing the next success. But her charity work is the opposite – success is found in contributing to others. It is this balance that brings her peace, joy, and gratitude.

At a time of identity politics and growing radicalism in the world, Kuper believes that people should guard against maligning others, especially in online debates. Rather, it is treating others with respect – even if you vehemently disagree with them – that goes the distance. Kuper practises this in every aspect of her life.

As she told the *SA Jewish Report* in 2019, it was her parents' adherence to a strong Jewish value system that gave her a sense of identity and belonging. "My father always taught us to believe in the talents we were given and not waste them. He pushed us to go out and cross frontiers, be bold, stand out among the crowd, and be remembered by our actions."

Powerhouse auctioneer leads by example

LEE TANKLE

When Ariella Kuper stepped up to accept the Europcar Women in Leadership Award at this year's Investec Jewish Achiever Awards, her message wasn't about titles, business success, or individual achievement. Instead, she spoke about cancer, surrender, community, and learning to ask for help.

"Nobody ever gets there on their own. You have to have people in your corner. Cancer taught me that surrender doesn't mean weakness; it means recognising the strength you have around you – in your family, in those who love you, and in your community."

For Kuper, one of South Africa's leading female auctioneers, the award represented a journey that has extended far beyond her professional success, encompassing philanthropy, community involvement, and a deeply personal experience that reshaped her understanding of what it means to lead.

Her work includes handling vessels arrested in South African and Namibian territorial waters over unpaid debts. Once a High Court order is granted, she is appointed to auction the vessel internationally on behalf of financial institutions seeking to recover the money owed.

Kuper has twice been named Charity Auctioneer of the Year by the South African Institute of Auctioneers.

She got her big break in January 2016, at the same time she was first diagnosed with cancer. When the cancer returned in 2018, she learnt the lesson about surrender and accepting help that became important in both her personal and professional life.

That philosophy influenced the development of her business. Recognising that buyers at auctions often have limited information about the assets they are bidding on, Kuper introduced comprehensive due-diligence reports to give them greater confidence. For vessels, this includes making a Master Mariner condition survey available to prospective buyers through a central repository of information.

Just a few weeks before receiving the award, Kuper had been standing on the same stage raising just under R4.5 million for a school foundation. "Now I'm standing getting an award in recognition of exactly those actions, doing what I absolutely love doing," she said.

"Abraham, the first Jew, was someone who led by example. He went against the grain, and his legacy was defined not by what he said, but by what he did and the influence he had," she told the Jewish Achiever Award guests.

"As Jews, throughout history we have often found ourselves on the other side, and that's why the lesson we take from Abraham is so important. It's about being an ambassador and recognising the impact of our actions – whether in business, charity, community, or leadership. It's through what we demonstrate as ambassadors that we make the greatest impact, and that's what we do as a Jewish community, particularly here in South Africa," said Kuper.



Johanna Makgalamele and Ariella Kuper

She attributes her successes to those who have stood by her through the ups and downs, especially her husband, her sister, and her parents.

Kuper said her success isn't about awards or professional achievements, but the example she sets for others.

"I want to be someone a mother can point to and say to her daughter, 'I want you to be like Ariella.' If I can be what a parent wants their child to aspire to, then I try my best to live up to that. I try to stand up and make a difference, despite everything thrown at me," she said.





Europcar Sponsor Message

By Martin Lydall, Chief Executive Officer: Europcar

Great leadership often begins with someone willing to step where no one has gone before.

Throughout history, progress has been driven by individuals who challenge assumptions, embrace uncertainty, and refuse to accept limitations. They are the people who see possibilities where others see obstacles, who remain resilient when faced with adversity, and who create opportunities not only for themselves but for those who follow.

At **Europcar**, we believe these qualities are the hallmark of exceptional leadership. They are also the qualities we are proud to celebrate through the **Europcar** Women in Leadership Award. Now in its eleventh year of sponsorship, this award continues to recognizse women whose influence extends far beyond their professional achievements. It honours those who lead with conviction, break down barriers, champion innovation, and create meaningful impact within their industries and communities.

Each year, we are inspired by the calibre of women nominated. These leaders demonstrate that success is not defined solely by ambition or achievement, but by the courage to challenge convention, the determination to persevere through adversity, and the commitment to use their success to uplift others.

This year's recipient, Ariella Kuper, embodies these values in every sense. In sectors where female representation has historically been limited, Ariella has built an exceptional reputation as South Africa's leading female auctioneer, becoming a recognized authority in judicial maritime and mining auctions on a global scale. Through her expertise, strategic vision, and entrepreneurial drive, she has transformed complex and highly specialized industries while earning the trust of international institutions, financial organizations, and industry leaders alike. Yet what makes Ariella's story truly remarkable is not only the scale of her professional achievements, but the impact she has created beyond business. Through her philanthropic work and charity auctions across South Africa, the United Kingdom and the United States, she has helped raise millions for worthy causes, demonstrating the profound difference that leadership can make when combined with purpose.

Her journey has also been marked by extraordinary resilience. Having overcome significant personal challenges. Ariella has continued to push boundaries, redefine expectations, and inspire those around her through her unwavering determination and optimism. She represents the kind of leadership our industries need most: bold enough to challenge the status quo, compassionate enough to create opportunities for others, and courageous enough to lead through example.

On behalf of **Europcar**, I extend my warmest congratulations to Ariella Kuper on this well-deserved recognition. Her achievements remind us that true leadership is measured by the legacy we leave behind and the lives we positively influence along the way.

To all the finalists and nominees, thank you for the example you set. Your stories continue to inspire future leaders and strengthen the belief that when women succeed, industries prosper, communities thrive, and possibilities expand for everyone.

Thank you to Investec and Jewish Achiever for providing a platform that shines a spotlight on the remarkable women shaping the future of South Africa.

Martin Lydall: Chief Executive Officer

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Europcar

From Sorbet to Cultureneering

GILLIAN KLAWANSKY


Ian Fuhr

Best known as the founder of Sorbet, the largest beauty salon chain in Africa, this year's Eric Ellerine Entrepreneur Award winner, Ian Fuhr, is also the pioneer of 'Cultureneering'. This concept is the impetus behind his coaching and consulting business, the Hatch Institute, which specialises in people, placing organisational culture at the heart of business strategy.

"The customer experience can never be better than the employee experience." This thinking underpins the business philosophy with which Fuhr has built multiple successful businesses over 50 years.

"The most important thing I have learned in my entire career is that the purpose of work is to serve," he says. "Money is the reward, never the purpose. Service always comes before reward. Every person in the business must buy into this belief. This led me to understand that there is an inextricable link between culture and service."

This understanding is why, when Fuhr built Sorbet, he did all the induction training himself – of 3 500 employees. "In hindsight, the success of Sorbet was largely built on its culture and the attitude of the staff towards customer service. You cannot motivate people. They have to motivate themselves. All I tried to do was to inspire them to do that. This included building a culture in which every individual had a sense of belonging in the company despite their differences."

This proved to be a winning formula, which saw the business grow to 225 franchised outlets and a combined turnover of more than R1 billion by the time he left in 2019.

While Fuhr is now 73 and considers this his greatest business achievement, he shows no signs of slowing down.

In a recent side venture, he became a shareholder in Popsicle, a new nail bar business that already has seven outlets. "I do the culture and customer-service training and support my fellow partners in launching the Popsicle franchise model," he explains.

Yet his focus now is mainly the Hatch Institute, which counts large corporates such as Santam and Investec, and medium-sized businesses including Food Lover's Market, among its clients. Fuhr also uses it as a vehicle to coach start-ups and individual entrepreneurs. Zeroing in on the people who make up a business, it has a specific focus on leadership, culture, diversity, and customer service.

"South Africa is in urgent need of a new approach to business leadership that will solve its many unique and complex socio-political challenges," he says. "Running a business in a polarised country with a melting pot of diversity requires leaders to understand the complexity of building an inclusive culture out of a fragmented workforce. This is called culture-driven leadership and is based on the 'Cultureneering' concept, which I created. It can be described as how to build a strong culture in a diverse workforce that lays the platform for obsessive customer service."

Fuhr says he started his career as "a naïve, uneducated, highly protected 22-year-old white boy who had grown up during apartheid in the leafy suburbs of Johannesburg". As the only white person in his first business, both among staff and customers, his perspective quickly changed, laying the foundation of his socio-political slant on business leadership.

"I soon came to realise that I had been hidden from the realities and atrocities of apartheid," he says. "I realised that racism had a significant impact on the lives of my people and on their level of commitment and productivity. That started my journey of challenging the hierarchy of human value that underpinned the apartheid philosophy. I developed a leadership style that took account of the socio-political and economic challenges the staff were having to deal with daily. That journey continued throughout my working life, and I have tried to spread my ideas through my businesses, my books, my coaching, and my public-speaking activities."

This ties into his lifelong vision of contributing to building an integrated and inclusive South Africa, through racial healing and eliminating racial hierarchy, offering everyone an opportunity to build a sustainable livelihood. "I have practised this belief in all my businesses and have coached and provided consulting services to other businesses on this critical aspect of our future."

Fuhr's story also proves the value of marrying one's personal and work purposes – in his case, to make a meaningful difference in the lives of others. While he admits that finding a balance between personal and professional commitments has been an enduring challenge, blending the two in his time at Sorbet was especially rewarding, he says. "Sorbet was largely a family business, with all three of my children and a few other relatives involved in senior positions. Working with my family was perhaps the most rewarding period of my life."

That he's become a prolific public speaker, even giving a TED Talk in 2015 that generated 100 000 views, would shock his 16-year-old self, says Fuhr. Having developed a speech defect as a teenager and stuttering quite badly, he virtually stopped speaking. "I was too embarrassed by my inability to get my words out. I lost my self-confidence and my school marks deteriorated badly. I also dropped out of university in my second year of BCom. As the youngest child in a family of entrepreneurs, I so badly wanted to be an entrepreneur and so I realised that I had to improve my speech to do so."

While completing the Dale Carnegie course on public speaking was significantly traumatic, he says, its impact was undeniable. "Somehow, I managed to get through it, and it was the catalyst for the recovery of my speech issues and my self-belief. The underlying message was that courage is not the absence of fear. It is the ability to overcome the fear. Do the thing that frightens you most."

Fuhr may not have completed his degree, but the fact that his expertise comes from personal experience has helped to secure his business success, helping him overcome challenges along the way. "I am not seen as an academic who learned all these things from books, but rather as someone who has actually walked this journey and practised these concepts in my own businesses," he says.



The Eric Ellerine Entrepreneur Award judging panel

Fuhr is not done yet

CLAUDIA GROSS

At 73, Ian Fuhr has a simple explanation for why he hasn't retired: he is not finished yet. Accepting the Eric Ellerine Entrepreneur Award at the Jewish Achiever Awards on Sunday night, the founder of Sorbet reflected on five decades of entrepreneurship, the family behind his success, and why the next generation is essential to business.

