



**FOOD JUSTICE**



**JEWISH EDUCATION**



**CIVIC ENGAGEMENT**



**SOCIAL ACTION**

**TIKKUN HA-IR OF MILWAUKEE**

# ***GESHER***

***THE JEWISH COMMUNITY BRIDGE TO ACTION***

*Building a just Milwaukee by uniting Jews of all backgrounds in study, action, and civic engagement.*

**SPRING 2026**

# LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Ten years ago, I stepped into Tikkun Ha-Ir with a core belief: that Milwaukee's Jewish community has a responsibility to help make this city better.

We are a people who have known marginalization, and today, in one of the most segregated cities in the country, many of us hold greater access and opportunity. That calls us not just to reflect, but to act. At the same time, antisemitism is alive and well. Holding both truths reminds us that vulnerability and responsibility can (and must) exist together, and that our story is deeply connected to others facing hardship.

Over the past decade, I've watched that belief take shape. We've chopped vegetables and prepared meals, canvassed to get out the vote, studied texts on core Jewish social justice topics, packed hygiene kits, delivered gifts and essentials, sang and learned with folks of different ages and backgrounds, and shown up again and again for our neighbors. What began as programs became something deeper: a community rooted in avodah (hands-on service) and chesed (empathy), fighting together for world with tzedek (equity and justice).

The most powerful moments for me have always been about connections. When we build with others, something more meaningful emerges. What grows with our hands eventually reaches our hearts. I've come to believe there are countless ways into Jewish life, and for many, it begins through action.

I am deeply grateful to the partners, volunteers, donors, staff, and community members who make this work possible. The impact we've created together will continue to ripple outward in ways we may never fully see with our own eyes.

**Sami Stein Avner**  
*Executive Director*  
Tikkun Ha-Ir of Milwaukee



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Executive Director  
Sami Stein Avner

Education Director  
Rhonda Lindner

Food Justice Director  
Amanda McVann

Communications Associate  
Kathryne Gargano



## ***Glean Machine is back for 2026!***

***Join us for a 3-day collection event supporting local organizations that serve housing-insecure and low-income individuals and families.***

## **WE ARE COLLECTING:**

### **NEW OR GENTLY USED**

- Kitchen Items (**PRIORITY**)
- Linens (**PRIORITY**)
- Adult Casual & Leisure Clothing

### **NEW ONLY**

- Toiletries & Hygiene (**PRIORITY**)
- Cleaning Products (**PRIORITY**)
- Adult Underwear & Socks

## **DROP OFF:**

CONGREGATION SHALOM  
7630 N Santa Monica Blvd  
Fox Point, WI

Sun, May 17<sup>th</sup> from 10am - 1pm

Tues, May 19<sup>th</sup> from 3:30pm - 6pm

Wed, May 20<sup>th</sup> from 3:30pm - 5:30pm



## **SCAN QR FOR VOLUNTEER INFO**

**Questions about Glean Machine? Email Sami Stein Avner at [sami@thi-milwaukee.org](mailto:sami@thi-milwaukee.org).**

Cover photos L-R: Fondy Farmer's Market © Tikkun Ha-Ir of Milwaukee, Sukkot Food Justice Farm Party © Linsey Kimmel, 100 WOMEN ON THE MOVE © Tikkun Ha-Ir of Milwaukee, and Good Deeds Day © Janet McMillan.





## CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

### Rhonda Lindner

As this year marks my fifth election cycle with Tikkun Ha-Ir, and my third during an election for Wisconsin’s Supreme Court, I am honored to be upholding our Jewish values that insist upon a free and democratic society. Yes, we vote alone in booths to protect our privacy and security, but as a community, we vote together, to continually seek out that more perfect union.

And our obligation to democracy doesn’t stop there. We are also called upon to be of assistance to those who may need an extra hand accessing resources, information, and even the ballot box itself.

We strive to live out the words of Rabbi Isaac ibn Ghayyat—“A ruler is not to be appointed unless the community is first consulted”—and those of Rabbi Hillel—“Do not separate yourself from the community.”

The work of THI and our volunteers demonstrate the power of those words. On April 6th, I spoke at a rally connecting our Jewish values to our work for free and fair elections; we continue to co-lead **100 WOMEN ON THE MOVE**, a multi-faith and multi-racial powerhouse in Milwaukee’s civic engagement community; and in the early months of 2026, THI was invited to join with **Fight of Our Lives**, a growing coalition working to amplify the voices of real people, and let them know they are not alone.