Fuhr described his move into the beauty salon industry as one of the most educational experiences of his career. When he started Sorbet, he knew little about the sector, joking that he had previously thought a Brazilian was someone who lived in Brazil. He also joked about the three-quarter leg wax and wondering which quarter of the leg was left unwaxed.

Despite his initial unfamiliarity with the industry, Sorbet grew into a chain with 225 franchise outlets by the time it was sold. Fuhr attributed its success to its approach to customer service and a philosophy of servant leadership.

He described this as serving the people who serve customers, placing employees and their ability to deliver good service at the centre of the business.

His entrepreneurial career has taken him through several industries, including retail, music, race relations, wildlife, beauty, and business coaching. After Sorbet, he established the Hatch Institute, a coaching and consulting business focused on workplace culture. He later returned to the beauty industry with Popsicle Nail Bar.

Fuhr said he continued to learn from younger people, whose perspectives challenged established assumptions and helped anticipate future changes. "When I was young, my teachers were old and they taught me about the past," he said. "And now that I'm old, my teachers are young and they teach me about the future."

Fuhr's explanation for continuing to work was characteristically humorous. He recalled retiring briefly for an afternoon nap, only to be questioned by his wife, Sandy, about what he was doing at home. "I said, 'Nothing.' She said, 'But you did nothing yesterday.' I said I wasn't finished."

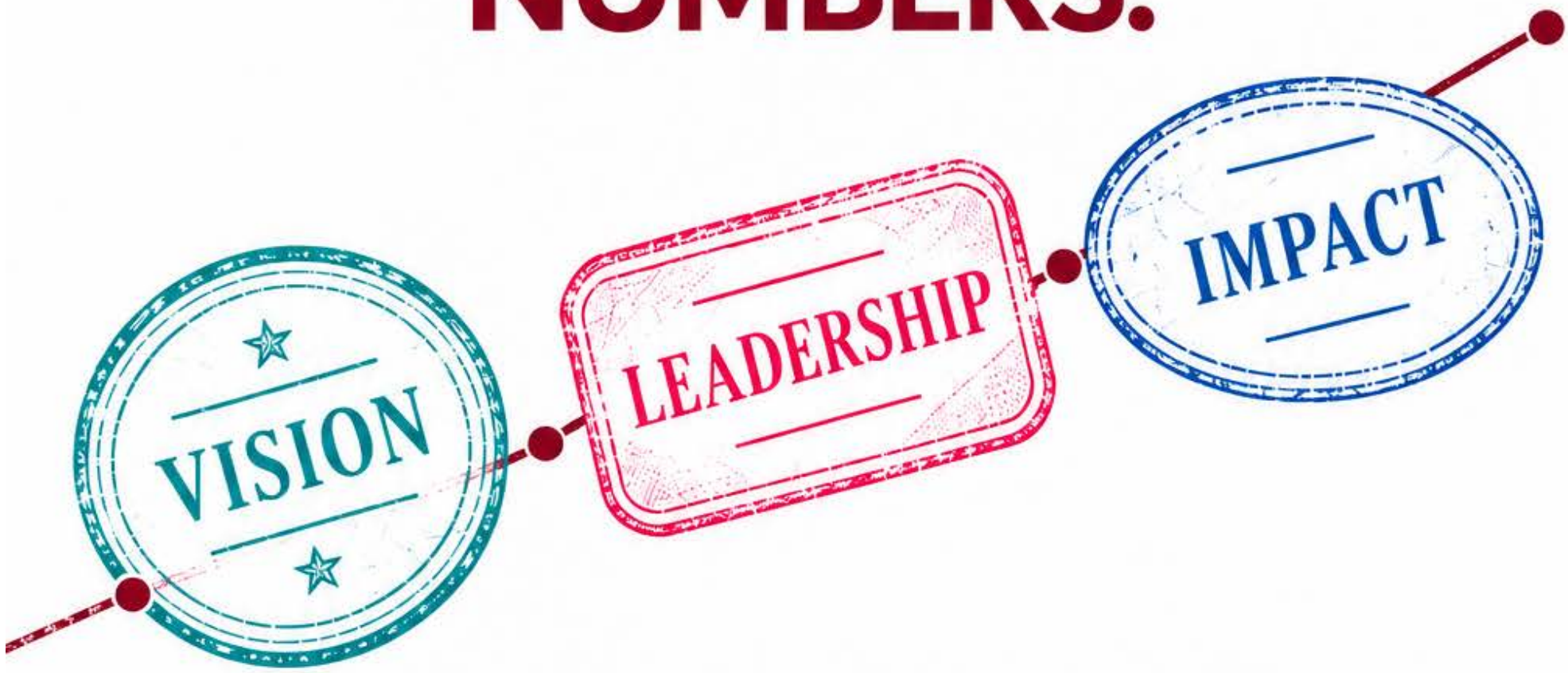


Ian Fuhr and Dionne Ellerine Hirschowitz

He then recalled the words of Viktor Frankl, who said he'd survived Auschwitz partly because there was much still to do. Fuhr said these words had inspired him. "And so, at the tender age of 73, my journey continues," he said. "Because there is much still to do."

Fuhr thanked the Jewish community, his family, fellow judges, and the event's sponsors, closing his speech by remembering his late friend Stephen Blend, who had served as a Jewish Achiever Awards judge for many years. "This is for you, Steve," he said.

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Lipschitz is leading SA running into the future

LEE TANKLE

Adam Lipschitz knows what it takes to go the distance. With a personal best of 2:07:22, he's established himself as one of South Africa's fastest marathon runners, but his ambitions extend well beyond his own race times and results.

As the founder of the Social Runners Club and a race organiser determined to grow the sport, Lipschitz has turned his passion for running into something bigger than himself, earning him the Ichikowitz Family Foundation Rising Star Award at the 2026 Investec Jewish Achiever Awards.

Running a marathon in just over two hours is impressive, but Lipschitz's success tells a broader story. His rise through South African distance running has required years of training, sacrifice, and persistence, while his growing influence off the road reflects his determination to leave the sport stronger than he found it.



Adam Lipschitz and Ruby Ichikowitz

Lipschitz has run in hundreds of countries, almost always improving on his time. Most recently, he achieved a new record of two hours, seven minutes and 22 seconds at the Košice Peace Marathon in Slovakia, earning seventh place on the list of fastest South African marathon times ever recorded.

In addition to running as an individual, Lipschitz founded the Social Runners Club, one of the biggest in the country, as a more flexible alternative to traditional running clubs. It's essentially a "no-frills" club where people can get their Athletics South Africa licence and be part of a running community without having to attend time trials, meetings and group runs, or marshal races.

"As a professional runner, it's normally easier to join a corporate club, get paid well, and promote them. I decided against it. I started my own club with my own vision, and everything through the club is a reflection of me," he says.

The Social Runners Club caters to all levels, from people doing their first 5km to Comrades runners. It also organises social runs, training sessions, and road races in Durban and Umhlanga.

Since the club's founding in 2021, it has grown to more than 600 members around South Africa and organises four large races a year, reaching close to 5 000 people. It's now the third biggest non-corporate running club in the country. Lipschitz has also brought in an element of *tzedakah*, connecting charities to events.

"The Social Runners Club is a movement that looks to give back to those in need in the running community, whether through race entries or training kit and shoes," he says. "I have expanded on my *tzedakah* and started adding charities to all events that we put on.

"In my personal capacity, I have also improved my running times and am now placed at the top of nearly every distance in the country from 10km to 42km."

Though Lipschitz has travelled the globe for his sport, he wants to continue to grow running at home. "I believe South Africa has all the potential. I have travelled to hundreds of countries, yet there is nothing that compares to this country. The opportunities here are endless, and it is up to us, the new generation, to unlock its full potential," he says.

Coming third in one of the biggest 15km races in the world, in the United States, is something Lipschitz will never forget.

"I had been going through a lot personally, and to overcome the mental effects to perform at the moment was a self-growth moment that I will never forget and never let happen again," he says.

Equally important in measuring his success is how much he's able to give back.

"Being able to be in a position to give *tzedakah* in all forms in the running world makes it enjoyable, and that to me is my measurement of success," he says.

One of his biggest challenges was being injured after university and not being able to run for a few years because of it.

"It definitely hurt me and restricted me in business, mentally, and in life. However, the hardships and not being able to run definitely made me stronger mentally, and this showed in the growth of my businesses and in life," he says.

The competitiveness of running can also be a challenge, but he says this only fuels him.

"A lot of people in the running world don't want to see you succeed, and they will go out of their way to bring you down. The only way to deal with this is to become so big, so powerful in the industry that they end up throwing stones at a wall. Over the years, I have built a strong business and a strong brand that has made it hard for others to take me down," he says.

Lipschitz, with his rigorous schedule, explains that balance is of the utmost importance to him. "Being able to balance running, work, and entertainment has been a blessing, and I live a balanced life. My mindset has allowed me to know what is good and bad and at what time, and this has certainly assisted with my growth," he says.

The words Lipschitz lives by are: set a goal and never worry about the now. Tomorrow is another day to get better and move forward.

"I never worry about how much money I can make from someone today; it's the relationship that counts for the future down the line and how a partnership or transaction can be beneficial," he says.

Lipschitz on track to even greater success

LEE TANKLE


Adam Lipschitz

For Adam Lipschitz, running 42.2km in 2:07:22 isn't the finish line. It's another step towards an even bigger goal: breaking the South African marathon record and representing his country at the Olympics.

The elite distance runner's ambition, achievements, and commitment to giving back through running were recognised when he received the Ichikowitz Family Foundation Rising Star Award at this year's Investec Jewish Achiever Awards.

Lipschitz recently won the Košice Peace Marathon in Slovakia, clocking a personal best of 2:07:22, to become the sixth-fastest marathon runner ever in South Africa, and ranked 61st in the world currently. This came after what he described as the best year of his running career so far.

"I made the right choices of races and where to go, how to do things," he said. "I'd been to Košice twice before as a pacemaker, so I knew the course. I went in there this time with no stress and nothing to hold me back.

"When we got to about 30km, I felt good and made my break, and I never looked back. That comes down to the mental strength I've developed over the past couple of years. Everyone in a marathon can run the first 30km, but it's about whether you can run the last 12km. I credit that strength to my friends and family, who have supported me, and also to the belief I've developed in myself."

In addition to his success individually, Lipschitz is the founder of one of South Africa's largest running clubs, the Social Runners Club, where many runners prepare for the Comrades Marathon.

"It started as a joke about four years ago during COVID-19, and it has grown to 650 members. My goal has been to change the lives of the Comrades runners I've met along the way," Lipschitz said.

For the upcoming Comrades, the club will be providing 20 entries to underprivileged runners who need the support to keep going. "Comrades isn't just a race; it's a journey that takes about six months of the year. It gives people something to work towards, keeps them committed, and can help keep them out of trouble."