CONTINUED...

## PROGRAM SPOTLIGHT: FAITH 250

Civic engagement work often calls for front-facing advocacy. We speak to crowds from podiums, we canvass in low-voter neighborhoods, and we participate in community festivals and congregational gatherings. Sometimes, however, it’s necessary to step back and rejuvenate our energy behind the scenes. In partnership with **WIVEC** and **Own Your Judaism**, THI formed a Faith 250 Clergy cohort. Our cohort includes 12 members representing nine diverse congregations and two interfaith organizations. We are one of the biggest cohorts in the country, which says a lot for a smaller city.

Our goals were not simple or easy—we wanted to provide space for members to clarify and articulate the values that hold us together, and to build a healthier civic union through the reading of four great American texts: *The Declaration of Independence* by Thomas Jefferson, *What to the Slave is The Fourth of July?* by Frederick Douglass, *The New Colossus* by Emma Lazarus, and *America The Beautiful* by Katharine Lee Bates. While we did not always agree on our interpretations of these texts, however our shared motivations for working in civic engagement, for how to move forward, forged the trust and respect we need to get through these difficult and necessary conversations.

We look forward to continue working together to ensure that every voter in Milwaukee feels confident and safe enough to vote.

**Upcoming Faith 250 Dates:**  
**May 28<sup>th</sup>, June 4 & June 11**  
**Register at <https://bit.ly/4dAeUrK>**





## Civic Engagement by the Numbers

**1,000**

Postcards Mailed for  
April Election

**80**

Participants Engaged by  
100 WOMEN ON THE  
MOVE

**11**

Interfaith Organizations  
and Congregations in  
Faith 250

**25+**

Organizations Involved in  
Fight For Our Lives  
Coalition

**15**

Poll Chaplains Serving  
Across the State in April  
Election

Fight of Our Lives provides information and inspiration, bringing together more than 30 organizations working together for healthcare equality, affordable housing, immigration, judicial equity, and election integrity. THI is proud to be part of of these organizations and working in these trailblazing communities.

As a final word, I'd like to **thank our THI community** for everything you do to help strengthen democracy. Some of you serve as poll workers, canvass for different organizations, send out postcards, donate to nonpartisan GOTV groups, work in your congregations to ensure 100% voter participation, drive voters to the polls, table at community events, attend rallies, and so much more.

Thank you for putting our Jewish values to action and putting yourselves out into the community. We appreciate all of you!



## PARTNER SPOTLIGHT: POLL CHAPLAIN PROGRAM

In my work with WIVEC, I hope to broaden the scope and participation of both Jewish and non-Jewish clergy as Poll Chaplains on November 3, 2026. In 2024 and this April, WIVEC in partnership with the WI Council of Churches recruited, trained, and organized over 90 clergy to serve as Poll Chaplains on November 5, 2024 and April 7, 2026. I hope to connect with a more diverse cross section of clergy here in Milwaukee, and increase participation.



## GOOD DEEDS DAYS

### Sami Stein Avner

*Mitzvah gorreret mitzvah—one good deed leads to another.* Many have grown up hearing these words, whether at home, in synagogue, in song, or in text. Last year, in partnership with the **Harry & Rose Samson Jewish Community Center** and the **Milwaukee Jewish Federation**, we revived Good Deeds Day, a global day of uniting together to help others. Over 200 people came out eager to do the work, and we knew this this chance to spread good on our community had enthusiasm!

This year, we teamed up with MJF and the JCC once again to expand the day to a week-long program full of service projects and community gathering. We kicked off Good Deeds Days on March 22nd, 2026 at the JCC, and after a shared moment of thanks singing *Mitzvah Gorreret Mitzvah* with **Wendy Cohen**, we got right to work.

**“[The Sunday program of] Good Deeds Days was a wonderful afternoon of volunteer activities and pure fun. All ages were intertwined in completing projects of need for those experiencing hardships.”**

**- Rhonda Shutkin, Volunteer and THI Board Member**

Sunday afternoon included snack kit making, card writing, activity packing for a children’s hospital, packing hygiene kits, beading bracelets to go in the kits, sandwich making, and blanket making for **The Humane Society** and **MADACC**. We also had 40+ people, including **BBYO** teens, head to **Hunger Task Force** and sort 350 stock boxes to help feed families across Milwaukee.





## Good Deeds Days by the Numbers

**1500**

Needed items distributed  
to our service partners,  
including hygiene kits and  
blankets

**350**

Bags of Passover food  
packed at the JCC Pantry

**300**

Postcards written for Get  
Out the Vote efforts

**300**

Sandwiches made and  
distributed to our service  
partner organizations

**100**

Meals prepped for  
Pathfinders at the VCS  
Kitchen at All People's  
Church



Over the next week, one good deed followed another, and together we offered our time, our words, our skills, our passion, and our compassion to people across Milwaukee and the amazing social service agencies who serve them. These organizations—including **Pathfinders, Cathedral Center, The Guest House, Street Angels, All People's Gathering Church, Saint Vincent DePaul, Children's Hospital, The Humane Society, and MADACC**—are invaluable, and ensure people and animals in crisis have food, shelter, and care.

A special thank you to everyone who served on the planning committee—thank you for your ideas, your follow-through, and your dedication. Your work behind the scenes made all of this possible. JCC Steering Committee members: **Jess Lanke (Lead), Julie Lookatch, Laura Bomer, Heidi Gould, Laura Slatky-Verkuilen,** and interns **Isabella Dexter and McKenna Rabida;** from the Milwaukee Jewish Federation and JCRC, **Roberta Clark and Kai Gardner Mishlove;** Tikkun Ha-Ir Team: **Brandice Kirchner, Rhonda Lindner, Kathrynne Gargano, and Quinn Finder, Sami Stein Avner (Lead);** and our incredible team of volunteers who helped make these days possible: **Linda Bader, Reenie Kavalar, Nikki Levine, Shari Malofsky, Rhonda Shutkin, Diane Zall, and Andi Zimmerman.**

We are also deeply thankful for our generous sponsors and our partners for making this week possible: **Anonymous Fund, Bader Philanthropies, Congregation Beth Israel Ner Tamid, Friendship Circle, Jewish Family Services, Mosaic Catering, NCJW-Milwaukee, Nikki Levine, Ovation, Own Your Judaism, Rabbi Scheinfeld Maos Chittim Fund, Salinsky Fund for Feeding the Hungry, Wendy Cohen (music), and Women's Philanthropy at the Milwaukee Jewish Federation.** Thank you to all the **matzah collection sites,** bought supplies from the **wish lists,** and to all those who **donated to the Passover Food Drive.**

Good Deeds Days is what happens when the community comes together to put values into action to take care of one another—we hope you will pass it on!



## FOOD JUSTICE

### Brandice Kirchner, former Food Justice Director

They say the only constant is change, and I felt that acutely as I prepared to step down as Food Justice Director and embark on a new path. During my almost 4 year tenure, I'm so proud we were able to increase access to fresh nutritious food for Milwaukee's underserved residents. We strived to enhance volunteer understanding of food justice issues affecting our city, and our Jewish responsibility to care for the planet and each other.

I am so grateful for everyone who made this position so meaningful, and a true joy—our farmers and produce donors at the farmers's markets, our volunteers, the people I've met in the field of food justice and sustainability; our interns and seasonal staff at Veggie Chop Shop, the THI staff, and of course, Chef Ric. I'm honored I was able to try new ideas, grow community connections and make real change in Milwaukee. Thank you for a meaningful experience, and *lehitraot!*

**Veggie Chop Shop 2026 Will Run July 13<sup>th</sup> - Sept 15<sup>th</sup>**  
**Sign up to volunteer at <https://bit.ly/4nsL7FS>**

## VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT: PHILLIP SALAT

This issue, we are so thrilled to highlight THI Board Member Phillip Salat! Director of Programs for Arts @ Large, Phillip currently serves as the VP of External Affairs for Tikkun Ha-Ir.

Since joining THI in 2023, he's helped organize events, served on committees, and volunteered at the Sukkot Food Justice Farm Party (2025), the Food Justice Walk (2024), Trivia Ha-Ir (2025), fundraisers, and many more programs!

Here's what Phillip had to say about volunteering with Tikkun Ha-Ir:

*When I first signed up for Veggie Chop Shop in 2020, I was looking for a community of helpers to be part of, and I found it.*

*What I've always loved most about volunteering with THI is the personal connection to the work. We all know the power of a meal that brings comfort, connection, or hope, and THI helps create those moments for Milwaukeeans in need. THI also gives people meaningful ways to take civic action and make a real impact in our community.*

Thank you, Phil, for everything you do for THI!