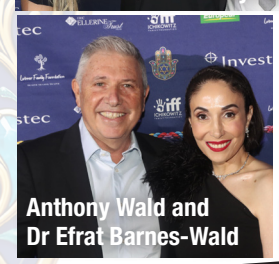
Lipschitz still aims to improve on his own marathon time and to set a new South African record.

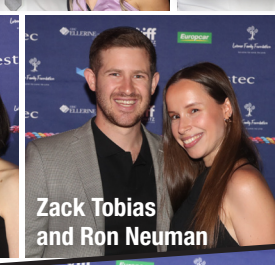

Muzi Kuzwayo


Benjy, Amanda, and Levi Porter with Natanya and Dean Rubin

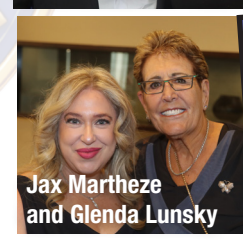

Dalya and Asher Marcus and Adam and Felicity Marcus


Stan Smookler and Mendel Medalie

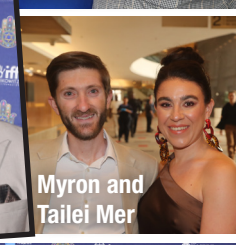

Anthony Wald and Dr Efrat Barnes-Wald

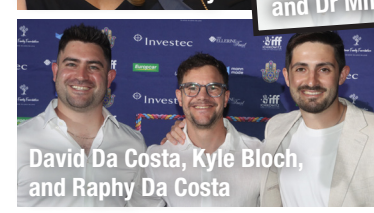

Zack Tobias and Ron Neuman


Natalie and Joel Back


Jax Martheze and Glenda Lunsky


Jeremiah Kapotwe and Dr Mmusi Maimane


Myron and Tailei Mer


David Da Costa, Kyle Bloch, and Raphy Da Costa


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A full-circle moment for humanitarian Sweet

GILANA LAB

Giving a sweet to a young boy at shul every Friday might seem like a small gesture, but for Martin Sweet, those treats came with lessons that would shape his life's work. Decades later, the boy who received those sweets and words of wisdom from the late humanitarian giant Bertie Lubner has been honoured with the Bertie Lubner Humanitarian Award in honour of Chief Rabbi Cyril Harris at the 2026 Investec Jewish Achiever Awards.

For Sweet, founder of Primestars and group chief executive of Prime Impact Holdings, the recognition carries a significance that extends well beyond his professional achievements.

"I'm deeply honoured and humbled by this recognition. To receive an award from my own community is profoundly meaningful, but to receive one associated with a man I admired and, in many ways, wanted to emulate makes it even more special."

Sweet's encounters with Lubner at shul left a lasting impression. "Every Friday he would give me a sweet. But the sweet was never just a sweet. Somehow, Bertie would turn it into a lesson about life, challenging me to hold myself to higher standards and to do more for others."

Lubner would remind him, "It's not about who you are; it's about who you can become, and you don't do good things because you are a good person. You become a good person by doing good things."

Those lessons complemented the values Sweet had already learned from his parents, both Holocaust survivors, while growing up in Klerksdorp.

"They had experienced unimaginable loss, but they were determined to give me something they believed could not easily be taken away from me: an education. They sacrificed enormously to give me the opportunity to learn, and they instilled in me the belief that education has the power to transform a life," he says.

That belief eventually became the driving force behind Primestars, which Sweet established in 2004, under the name Marketing Stars, following a career in corporate leadership and a stint as a Johannesburg city councillor.

"My passion is driven by service," says Sweet. "I feel a profound responsibility to use every resource, connection, and skill I have to widen the circle of opportunity. Seeing the resilience, brilliance, and potential of our pupils fuels me daily."


Martin Sweet

What began as a small initiative has grown into one of South Africa's leading youth development organisations, reaching young people in under-resourced communities across all nine provinces.

One of Primestars' earliest innovations was turning Ster-Kinekor and Nu Metro cinemas into what Sweet called "theatres of learning". Its eduCate programme offers matric pupils free maths and science revision, while mobile cinemas bring these learning opportunities to schools beyond conventional cinema networks.

Over the years, Primestars has expanded into entrepreneurship, financial literacy, career guidance, and leadership development. Its Step Up 2 A Start Up programme encourages young people to develop business ideas, while Rethink Rands teaches practical money-management skills. The What About the Boys? initiative addresses gender-based violence by challenging harmful ideas about masculinity and encouraging empathy, accountability, and respect.

"We helped young people explore careers they didn't know existed. We encouraged them to step into entrepreneurship, to see themselves as creators of jobs rather than seekers of them," says Sweet.

His commitment has already earned national recognition. Earlier this year, Sweet was named Best CEO at the CSI Legacy Awards for his contribution to youth empowerment and education.

He took on the role of group chief executive of Prime Impact Holdings, bringing together Primestars, Signa, Seed Academy, School Media, and InternFit to create opportunities extending from education to employment.

Primestars has now touched the lives of more than 1.8 million young South Africans, with more than 90 000 participating in its programmes annually.

Sweet's motivation has remained rooted in the belief that a young person's circumstances should never determine their future. "The youth of this country aren't broken. They are brilliant. They simply need scaffolding, encouragement, and environments that allow their gifts to rise," he says.

It is a conviction that connects directly to the values of his childhood, when his parents taught him the importance of education and Lubner shared what it meant to live a life of service.

"From my parents came my belief in the transformative power of education. From Bertie came the understanding that a meaningful life is defined by what we choose to do for others."

Receiving an award bearing Lubner's name has therefore brought Sweet's personal and professional journeys together in a way he could never have anticipated.

"In many ways, this moment brings the journey full circle. My parents shaped the values by which I have tried to live, and Bertie showed me what those values could look like in action. To now receive an award associated with him is profoundly meaningful."

Sweet also paid tribute to Marc Lubner and the Afrika Tikkun family for continuing Bertie's legacy, while acknowledging the team, partners, and sponsors who have helped Primestars reach so many young people.

Above all, his award is a celebration of the values that have guided him from childhood to the present day, and the community that helped instil them.

"I am deeply grateful for the privilege of belonging to our Jewish community, a community that has always taught us to aim high, to reach for the stars, and to understand that the values that define our humanity are found in what we do for others, in planting a tree today knowing that someone else may one day sit in its shade."

A prime star in educating the nation

GILANA LAB

When Martin Sweet accepted the Bertie Lubner Humanitarian Award in honour of Chief Rabbi Cyril Harris at the 2026 Investec Jewish Achiever Awards, he honoured his Holocaust-survivor parents for being determined to give him something no one could take from him – an education.

That belief has helped transform the lives of more than 1.7 million young South Africans through his organisation, Primestars, said Sweet, who grew up in Klerksdorp.

Sweet credits his parents' sacrifices with shaping his life's work. Although they had experienced unimaginable loss, they "sacrificed enormously to give me the opportunity to learn, and they instilled in me the belief that education has the power to transform a life".



Martin Sweet and Marc Lubner

That belief grew into an understanding that education could change more than one person's circumstances. "Education can transform a family, a community and, ultimately, a country," Sweet said. Through Primestars, he has worked to make those opportunities accessible to young people in under-resourced communities, particularly those who might otherwise struggle to enter the economy.

What began with just 167 pupils studying mathematics and science has grown into an organisation reaching more than 90 000 young people annually. Its programmes introduce youngsters to careers they may never have considered, while developing entrepreneurship, financial literacy, and leadership skills. A video tribute shown during the ceremony highlighted Primestars' Theatres of Learning initiative, which brings pupils into cinemas across the country for educational programmes.

"We have encouraged entrepreneurship and challenged them to become creators of jobs rather than simply seekers of them," Sweet said. "We have challenged stereotypes around gender and masculinity, taught financial literacy, and built leadership programmes that help young people find their voice, their agency, and their purpose."

Presenting the award, Marc Lubner reflected on his father's legacy and the family's decision to establish the humanitarian award in his memory. Bertie Lubner and the then Chief Rabbi Cyril Harris co-founded Afrika Tikkun, which works to uplift disadvantaged communities through education and development. The Lubner Family Foundation continues to support charitable initiatives, including the award.

Marc described Sweet as someone who had dedicated his life to "genuinely enriching the lives of others, giving them hope and a belief that there is a future to believe in".

For Sweet, receiving an award associated with someone he had admired was particularly meaningful. As a boy, he had attended the same shul as Bertie Lubner. "My parents shaped the values by which I have tried to live, and Bertie showed me what those values could look like in action," Sweet said.

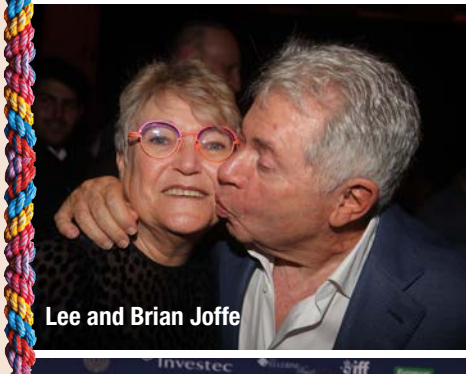
He reflected on the importance of creating opportunities whose impact extended beyond one generation. He described the Jewish community's commitment to helping others as "planting a tree today knowing that someone else may one day sit in its shade".


Ian and Sandy Fuhr


Ilan and Lori Wiesenbacher



Ingrid and Stanley Seeff


Lee and Brian Joffe



Leigh and Wayne Sussman



Afrika Tikkun
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Berman – an agent of change through art

TANIA LEVY

Over more than three decades Kim Berman – the 2026 Investec Jewish Achiever Art, Sport, Science, and Culture Award winner – has midwifed hundreds of other artists. This through Artist Proof Studio, the community printmaking centre she co-founded, and as a visual arts educator at the University of Johannesburg (UJ).

Her commitment to empowering others has helped produce some of the most well-known contemporary South African artists, including Philemon Hlungwani, Nelson Makamo, Mary Sibande, Nicholas Hlobo, and Sizwe Khoza.

Berman spearheaded a paper-making project in 21 rural areas around the country that provided skills and jobs, facilitated HIV awareness campaigns, and has secured vital government, institutional, and corporate funding for artists and arts education.

Her own art hangs in prestigious collections such as at the Constitutional Court and the Museum of Modern Art in New York.

The thread through it all is Berman's social conscience. And she attributes that in large part to being Jewish.

"My parents brought us up with Jewish awareness and a sense of social justice," she says. "Being Jewish was part of a social conscience. We knew about the Holocaust and therefore recognised apartheid as prejudice."

Social involvement runs in the family. Her maternal grandfather, Yiddish writer Richard Feldman, was a South African Labour Party member of Parliament in his time. Her grandmother Freda was a co-founder and leader of ORT SA. Her three sisters are active in areas ranging from family and women's labour issues to art therapy.

"My Jewish upbringing has very much influenced who I am and my choices as an activist and as a person who believes in social justice. I happen to be an artist so I use my art in that area," she says.

Berman co-founded Artist Proof Studio with the late Nhlanhla Xaba in Newtown, Johannesburg in 1991. She'd spent seven years in Boston, acquiring a Master's degree at Tufts University and most of the printmaking skills she would use to make a difference back home.