## Veggie Chop Shop & Food Justice by the Numbers

**10,000**

Pounds of edible food waste reduced per year

**6,000**

Meals made and delivered to partner organizations annually

**1,000**

Individuals served

**100+**

Volunteers

**45+**

Volunteers from the Milwaukee Women's Correction Center

**5+ Associations**

The Association of Gleaning Organizations, FEED MKE, The Chicago Food Policy Action Food Justice Summit, The Wisconsin Nonprofit Conference, and Marbleseed





## WELCOME AMANDA MCVANN!

Amanda McVann (she/her) joins the Tikkun Ha-Ir staff as our new **Food Justice Director!** Proudly from Rockland County, New York, she has a B.A. in Linguistics and a minor in Korean Studies from SUNY Binghamton, where she served as a campus leader for two multi-ethnic ministries. She also holds an M.A. in Biblical & Theological Studies from Dallas Theological Seminary and a Master of Divinity from Fuller Theological Seminary. Amanda has worked with AmeriCorps, the Iowa Migratory Education Program, the Creston Human Rights Coalition, and other organizations focusing on socioeconomic and racial justice. Amanda has extensive volunteering experience, especially around food equity and community uplift. Amanda and her husband spend their time discussing theology, playing video games, and being parents to twin toddlers, two dogs, and one cat.

To read her full biography, visit our website: [www.thi-milwaukee.org/about/leadership-sponsors](http://www.thi-milwaukee.org/about/leadership-sponsors)

“ I am so excited for this role with Tikkun Ha-Ir and the opportunity to bring together all my experiences in community uplift, engagement, and education. ”

- Amanda McVann,  
Food Justice Director

## REFLECTING ON JUDAISM AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

### Quinn Finder, THI Marquette Intern 2025-2026

When I first began at Tikkun Ha-Ir, I was excited to learn more about the Jewish faith. Coming from a background where my Mom’s side of the family is Christian and my dad’s side is Jewish, I was already somewhat knowledgeable about many regular traditions, but I truly had no idea the extent that I would be immersed in the Jewish community through this internship.

Through everything I’ve been a part of—from the Tu Bishvat seder to Good Deeds Days—I’ve learned so much about the Judaism and the interplay between faith, Tikkun Ha-Ir’s mission, and social justice. Though my family does not celebrate or practice as often as we used to, I’ve been inspired to take it upon myself to keep the spark alive in my personal life, so I can continue to embody Jewish values and traditions.

Thank you to everyone at Tikkun Ha-Ir and in the Jewish Community for a wonderful year!



# JEWISH SOCIAL JUSTICE LEARNING

Rhonda Lindner



## TU BISHVAT SEDER AT TRICKLEBEE CAFE

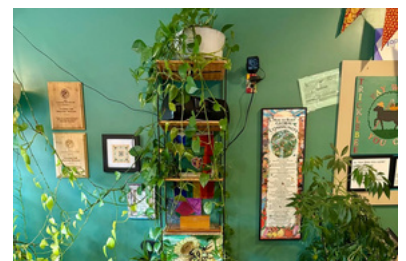
Rhonda Lindner

I am incredibly proud of all those involved in Tikkun Ha-Ir's **Second Annual Tu Bishvat Seder**. Over 20 people attended the seder, a huge increase from last year's assembly of eight. We were an incredibly diverse group, and demonstrated that we have so much in common as people from a variety of backgrounds. For many attendees, it was their first Tu Bishvat seder, and they appreciated the opportunity to join with friends and strangers around a bountiful display of fruits, nuts, juices, and tree-shaped challah. The seder itself—full of inspiration and reflection—encouraged us to be present and balanced for ourselves, our community, and our planet. Divided into four mystical “spheres,” each part of the seder represented a different relationship between humans and the earth: *Assiya* (Actualization), *Yetzira* (Formation), *Beriah* (Creation), and *Atzilut* (Nobility). Each year, I learn something new, both from the seder and the participants.

Our gratitude to **Moishe Steigmann, The Mindful Rabbi**, for leading such an inspiring seder and giving our group opportunities for reflection and sharing.