"Printmaking is a democratic medium," says Berman. "You can use recycled materials and it's affordable. You don't have to be rich to make a print."

But at that time in South Africa, printmaking happened only in universities or art centres, limiting access.

"So I bought a beautiful French Tool etching press. I sold my car and my furniture to afford it, and shipped it to Johannesburg . The studio formed around the press.

"We explored alternative ways to create prints, approaching newspaper and magazine presses for leftover inks. We made our own plates from found and repurposed materials. We also began making paper because handmade paper suitable for printmaking is unaffordable for many artists."

Berman says the main idea was, and still is, for Artist Proof Studio to be a "safety net" for youngsters who didn't have access to tertiary education. "We accept students based on their portfolio, their talents, and their ambitions to be artists," she says. "We don't exclude them because they don't have a matric or money"

More than 600 artists have graduated from Artist Proof Studio over 35 years.

All the while, Berman was making a difference too at UJ. It's predecessor, the Wits Technikon, hired her as a lecturer in 1994, on condition that she helped in its transformation.

"At that time, technikons were very white. I helped appoint the first two black lecturers in the Faculty of Arts, one of whom was a colleague from Artist Proof Studio. Some of the students also came through the studio, where I was able to secure funding to support their studies. It took a good 10 years to transform the faculty racially."

Berman feels one of her biggest contributions at UJ was introducing a socially engaged curriculum.

"I've always seen my role as making students aware of their society. Community engagement has always been my strongest pull. As a senior lecturer I managed the post-graduate students and designed an honours programme in which all students have to do workplace learning or community engagement. I took volunteers to engage with community projects all over the country," she says.

For a long time, she didn't have the buy-in of her academic colleagues. Many saw the community work as taking students away from their fine art practice. Completing her PhD gave her more autonomy. The faculty's first black Master's student was able to complete his research because she could get funding for him to do so.

Berman says being in both spaces was always interesting for her. "I don't think I would have survived so long in academia if I hadn't been involved with Artist Proof Studio. It's a free space, where artists can make their own opportunities, whereas academia has a much tighter curriculum. At Artist Proof Studio, some students don't have maths or writing literacy so we find different ways to teach. We can accommodate deaf and neurodivergent students by having the flexibility to accommodate one-on-one learning."



Kim Berman and Andrew Ross

Berman says the success rate of Artist Proof Studio students supporting themselves as artists is much higher than university students. "In academic courses, you teach critical and conceptual thinking, and the learning has nothing to do with commercial viability. At Artist Proof Studio, we teach life skills, business skills, and how to market yourself as an artist."

This doesn't mean she prefers one environment to the other. She did, after all, spend 31 years in academia, becoming a full professor. One of the things she is proud of about her UJ career is the Master's in Art Therapy she helped "midwife" and lead for five years, with specialists from around the world lecturing online. The programme, the first Art Therapy qualification in Africa, was initiated by her sister Hayley, an art therapist.

"The programme is ground-breaking," says Berman, explaining that it is adapting art therapy, which originates in America, for an African context.

Before Berman retired from UJ last year, the university staged a comprehensive exhibition of her artwork titled Remembering and Forgetting: Landscapes in Dialogue. "My retrospective was a big deal for me," she says. "I was nervous. I hadn't shown my art in 15 years. My students didn't really know me as an artist or my artwork."

Ultimately, the retrospective was very gratifying. "It was a way to rediscover myself as an artist."

However, it hasn't yet led her back into her studio. She's been too busy compiling a book on the legacy of printmaking, which profiles 100 Artist Proof Studio alumni and features essays. The book is due to be launched early next year.

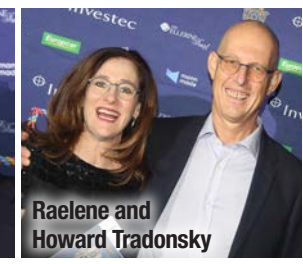
Maybe then Berman will get her hands dirty with ink again.


Howard Sackstein with Barbara and Geoff Rothschild


Lacky Kaplan, Howard Sackstein, and Ivor Polo


Sasha and Heidi Said


Reeva Forman and Martin Sweet


Raelene and Howard Tradonsky

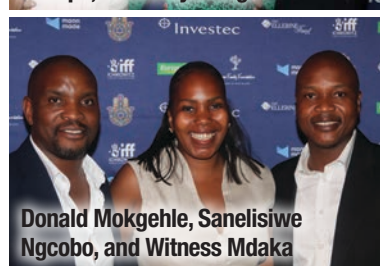

Stephanie Du Toit, Batsheva Phillips, and Chaya Finger

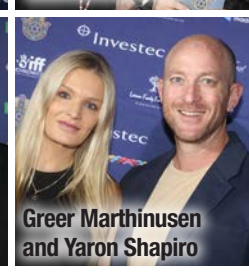

Sharise Weiner and Heidi Brauer


Nicole and Clive Sindelman

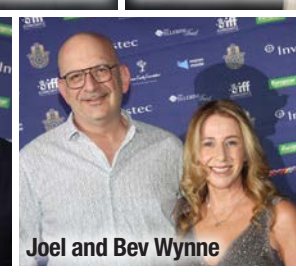

Lorraine Srage and Mazal Sacks

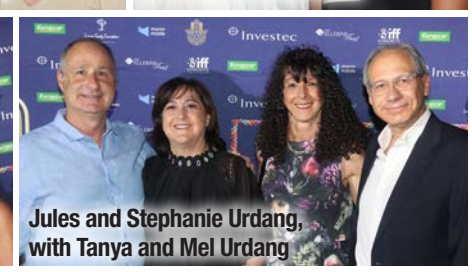

Karl and Cleo Socikwa


Donald Mokgehle, Sanelisiwe Ngcobo, and Witness Mdaka


Greer Marthinusen and Yaron Shapiro


Howard Sackstein and Rob Hersov


Joel and Bev Wynne


Jules and Stephanie Urdang, with Tanya and Mel Urdang

Artists imagine a different world

LEE TANKLE

For Kim Berman, art has never simply been about what hangs on a wall. It's been a tool for activism, education, and social change, she said on accepting the Art, Sport, Science, and Culture Award at the 2026 Investec Jewish Achiever Awards on 1 November.

From discovering printmaking as a language of resistance and democracy to founding Artist Proof Studio in 1991, Berman has spent more than three decades creating opportunities for young South African artists who might otherwise have been excluded from formal art education.


Kim Berman

That lifelong belief in the power of art to transform lives was recognised when Berman received her award.

Berman's belief in art as a force for change began taking shape long before Artist Proof Studio opened its doors. Exposed to art from a young age, it was during her university years, amid the political realities of apartheid South Africa, that her creativity and activism began to intersect.

"I grew up in a family that instilled in us the belief that each of us has a purpose. My three sisters, Lori, Cindy, and Hayley, and I have each found ways to be activists in our own fields. Mine is art. But can art change the world? Can it advance social justice and equality? Can it save lives? These questions have been at the heart of my life's work.

"Artists imagine a different world. They look outside of the margins and challenge and change the shape of things. They bring beauty and hope into places of despair and seek to change the way we think as well as what we do," she said on accepting her award.

Printmaking offered her a way to engage with ideas of democracy, human rights, and resistance.

Berman co-founded Artist Proof Studio in Johannesburg in 1991, creating an alternative space for aspiring artists who lacked access to formal tertiary art education.

"At Artist Proof Studio, young people arrive with talent and dreams, but financial hardship and educational barriers often stand in their way. We offer a nurturing space where they can discover their potential and shape their future. I believe that a single spark of inspiration can ignite a chain reaction of creativity, a fire that generates heat and light in sometimes dark and cold places. I am so proud to have helped bring Artist Proof Studio into the world in partnership with so many others," she said.

After 35 years and with hundreds of artists trained, what keeps the studio going is the conviction that art matters in transforming society.

"It gives young artists a voice, makes their work visible, and enables them to pursue their dreams. We remain committed to providing education without fees, made possible through the generosity of artists, collectors, patrons, and partners. Communities like this one make our work possible, so thank you for believing in us, for your generosity, and for your continued support," she told the awards ceremony guests.

"Art brings us joy, opens our eyes, gives us hope, and helps us imagine and create a better world. As John Lennon said, 'A dream you dream alone is only a dream. A dream you dream together is reality.'"

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An award for the ultimate giver of gifts

LEE TANKLE


Joan Block

Fifty-two years of quietly giving her time, energy, and heart to the Selwyn Segal Gift Shop have earned Joan Block the Mann Made Community Service Award at this year's Investec Jewish Achiever Awards.

Through her selfless work at the volunteer-run shop, Block has helped turn everyday gift-giving into a means of supporting the Selwyn Segal Centre and the people who depend on it.

"The role of the shop is to offer an important service to the community," says Block. "Every gift sent out bring smiles to the faces of the recipients, while also allowing every customer to do a *mitzvah* by supporting us."

Fifty-two years ago, Block was invited to work in the basement of Jessica Emdin's Observatory, Johannesburg home, packing gifts to be sold for the residents of Selwyn Segal. Since then, the shop has grown from its humble beginnings into the large gift emporium it is today in Glenhazel, supplying heartfelt gifts, the joy of toys and play, and the knowledge that all proceeds go to a worthy cause.

"I started working two mornings a week and not for a moment did I realise that Hashem's plan for me was to work all of every day and often well into the night," Block says.

The Selwyn Segal Gift Centre offers gifts for every occasion under the sun and brings in much-needed funds for the home. It also acts as an ambassador for Selwyn Segal within the wider community, under the umbrella of the Chevrah Kadisha. "For us, the shop is ultimately about people; bringing people together, creating connections, and making a difference in the lives of our wonderful residents," she says.

Every time a purchase is made at the gift shop, money goes towards making a difference in the lives of the Selwyn Segal residents; every cent of the profit goes to their care.

Block now runs the show alongside her co-convenor, Irene Schraibman. "My role has changed from a volunteer to a volunteer shouldering the huge responsibility of running a shop of this magnitude. It has been 52 years of learning, growing, laughing, worrying, and creating," she says.

Block, who has never earned a cent in five decades working at the gift shop, explains that she continues to do so because she is continually motivated by the residents of Selwyn Segal, and the way they "accept their lives without complaint and are grateful for the smallest kindness".

"They are Hashem's special chosen *neshamas* [souls], who often just want to chat and share their warmth."

Block acknowledges that nothing happens without her co-convenor and the tens of volunteers who devote their time, truly embodying, in her opinion, the saying "Who can find a virtuous woman? For her price is far above rubies".

"I am beyond privileged to be surrounded by the most amazing rubies," she says. "The first being my co-convenor, Irene Schraibman, who has stood beside me for the past 37 of my 52 years and has given her soul to the gift shop. Without her incredible hard work, love, care, and professionalism, I am quite sure the shop would not be what it is today. We are blessed to have wonderful volunteers who give so much of their time, energy, creativity, dedication, and passion, and we are truly grateful to every one of them. Volunteers are gifts that keep on giving and live by the premise that a candle loses nothing of its light when lighting another candle."

What people don't see when they buy or receive something from the Selwyn Segal Gift Shop is the months of planning, buying, designing, packing, and organising that go into making sure that every gift is unique.

"We spend many hours sourcing new and different items so that we can offer an exciting range of babyware, homeware, pamper items, toys, Judaica, and delicious hampers for our customers to choose from. We pride ourselves on bespoke gifts, personalising them for each event and occasion. We also change the theme and packaging of our gifts for every *chag* so that they will be unique and professional in every way. The planning and buying takes us at least six months," Block says.

For example, this Rosh Hashanah season, the team sent out more than 4 000 gifts, using 560kg of dried fruit – about the same weight as a rhino – along with 6km of ribbon, 3km of cellophane, 3 500 boxes, and nearly 3km of tissue paper.

For Block, the Mann Made Community Service Award is overwhelming.

"I have struggled with the idea of actually accepting this kind of recognition because I have never felt what I do is about me. It's about the residents, the volunteers, the staff, our supporters, and the wonderful community that has allowed the gift shop to become what it is," she says.

She is accepting the award in the name of her beloved late husband, Dave, who was a director of the gift shop and supported Block over the years. "He was the backbone of the shop in so many ways. He listened to me worry about every challenge, supported the late nights, lived through the endless ideas and, of course, even survived sleeping in glitter."

Block says that while 52 years of tying bows can become repetitive, she feels fortunate to have spent that time doing something she loves and, more importantly, something that has meaning.

"I have learned resilience and patience, that happiness can be found in the simplest things, that kindness never needs to be complicated, and that making someone feel loved and valued is one of the greatest gifts we can give."

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Block's biggest gift is her 52 years of service

LEE TANKLE

"I am who I am because of who we are," Joan Block relayed to an audience at the 2026 Investec Jewish Achiever Awards on Sunday, 1 November, on receiving the Mann Made Community Service Award. She said those words encapsulate five decades of running the Selwyn Segal Gift Centre, working alongside others to make a difference in the lives of others.

"I have watched the Selwyn Segal Gift Centre grow from its humble beginnings into the incredible gift emporium it is today. I feel so blessed that it chose me for this journey, to love what I do, and I hope that along the way, I have made a difference in a life or two," she said.

In her 52 years at the shop, she has seen it grow from selling 4 500 gifts a year to 4 500 gifts just this past Rosh Hashanah season, when they used 560kg of dried fruit, about the same weight as a rhino, six kilometres of ribbon, eight kilometres of cellophane, and five kilometres of tissue paper.



Mic Mann, Joan Block, and Shayne Mann

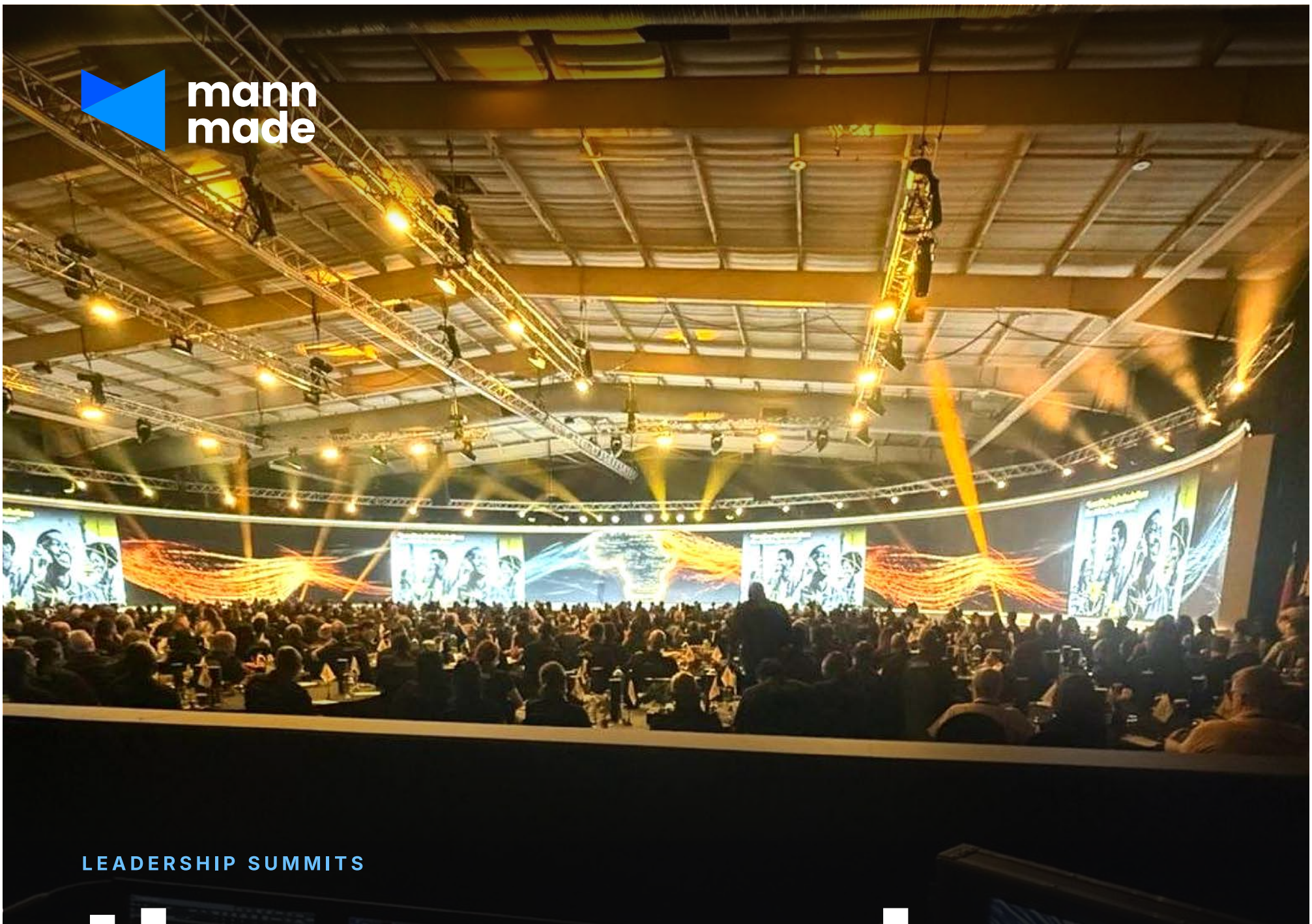
"I'm gratified to know that our gifts have touched the lives of so many. It is with the gift shop and our beloved Selwyn Segal residents, with their beautiful *neshamas* [souls] in mind, that I thank you with all my heart for this unbelievable honour."

When Block thinks back on her journey, she is reminded of a story about a man who visited a village in Uganda and saw a group of children playing with sticks and stones. He placed some sweets under a tree a short distance away and told them that when he said 'go', whoever reached the sweets first could have them. But instead of racing against one another, the children held hands, ran together and shared the sweets. When asked why, they replied, "I am who I am because of who we are."

Likewise, she attributes her achievements to the people around her. She thanked her co-convener, Irene Schraibman, who has worked alongside her for 37 years, as well as the gift shop's volunteers, staff, customers, and wider community for their dedication and support. Block also paid tribute to her family and friends, the organisation's leadership, and her late husband, Dave, whom she described as the backbone of the gift shop.

She expressed her hope that the Selwyn Segal Gift Centre would continue to grow and to make a difference in the lives of Selwyn Segal residents.

"Our mantra is "Give a gift and do a *mitzvah*", because the gift is truly in the giving. I am who I am because of who we are, *ubuntu*," she said.



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Israel's election deadlock a gift for would-be *olim*



OPINION MICHAEL KRANSDORFF



Last week's inconclusive election may have left Israel without a clear path to a new government. But for South Africans considering aliya, it has delivered an unexpected bonus: six more weeks to qualify for one of the most generous tax incentives Israel has ever offered new immigrants.

Earlier this year, the Israeli government introduced a temporary tax exemption on income earned from working in Israel, designed to encourage skilled professionals, entrepreneurs, and business owners to make aliya.

The catch was that the incentive was available only to those who became Israeli tax residents by 31 December 2026.

That deadline has now been extended to 10 February 2027.

And, somewhat unusually, we have the Israeli election to thank.

Under Israel's Basic Law, certain legislative provisions due to expire during the first three months of a newly elected Knesset are automatically extended until the end of that period. Following the 27 October election, this provision has extended the qualifying period for the tax incentive. The Israel Tax Authority has already confirmed the extension and updated its official application system.

The incentive remains substantial. Qualifying new immigrants and long-term returning residents can earn up to NIS 1 million (R5.3 million) a year in Israeli-source employment or business income free of Israeli income tax, in both 2027 and 2028. The exemption then drops to NIS 350 000 (R1.8 million) in 2029 and NIS 150 000 (R793 870) in 2030.

This is particularly attractive for professionals who can continue working remotely for their South African employers after relocating to Israel. Because employment income is generally sourced where the work is physically performed, such income may qualify for the Israeli exemption, subject to certain conditions.

Take, for example, a South African actuary earning R2.6 million annually who moves to Israel with his family before the 10 February 2027 deadline. He continues working remotely for his South African employer, but now performs his duties from Israel.

At that salary, he would ordinarily pay close to R1 million a year in South African income tax. By genuinely relocating to Israel, ceasing South African tax residency, and qualifying for the Israeli exemption, he could potentially save this amount in 2027 and 2028.

This temporary incentive complements Israel's long-standing 10-year exemption on qualifying foreign-source income, including foreign capital gains, dividends, interest, and rental income. Together, these incentives can significantly ease the financial cost of making aliya.

But there is an important catch. The deadline is not simply about getting on a plane to Israel. It's about genuinely moving your centre of life there.

Israeli tax residency depends on where you actually live and where your personal, family, and economic interests lie. The authorities will consider where your permanent home is, where your spouse and children live, where your children attend school, where you work, and where you spend your time.

Obtaining a Teudat Oleh (new immigrant certificate) or arriving in Israel shortly before the deadline does not, on its own, establish Israeli tax residency. The move must be genuine and supported by the facts.

Becoming an Israeli tax resident does not automatically mean that you have ceased to be a South African tax resident.

South Africa taxes its residents on their worldwide income. To avoid remaining liable for South African tax on income earned while working in Israel, it is essential to properly establish your cessation of South African tax residency and declare the change to the South African Revenue Service.

There can also be a sting in the tail. Ceasing South African tax residency can trigger a deemed disposal of certain assets for capital gains tax purposes, commonly referred to as "exit tax". Moving money and assets abroad also requires careful consideration of South Africa's exchange control rules.

Getting the timing and structuring wrong can be expensive and requires pre-aliya planning.

For prospective *olim* who hoped to relocate before the end of December but were struggling to finalise their arrangements, the extension is welcome news.