Thanks to **Christie Melby-Gibbons** for hosting at her fabulous space, **Tricklebee Cafe**, a pay-what-you-can community cafe. I couldn't think of a better location for the seder. Thank you to **Bootz Bootzin** for the beautiful and delicious challah. Our guest were able to leave with a generous chunk and make divine French toast for their families the next day.

I certainly appreciated the opportunity to gather, and it brought a sense of balance and restoration to my work. Thank you to everyone who came out to celebrate with us!





“ Tikun Ha-Ir is not inventing a new playbook. Jewish teachings have long called on us to care for one another, pursue justice, and strengthen our communities. THI brings those teachings to life every day in service of healing our city. ”

- Phillip Salat, Volunteer and THI Board Member

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# GRATITUDE

## A MORE PERFECT UNION

### A MORE PERFECT UNION

Through our partnership with **A More Perfect Union: A Jewish Call to Democracy**, Tikkun Ha-Ir has been able to strengthen our civic engagement program and collaborate with even more local partners. Thanks so much to A More Perfect Union for three different grants totalling \$4000, which will go quite far in the coming months before our November midterm elections. The grants helped to organize our Second Annual 100 WOMEN ON THE MOVE celebration luncheon, our Faith 250 cohorts, and our community gathering to commemorate our nation's 250 birthday and officially launch the Pray with Your Feet, Pray with Your Vote voter engagement and volunteer program.

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## HUNGER TASK FORCE

**Hunger Task Force**, Milwaukee's Free and Local foodbank opened its doors on a Sunday specifically for our Good Deeds Days event on the 22nd. The group of 40 or so was about 50% teens from BBYO and the rest from the community, and they had prepared stock boxes for local seniors in need. A Stockbox is a box of healthy foods that Hunger Task Force delivers to low-income seniors free of charge. Each box contains nutritious items including rice, cereal, juice, beef stew, pasta and vegetables. Each month, nearly 10,000 boxes are delivered to seniors in Southeastern Wisconsin.



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## “WHAT I’VE LEARNED ABOUT TIKKUN OLAM”

by Sami Stein Avner featured in the Wisconsin Jewish Chronicle (May 2026)

*“Tikkun olam isn't something we finish. It's something we practice, together, imperfectly, and with hope.”*

Read Sami Stein Avner's featured article, “What I've Learned About Tikkun Olam,” in the May issue of the Wisconsin Jewish Chronicle! Sami reflects on ten lessons she lives by as executive director of a social justice non-profit and member of the Jewish community.

Read the entire article online here: [bit.ly/tikkun-olam-chronicle](https://bit.ly/tikkun-olam-chronicle)



# THANK YOU DONORS & VOLUNTEERS!

*Participation from October 25<sup>th</sup> 2025-May 17<sup>th</sup>, 2026*

## Key

+ Donors

\* Volunteers

^ Steering Committee Members

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Lauren Domski+

Harriet & Jerry Dorf+

Phyllis Dorf+

Richard Downs+

Howard & Eileen Dubner+

Judy Eglash+

Rodney Eglash+

Sheila & Hyam Eglash+

Marc Eiseman+

Herbert Elliott+

Susan Ellman\*

Joe & Michele Ellner+

Liz Escobar+

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Barbara Federlin\*

Carol Fishman+

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 Nadine Zuckerman+

**A special thank you to the family of Eve Eiseman who  
 indicated THI as a place to make donations in her memory**



**Tikkun Ha-Ir • תיקון העיר**  
Repairing Milwaukee

# THANK YOU!

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*“You are not obligated to complete the work, but nor are you free to desist from it,” Rabbi Tarfon (Pirkei Avot 2:16)*

## WEBSITE

[WWW.thi-milwaukee.org](http://WWW.thi-milwaukee.org)

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## ADDRESS

PO Box 090287  
Milwaukee, WI 53209

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## EMAIL

[info@thi-milwaukee.org](mailto:info@thi-milwaukee.org)

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## KEY DATES WITH TIKKUN HA-IR

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**MAY 17 - 20      GLEAN MACHINE**

**MAY 14, 28      FAITH 250**  
**JUNE 4, 11**

**JUNE 17      CREAM CITY BEIT MIDRASH WITH OYJ**

**JUNE 19      JUNETEENTH WITH 100 WOMEN**  
**ON THE MOVE**

**JULY 13 -      VEGGIE CHOP SHOP**  
**SEPT 15**