It provides some breathing space to obtain those elusive police clearances and unabridged birth certificates, organise housing and schooling, and restructure financial affairs to minimise the tax consequences of leaving South Africa.

But six weeks can disappear remarkably quickly when you're trying to uproot a family and establish a new life in another country.

Anyone hoping to take advantage of this opportunity needs to start making concrete arrangements now.

The potential tax savings could run into millions of rands over the coming years. It would be a great pity to lose this opportunity simply because the practical arrangements were left too late.

Israel's election may not have delivered the political certainty many had hoped for. But it has given would-be *olim* an unexpected reprieve.

The new deadline is 10 February 2027. Prospective *olim* shouldn't count on another extension.

• *Michael Kransdorff is chief executive of the Institute for International Tax and Finance.*

Impasse or chance for Israeli politicians to lead together?



OPINION BARUCH THE BALANCED

The results of the recent election in Israel are now final. With the "Netanyahu bloc" ending up with 53 seats – of which the Likud party is by far the biggest with 26 – and the "Eisenkot bloc" on 48 seats, neither is close to getting to a majority of 61 seats on their own. The remaining 19 seats are held by two Arab parties, The Joint List with 11 and Ra'am with eight. Some analysis of the results:

Bibi the great survivor

Love him or hate him, one cannot deny that Benjamin "Bibi" Netanyahu is one of the great survivors of Israeli politics. Despite being written off by the media, the academics (who always get Israeli elections wrong), the pollsters, and even the exit polls, his party still managed to remain the largest in the Knesset. This was despite 7 October happening on his watch, that he has refused to allow an independent inquiry into how it was allowed to happen, in addition to numerous corruption cases against him.

The simple reality is that although many Israelis are supposedly tired of him and his escapades – at least that's what they tell the pollsters – they still trust him above all the other potential leaders to handle inevitable future conflicts with Iran, Hezbollah, and Hamas, as well as numerous other security challenges.

The Arab vote

Israel's Arab political parties had their best ever result of 19 seats. This was due to the Arab population's extremely high turnout of close to 80%. The two Arab parties now hold the balance of power in the Knesset. It's interesting that the Arab turnout was higher than the Jewish one, no doubt pushed by their hatred of the hard-right elements in the ruling coalition, as well as the very high crime rate in their cities.

This is a positive development. Contrary to what is going on in Europe with riots and violent public disturbances, the Arabs in Israel are voicing their grievances at the ballot box and trying to peacefully create change. They still clearly feel invested enough in the country to try make change from within the system, using the structures available to them, whereas in the past many had boycotted.

Options going forward

With neither bloc close to a majority, what options are there to break the deadlock?

Eisenkot does a deal with the Arab parties

Although the two Arab parties can get Eisenkot to 67 seats, this is a highly unlikely option. The Joint List contains too many politicians who still don't recognise Israel as a Jewish State, and refuse to condemn Hamas. While Ra'am is more palatable, their eight seats don't get Eisenkot over 60. A "confidence and supply" arrangement with the two parties has been spoken about, which would entail them staying out of the government but supporting it from outside, and giving it the votes to pass legislation when needed, but this is still problematic for Eisenkot. First, it isn't clear that Naftali Bennett or Avigdor Liberman in the bloc would accept this. Second, if the government later fell, it would leave Eisenkot's bloc open to being castigated at the next election for relying on the Arab parties to rule.

A government of national unity

The most positive option is a government of national unity, with Likud, Yashar, B'Yachad, and Yisrael Beiteinu joining together. Such a coalition would have 66 seats, a comfortable majority, and, shorn of the hard left and hard right from either bloc, would be solidly in the centre.

In reality, the four big parties are really not that different when it comes to policy on Iran, Hezbollah, Hamas, Gaza, and even the Haredi draft, where Bibi no doubt would be happy to entertain some creative changes to get more Haredim serving, without being constrained by his more right-wing, ex-coalition partners. However, things are not that simple in politics.

First, the Eisenkot bloc campaigned mainly on change and getting rid of Bibi. Joining such a coalition would entail going back on this promise.

Second, on Bibi's side, this would entail jettisoning his erstwhile allies like Itamar Ben-Gvir and Bezalel Smotrich on the hard right, knowing that they wouldn't forgive him if such a new government fell and he needed to go back to another election.

The above roadblocks aside, the makeup of such a government could be Bibi as prime minister for the first two years, Eisenkot as deputy prime minister for the first two years – before then taking the top job, which, being a relative political novice, would give him much needed experience – as well as defense minister in the interim, Bennett and Yair Lapid as foreign and finance ministers respectively, with Liberman in charge of the Haredi draft issue.

Conclusion

Such a "dream team" is unfortunately still light years away. But it is hoped that senior politicians will put aside their personal differences and do what's best for Israel. The country cannot afford to go to election 2, and then probably 3. With all the tough challenges, including another likely round with Iran, on the horizon, it needs the adults in the room to stand up, take ownership of the numerous hurdles that lie ahead, and lead with the courage and accountability that this difficult time demands.

• *Baruch The Balanced is an attorney who can't be named for professional reasons, but who also studied politics and international relations at university.*



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The thrill of thrifting

LEE TANKLE

There's an art to thrifting. It means digging through rails of clothes, looking past the pieces that aren't quite right, and holding out for the moment when you uncover the jacket, dress, or pair of jeans that feels as though it was waiting for you all along. For a growing number of shoppers, that hunt is precisely the appeal.

Thrifting isn't simply about finding a cheaper way of dressing. As attitudes towards second-hand clothing change, shoppers are also embracing pre-loved pieces for their sustainability, quality, and individuality, transforming what was once considered unfashionable into something increasingly desirable.

Carissa von Mayer, who runs Venus Rose Vintage, explained that she calls what she does "clothes rescue", rather than thrifting, because she's giving items a new life.

There is a lot of effort that goes into it.

Von Mayer explained that to source the high-quality clothing she sells at markets around Johannesburg, she treks into the CBD, where it is often dangerous and where people bring in bales of clothing, and she has to weigh up item after item to see if it's something she can sell.

"It's got to be a good design, but there are several factors I consider. I mainly try to thrift natural fabrics like linen, cotton, leather, and silk. As a textile designer, I'm particularly drawn to special pieces made from good-quality fabric, especially those with beautiful fabric designs, embroidery, or something else that makes them unique."

She said Johannesburg serves as an important hub for the second-hand clothing trade, with resellers travelling to the city to source stock before distributing it across South Africa. However, she said recent law enforcement against informal vendors disrupted this network. She is also concerned about the possibility of tighter restrictions on imported second-hand clothing.



> Buying second-hand is significantly better for the environment because it avoids most of the resource-intensive stages of producing new goods, especially for clothing.

"Last year, the City of Johannesburg conducted a clean-up in the area where we buy our stock. Goods were confiscated, vendors were removed from the streets, and some were forced into shops where the costs were much higher. Some of these vendors had been trading there for 25 years, and many simply disappeared afterwards.

"There was a huge protest against what was happening, and I helped make some of the signs. My concern is that these are people running businesses and supplying the thrifting industry. I also worry that South Africa may be moving towards restricting the import of bales of second-hand clothing, as some other African countries have done."

Gabrielle Onay, the owner of Crybaby Thrift and one of the cofounders of Picnic n Thrift, finds clothes to sell mainly by going to the East Rand town of Brakpan, Benoni, and Boksburg and walking through the second-hand shops there.

"I call it the Bermuda Triangle – Brakpan, Benoni, and Boksburg. I'm not even joking; that's where they have the best clothes. I find all these incredible old pieces that tannies have donated to thrift shops, and the prices are significantly lower because I'm travelling further out," she said.

When Onay formally became a thrift seller eight years ago, she priced the clothing based on how much she wanted for an item. Now, she sets a standard price for everything.

In recent years, there has been a massive influx of fast fashion, including clothes bought online.

"It's fast fashion in general, but particularly brands [from retailers] like Shein and Temu. It's definitely become an issue because these clothes have made their way into the second-hand space quite extensively. I'll go out looking for something to resell and find what looks like a nice T-shirt, but then I'll feel the material and realise it's from Shein," said Onay.

The co-founder of Picnic n Thrift, Ruby Lee Prager, said thrifting can be an antidote to consumerism. "Thrifting can make a real difference to fast fashion's impact, but only if it actually replaces new purchases and slows down overall consumption, not if it just becomes another channel for buying more clothes."

There is also an element of environmentalism when it comes to thrifting, Prager said.

"Buying second-hand is significantly better for the environment because it avoids most of the resource-intensive stages of producing new goods, especially for clothing. Choosing second-hand apparel can cut carbon emissions, while saving thousands of litres of water per garment and keeping textiles out of landfill for longer. The biggest gains come when second-hand purchases replace new ones and when items are worn many times, which is exactly what well-curated local thrift markets encourage."

Over the years that she has been thrifting, Onay has seen a meteoric rise in the demand for thrifted, or second-hand, clothes.

"When I started in 2018, second-hand shopping was a thing, but mainly among people who already knew about it. It wasn't nearly as popular as it is now. Today, everyone seems to have a Yaga shop or is a reseller. It's no longer just a small business or niche market; it's become a huge thing," she said.

One of the reasons for this rise in popularity, according to both Onay and Von Mayer, is that nowadays people want a more individualistic style rather than whatever everyone else is wearing.

"People love the uniqueness of it. I think part of it is like that innate hunter-gatherer thing. I'm out there scavenging for a good deal or a good piece, but I think it all kind of relates to uniqueness and people wanting to feel that they can find something that no one else has, or find something that's different and suits them that they wouldn't see in a normal shop. You're unlikely to find the same two pieces twice."

"It's far more acceptable today to have individual style and to express yourself through clothing," said Von Mayer. "Young people today are much more open about who they are and expressing their individuality, although I think that applies to older people too. There's also much more freedom around gender and fashion. People are more comfortable wearing what they want to wear, regardless of whether something has traditionally been seen as masculine or feminine, and that's become much more accepted."

What would you do without Shein and Temu?

LEE TANKLE

Ask members of the Jewish community to give up Shein and Temu, and you're likely to get a strong reaction. Yet that is effectively what The Congress of South African Trade Unions (Cosatu) is proposing as it pushes for action against the Chinese e-commerce giants in the name of protecting local jobs and industry.

Whether it's your *bobba* buying anything and everything under the sun, your mother filling her cart with things she didn't know she needed, or you scrolling through Shein in search of an outfit for your next *simcha*, the online shopping marketplaces have become firm favourites across generations.

Cosatu has resolved to campaign for the government to ban Shein and Temu from operating in South Africa, backing a proposal by its affiliate, the Southern African Clothing and Textile Workers' Union. They argue that the Chinese retailers' low prices make it difficult for local clothing, textile, and retail businesses to compete, threatening South African jobs.



AI-generated image

While no ban has been announced, the call has caused concern among shoppers who've come to rely on the platforms' affordability, convenience, and wide variety of products, particularly at a time when household budgets are under pressure.

Jenna Lauren Szutowicz explained that while she'd love to support local businesses, it's often difficult.

"I think we'd all prefer to buy local and assist job creation, but the offerings locally are minuscule, overpriced, and, honestly, more often than not unflattering or catering to a very specific 'plus size'. I buy clothes for myself, my husband, and my son," she said.

A Johannesburg grandmother who buys most of her household items on Temu said she would be devastated if it were to be banned. "A lot of the little things that I buy for my apartment from Temu are useful things that I can't find anywhere else."

She explained that she mainly shops from Temu for organisational items and having it all online is especially convenient because she cannot move around shops the same way she used to.

"It also helps that if anything doesn't work, or isn't the way I wanted it to be, I didn't spend too much money on it," she said.

Johannesburg mother Candice Shaer Myerson places an order with Shein once or twice a month, depending on her budget and what is happening in the month. She said she shops from the Chinese company because of the affordable price point and wide array of products.

"I have a 13-year-old foster daughter so I buy lots of clothes and arts and crafts things for her. I used to weigh 205kg, and even though I'm down to 132 kg, I still wear plus-size clothes, and there is such a variety and returns are so easy. I also buy all my false nails, files, etcetera on the apps," she said.

Shein and Temu are also better options for her because she cannot drive, walk, and stand due to sepsis and gangrene she developed in hospital eight years ago. Because of this, she also lost her career and has less disposable income.

"Now I earn a third of my salary and work nights for a US company, so shopping online has been a lifesaver for me. Temu and Shein have given me so much freedom to shop, whatever hour of the day or night I am awake, and also from the comfort of my bed or couch," she said.

Although she doesn't have mobility issues, an anonymous twentysomething woman explained that while she shops from a mixture of local retailers like Pick n Pay Clothing and Mr Price, sometimes she has to resort to shopping on Shein, especially when it comes to clothes for a special occasion.

"There just aren't shops that have affordable clothes for something like being a guest at a wedding. If you go to a place like Foschini or YDE, a dress would cost close to R1 000, but I can get something more to my taste for closer to R200 on Shein."

Many of her friends who are more religious shop almost exclusively on Shein for attractive and affordable modest clothes.

"It is very difficult to find *tsnius* clothes in shops that don't look frumpy, so Shein is really the only option for them most of the time," she said.

She believes a ban on Shein and Temu wouldn't impact her life to a large extent, but would be a massive inconvenience.

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The inspirational joy of *Tuesdays with Morrie*

One of South Africa's most highly regarded theatre directors, **Alan Swerdlow**, is directing the stage adaptation of *Tuesdays with Morrie* by Mitch Albom at Theatre on the Square. The *SA Jewish Report* caught up with Swerdlow during rehearsals.

How did you directing *Tuesdays with Morrie* come about?

I have a relationship with the Theatre on the Square and [its owner-artistic director] Daphne Kuhn that goes back quite a number of decades. Daphne called and said she wanted to remount *Tuesdays with Morrie* and would I be interested in directing the play again. I said yes immediately.

What attracted you to this piece of theatre?

A two-hander is always satisfying because the cast and director can do a deeper dive into the characters and subject matter. We have the opportunity to do intensely subtle and detailed work in bringing the script to life, and use delicate brush strokes in delineating the characters and their relationship. That's always very exciting within the creative process. And then the subject matter is so uplifting and the original book remains hugely popular. In the very unhappy world we live in at present, the message of Tuesdays is both comforting and inspiring.


Michael Richard, Jeremy Richard, and Alan Swerdlow at rehearsals

The book was so moving but didn't seem to be a natural to translate into a theatrical script. How was it done?

Mitch Albom recognised that he wasn't equipped with the skills needed to adapt a piece of prose to the stage. He is, after all, a sports writer. He turned to playwright Jeffrey Hatcher to do the heavy lifting, and Hatcher did an excellent job in giving the narrative a theatricality and its own vitality, while condensing the multiple ideas that motivate the characters into an acceptable running time. There are very good reasons Hatcher is highly acclaimed as a playwright. Instead of being an extremely naturalistic presentation of a series of conversations, the characters often step out of a discussion to engage with and speak directly to the audience. In addition, there is a special magic woven onstage that ignites the audience's imagination and welcomes them into the narrative.

How has choosing a father and son in these roles been? Has it made any difference in the portrayal?

I have directed both Michael and Jeremy Richard before, individually and together, and I know what they are capable of and just how remarkably skilled they are as performers. One of the things a director has to do when working with actors who aren't familiar with each other is to build a sense of trust between them. With a father and son I didn't have to do that, and so we could devote more of the rehearsal time to other explorations. That's always a win, since rehearsal times in South Africa are very constrained.

What for you were the take-home lessons in directing this specific play?

That the truths it reveals are as valid today as when the play was first staged, and it hasn't dated in any way.

This is not the first time you have directed *Tuesdays with Morrie*. How does this one differ from the 2010 production?

I approached it as if it were a brand new script that had just been handed to me. Attempting to recreate a 16-year-old production is to disrespect the material and probably one ends up with a museum piece – perfectly preserved but lifeless. I'm a very different person to the person I was in 2010, and I have experienced 16 years of learning new things, and understanding more. I hope I've brought that to this production.

Have you ever known a person with ALS? How did that impact on your life and how you directed this?

Not ALS as such, but two very close friends had, respectively, Parkinson's and PSP, which lie within the spectrum of motor neuron diseases. One shut himself off from the world as he began to decline, and one fully embraced the world, living more vibrantly, as Morrie does. I learned so much from them, as Mitch does from Morrie, and I thought of them every day of rehearsal. In a way, this production is a very quiet, very personal tribute to their courage.

What are the coincidences you've noticed in this production?

There have been a number of happy coincidences, among them the 16 years since our first production of Morrie in Sandton, and its chime with the 16 years between Albom graduating from Brandeis University and reconnecting with his mentor, Morrie. 2010 was the first time I directed both Michael and Jeremy in the same play (but not this play) – 16 years again. Our first preview was on the yahrzeit of Morrie Schwartz's death. There are a few more, but they are personal things between the cast and me. Suffice it to say that the whole experience has been a very happy one and we all can't help feeling that we have someone looking out for us whose name may be Morrie.

While this piece of theatre is about the process of dying, its impact is not that. What would you say its impact is?

Its message is both simple and complex. It tells us to embrace life fully and to do so joyfully. And it delivers its message with so much humour and wit.

With Mitch and Morrie both being Jewish, what is the significance of their religion in the play? And is there anything specifically Jewish about it?

Where do I begin because there is so much? The play is steeped in Yiddishkeit, with allusions to Pirkei Avot and Maimonides and Hillel. I personally had great fun teaching Michael to pronounce the Yiddish he speaks during the play in a proper Peilisher accent instead of Litvak because the majority of Jews on the Lower East Side of Manhattan came originally from Poland, and that was where Morrie would have heard Mamaloshen.

- *Tuesdays with Morrie* is at Theatre on the Square in Johannesburg until 22 November.

Epstein's SA connections explored in new book

CLAUDIA GROSS

Jeffrey Epstein's connections to South Africa extended beyond the women he recruited and abused. Investigative journalist Hazel Friedman's new book, *The Devil Wears Sneakers*, examines the country's place in his international network. She believes there are still unanswered questions about the sex offender's full reach and the people who enabled him.

Friedman's interest in Epstein intensified after she met South African survivor Juliette Bryant in December 2022. Bryant's experiences connected Epstein's activities in South Africa with his international operations and the failure to hold him accountable.

Initially, Friedman's focus was on Bryant's story. However, her research soon revealed that Epstein's footprint in South Africa was far more significant than it first appeared to be, Friedman told the *SA Jewish Report*.

Epstein was a wealthy American financier who sexually abused girls and young women and operated a sex-trafficking network. He died in a New York jail in August 2019 while awaiting trial on federal sex-trafficking charges.

Friedman said his 2002 trip to South Africa with former United States president Bill Clinton was among the most widely reported events in Epstein's history. Clinton was visiting as part of an African HIV/AIDS awareness and economic development tour.

Friedman said her research identified several South African survivors, including women recruited locally. She believes others may have experienced similar abuse without coming forward.

Beyond sexual exploitation, she found evidence of Epstein's attempts to establish business relationships and gain access to political circles. She said his interests extended across the African continent. "He was in it for the money. It wasn't about ideology. It was about the bottom line, how he could gain greater proximity to profits, to people, and to power."


Hazel Friedman

Friedman describes Epstein as a criminal opportunist whose associations crossed national, political, and social boundaries.

Epstein's Jewish identity has featured prominently in some public discussions of his crimes. Friedman, who is Jewish herself, said her background had no bearing on her decision to investigate him. "My ethnicity, my religion has got nothing to do with me writing the book," she said. "Absolutely nothing."

She acknowledged that Epstein was Jewish and grew up in a largely Jewish community in Brooklyn. But she rejected the suggestion that his religious or ethnic background explained his behaviour. "His Jewishness ultimately, in my eyes, had nothing to do with his predation," she said.

Friedman argued that Epstein's relationships should be understood through evidence of his conduct and the advantages he sought. He cultivated connections across different communities and political environments.

However, she stressed that the presence of a name in Epstein's records did not establish wrongdoing. "There's absolutely no proof of any wrongdoing by any South African businessman in relation to him."

Friedman found evidence suggesting Epstein had been in South Africa during the late 1980s and possibly the 1990s. However, she acknowledged that she had not investigated every potential connection. She hopes the book will encourage further research into these relationships.

Friedman discussed possible links between Epstein's network and intelligence figures, including Robert Maxwell, the late British media proprietor and father of Epstein associate Ghislaine Maxwell. However, she said she had been unable to investigate this dimension as extensively as she would have liked.

She did not establish that Epstein's crimes were directed by any intelligence agency.

Friedman also pointed to Epstein's relationships with people outside Jewish communities, including political figures and wealthy individuals in different countries. She said these connections reinforced her view that his principal interests were money, influence, and power.

Verifying information was one of the most demanding aspects of writing the book. She examined correspondence, documents, photographs, and flight logs connected to Epstein and his associates.

One resource was Jmail, a website that organises Epstein-related email correspondence. Friedman said the material was extensive and not always presented chronologically. When she encountered information that required confirmation, she consulted original documents available through the United States Department of Justice. She also used the Epstein Files Archive to examine documents and other records.

Friedman searched correspondence for names and references connected to Cape Town, South Africa, and the wider African continent. She then attempted to establish how individual connections fitted into the broader picture. "It was also almost like building an unfinished house from within while living in it," she said.

Friedman had approximately three months to turn a large volume of material into a completed manuscript. She described the process as isolating and emotionally demanding.

The research also exposed her to the institutions and organisations that she believes helped Epstein maintain access to influential circles. She said one man could not have operated on such a scale without an environment that enabled his behaviour.

Her investigation isn't presented as a final account of every South African connection. Friedman said new information had emerged since she completed the manuscript, leaving parts of the story unresolved.

Although the book investigates Epstein's network, Friedman said the experiences of survivors remain central to her work. She described how predators can gradually exploit vulnerabilities, aspirations, and trust rather than relying on the image of a threatening stranger. In Bryant's case, Epstein had appealed to her aspirations to become a model, said Friedman.

Another South African survivor, identified in the book as Sasha, was recruited in Cape Town. Friedman said Sasha challenged Epstein's flattery and attempts at manipulation, helping her avoid further sexual assault. However, Friedman emphasised that avoiding sexual assault did not mean Sasha escaped trauma.

She said survivors may struggle for years with shame, anger, sadness, and the difficulty of being believed. The consequences can continue long after the immediate experience has ended. Friedman believes survivors' willingness to share their experiences has been essential to exposing Epstein's activities. Journalists did not uncover the full story alone.

Instead, survivors took considerable personal risks by speaking publicly, sometimes facing disbelief or vilification. Friedman hopes her book will help survivors in South Africa feel able to come forward. She also wants it to prompt further investigation into people and institutions that may have enabled Epstein.

"There are some among us who live in rooms of experience that we can never enter," she said, reflecting on a quotation by author John Steinbeck that she included in the book. She hopes the investigation will open the door to further questions and give survivors greater recognition.

Friedman said millions of documents connected to Epstein remain redacted or inaccessible. She believes the full extent of his network has yet to be established.

For South Africa, she hopes the book will encourage closer examination of the country's role in Epstein's activities. She also wants readers to understand the courage required for survivors to reclaim their stories. The investigation, she said, remains unfinished.

A column of the SA Jewish Board of Deputies

Chutzpah into action



ABOVE BOARD
Karen Milner

By the time you read this, South Africans will have voted. I wrote it before the polls opened, so I cannot tell you what the elections have brought. What I can tell you is that the SA Jewish Board of Deputies (the Board), as it has done for many years, hosted an elections observer team. This year 141 volunteers from eight provinces, including a number of foreign nationals, gave their time to help make sure the elections were free and fair. The team is multi-faith and inter-communal, which is fitting for the work it does. We are very grateful to every one of them, and proud of the role they, and the Board, play in our democracy. A special word of thanks goes to the Board's professional staff, who carry the mammoth logistical task of making the mission happen. That includes making sure that even the most rurally located observer receives a bib, credentials, and an information pack.

Many of you will also have seen the Board's election participation posters around our neighbourhoods. Slogans such as "First the vote, then the braai", "Your money prints the ballots, use it", "Can name every problem in the city, can't name his voting station. Don't be that guy", and "Regrets last longer than the queue" were plastered all over. They caught the eye and were an important part of our final push to get the community to the polls. I can only hope they worked. My favourite, "Turn your *chutzpah* into action", goes well beyond elections. It is a credo I think we should all try to practise.

Last weekend the Board's national director, Wendy Kahn, and I had the honour of attending the annual memorial of the South African Jewish Ex-Service League. The service remembers the courage and sacrifice of those who served in our country's military. Jewish veterans attend, and so do representatives from outside our community, and serving soldiers form the guard of honour. This year the address was given by Avrom Krengel, president of the South African Zionist Federation.

Krengel spoke about two battles. The first was Square Hill, fought by the 1st Battalion Cape Corps in September 1918 as part of the Battle of Megiddo, only weeks before the end of World War I. The offensive broke the Turkish and German forces in the Middle East and gave Britain control of the region.

The second was El Alamein. In July 1942, the 1st South African Division was among the forces that held the line and stopped the German advance across North Africa. The South Africans held firm against overwhelming odds. A few months later, the same division fought under General Bernard Montgomery at the Second Battle of El Alamein. That battle is counted with Stalingrad and Midway as one of the three turning points of the war. Once again, these were South Africans fighting in a foreign land, and if they had failed, the Jewish community there could have been wiped out

We are the beneficiaries of all that courage, and we honour their sacrifice. In their memory, we pray for peace, so no young man or woman will ever have to give up their life in war again.

• *Listen to Charisse Zeifert on Above Board, 101.9 ChaiFM, every Friday from 14:00 to 15:00.*

This column is paid for by the SA Jewish Board of Deputies

We've been expecting this



INNER VOICE
Howard Feldman

I'm trying to take seriously the advice that we should keep enough supplies at home to survive for 72 hours. But I'm Jewish and I live in Johannesburg, which makes it difficult to understand what we're supposed to do with the rest of the food.

For those who've missed it, governments around the world have been encouraging households to prepare for emergencies. In March 2025, the European Commission included a minimum of 72 hours' essential supplies in its preparedness strategy. The Netherlands has been campaigning about coping without electricity, water, or internet, with another phase launched in October.

The concerns include extreme weather, cyberattacks, conflict with Russia, and disruptions to essential services. The advice is intended to help households manage while emergency services respond. There's no announced appointment with the apocalypse.

Still, two groups have been preparing for this for years. Jews. And Joburgers.

Together, we could probably survive 72 years, let alone hours. Although we'd need final numbers by Thursday.

Start with the Jewish contribution. Who doesn't have a week's supply of potato flour? Nobody knows how much that actually is, but we buy it before Pesach as though we've received intelligence that potatoes are about to be discontinued. There's always that moment in the supermarket when you can't remember whether you have three packets or six. So you buy four. Nobody wants to be the person who brought down Pesach through poor carbohydrate procurement.

Then there's the freezer. Beneath the ice cream containers containing absolutely no ice cream is enough food to sustain a small evacuation centre. You'll need to defrost three things before identifying lunch. Bear Grylls should try that before getting excited about eating a beetle.

Our difficulty wouldn't be feeding unexpected arrivals. It would be accepting that they genuinely didn't want anything. We could survive a global catastrophe. Someone refusing a plate would require international mediation.

If Jews bring the food, Johannesburg brings the engineering.

Many households have spent years assembling solar panels, inverters, batteries, water tanks, and gas cookers. Among my friends are men who can tell you their battery percentage more readily than their wedding anniversary. Ask how their children are and you'll get, "Fine, I think". Ask what they're running off the inverter and cancel your afternoon.

Europe is being encouraged to imagine life without municipal services. Johannesburg could offer an exchange programme. Stay with a local family. Experience Stage 6. Leave with a qualification.

Of course, this expertise has come at a cost. Backup systems are expensive, and many people endure failing services without them. Nobody should need a small "Gresswold" to answer an email.

Perhaps we should pair households. One supplies electricity and water. The other arrives with food, serving dishes, and concerns about whether everyone's eaten. Like Jdate, but you disclose your inverter capacity before discussing your feelings.

I should find all this reassuring. For once, we have the equipment, the experience, and enough potato flour to see out several administrations.

But there's something unsettling about watching Europe prepare for the life we've spent years trying to buy our way out of. We bought the inverter because we wanted the lights to stay on. I don't remember wanting to be ahead of an international trend.

For years, I've wondered when Johannesburg would catch up with the rest of the world.

I never considered that they would be catching up to us.



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Excel excellence lands Jacobson in world championship

GILLIAN KLAWANSKY

It may not be a mainstream competition, but the Microsoft Excel World Championship (MEWC) has a significant global following, culminating in quarter, semi, and final rounds broadcast live on ESPN. Having dominated the qualifiers in South Africa, actuary Adam Jacobson is ranked number one in the country and will compete in the quarter finals in Las Vegas in December.

Having developed an interest in Excel while studying, Jacobson has been using the tool throughout his career, developing a passion for the problem-solving functionality it offers.

"It's the primary software used in the financial and actuarial industries," he says. With 15 years' experience in life insurance and reinsurance pricing, Jacobson says that competitive Excel has added a whole new dimension to his expertise. Head of retail pricing at global reinsurance company Munich Re, he is always working on improving his skills, which he believes necessitates measuring them against other Excel aficionados.

"I started looking online for ways to test myself, and through social media, I discovered this huge world of Excel Esports," he recalls. Having entered his first MEWC-linked competition in March last year, through the monthly matches that followed, he began gaining confidence. "On average, about 500 people worldwide enter each month and there are around 50 to 100 South Africans who compete. I'm currently ranked number one in South Africa and I've got my world ranking up to about 45."

Finishing on top at the South African competition and claiming the number one spot globally in a qualification round along the way, he has received a sponsored trip to Las Vegas to compete in the quarterfinals of the World Championship in December.

"I'm over the moon," he says. "When I first watched it, I was in awe at what these guys were doing. But by putting my mind to it and learning the tricks, I knew I'd be able to get there myself."

The MEWC transforms a common office tool into a dynamic global sport, the ultimate test of the logical thinking skills of the "spreadsheet athletes" who compete. Competitors use Excel for 140 problem-solving challenges, all of which must be completed within 30 minutes. They are judged on the accuracy and efficiency of their solutions. "You have limited time to solve as many problems using Excel as fast as you can, so you have to be quick," Jacobson explains.

"It generally includes games, anything from cricket to darts or chess, or it could be financial modelling or music. It's quite crazy what you can do in Excel, people can't believe it." For instance, competitors can solve LinkedIn logic puzzle game Tango in Excel or decode binary data streams to extract music-related metrics, notes, channel lookups, and instrument appearances.

"Adam has gone toe to toe with some of the world's best Excel competitors and proven that he belongs among the elite," says the team behind MEWC South Africa. "To see a South African flag flying this high on the global Excel Esports stage makes us incredibly proud."


Adam Jacobson

Jacobson says the entire competition in Las Vegas will take place over a few days, with the quarterfinals, featuring 97 players, happening on 1 December. Players will compete in two 30-minute games, and their scores will be combined to determine who qualifies for the next round. The top 16 go through to the semifinals the next day, which is immediately followed by the finals.

The winner takes home $20 000 (R332 318). Prize money is also awarded to the top 50 players. The MEWC takes place live in the HyperX Arena before a live audience and is broadcast in real time on ESPN and YouTube.

As the South African representative, Jacobson will be running through a tunnel before he takes to the stage. "You have your computer in front of you and all the competitors have their screens projected up on big screens. There's a timer and they track your score."

While the competition remains quite niche, it's becoming seriously competitive worldwide, Jacobson says. "A friend of mine was at a hotel in Miami last week, and he said they were showing the MEWC in the lobby. It's really grown."

Jacobson encourages others to investigate what's out there in terms of alternative competitions that test online efficiency. "If you're the best runner or cricketer in the school, for example," he says, "you'll start working your way up to the area, provincial, and national teams. Yet a lot of people have other skills, and they never find out just how good they are at them as they're not aware of opportunities to compete."

Jacobson says he'd love to make the semifinals of the competition and be in the top 16 players in the world. "I like to win," he says. "The MEWC is not just about being the best though, it's for people who can really think fast, who can do the most correctly in the shortest amount of time."

He says competitive Excel has sparked much curiosity among family, friends, and colleagues. "It's incredible to be part of the MEWC South Africa community and it's time to bring this sport to the Olympics," he says.

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