

On behalf of the Greater Altoona Jewish Federation, I want to wish everyone a Happy New Year and thank you for the honor of being with you this evening.

One of the special joys of Judaism is the yearly opportunity for renewal at our High Holy Days. We get the opportunity to examine our deeds or misdeeds, and make an ethical and religious assessment of our lives.

It is amazing to think that on this day, Jews all over the world sit in a congregation like this to pray, to worship and to celebrate. We celebrate the creation story, and our role in the world. Jews look for strength from the same God and pray for a more peaceful world that we all share.

At this time each year, as I sit and contemplate, many thoughts run through my mind. Have I been a good husband, father, and son? Have I been honest in business and have I been a good friend and member of my community?

We say Le-shana Tova Teek-a-taivu, May You Be Inscribed for a Good Year, and we say Happy New Year. This year I seem to be obsessed with the word "happy." The idea of Happiness seems to permeate my thoughts.

Happiness can be as simple as a day with your family. It can also be as complex as trying to be a good Jew. I have come to believe that Happiness may be a choice. In affairs of home, business and community, I often ask myself, "do I want to be happy or do I want to be right?"

Happiness may be like holiness. In Judaism, we bless the arrival of a new day, we bless our first meal, we bless things that are often seen as routine and mundane. This is how we learn that life is special and precious. This is how we honor God in our lives. For me, Happiness seems to be about sharing, about win – win, a process and result that benefits everyone.

Is it possible to be happy and right, or are they mutually exclusive. I know they are exclusive if happiness is about self-interest and if right is about exclusion.

I would like to think that our Federation is about Happy and about Right. About doing for others as it's own reward. About performing mitzvoth. I invite everyone here tonight and our entire Jewish community to become a member of our Federation.

We want you to be apart of our Film Festival, which will be going into year number twelve. Our "dinner and a movie" concept has been a big success.

Our Federation strongly believes in helping our kids develop a strong sense of Jewish identity through education as well as sponsoring our kids to attend Jewish summer camps.

Federation also continues to sponsor Celebrate Diversity and Holocaust programs. Each year we fund the cost of transportation to the Holocaust Museum in Washington DC for Celebrate Diversity. Federation has also assisted in providing programs in local schools concerning genocide.

Our Federation has continued its work with senior outreach to those in homes and for those who are homebound, as well as providing outreach to Jewish students at PS Altoona and Juniata College.

The PJ Pajama Library Program is for families with children from 6 months of age to eight years old. By registering for the PJ Pajama program parents or grandparents will be sent a free age appropriate book or CD each month featuring Jewish content to share with their child or grandchild. If you are interested, there are program folders available in the first pew.

Our Website, www.greateraltoonajewishfederation.org, is celebrating 18 months of stories, news articles, book reviews and member happenings.

Some upcoming programs found on our home page of interest are:
The Annual Federation Picnic at Diamond Carriage Lane on Sunday September 26th. Wagon rides, pumpkin carving, a cookout and bonfire are planned.

On Sunday October 10th the annual Israel Bonds Dinner will honor Reverend Paul Johnson. Our Federation helped sponsor Reverend Johnson on a recent interfaith trip to Israel with the Zionist Organization of America.

Judy Meisel will be returning to our community in late October to speak with schools, colleges and organizations about the Holocaust.

On November 7th we are working with the community Sunday School and Rabbi Korotkin for the Global Day of Jewish Learning. On that day, Jews all over the world will come together in their communities to study Jewish texts and teachings, and celebrate the completion Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz 45-volume translation and commentary of the Talmud.

The purposes of the Global Day of Jewish Learning are to spark and nourish a love for Jewish learning -- and to celebrate the unity that Jewish learning can engender.

As you can see, there is a lot going on and your Federation continues to work toward fulfilling our mission to further the welfare of the Jewish community and to foster cooperation among local Jewish organizations directed toward that end.

I feel that Federation fills a very important role in our community, as Federation is the only active remaining organization that represents our entire Jewish community. We have members from TBI, AAC and members who are not affiliated with a congregation.

More and more we have become focused on community building and as a result we began Campaign 100% four years ago. Campaign 100% is an attempt to engage every Jewish person and it is about providing for the philanthropic, social, cultural and educational advancement of our community.

It is no secret that our community has experienced a significant decrease in population in the last 20 years and there is no reason to believe that this trend will not continue. I think it is in the best interest of every Jew in this community to look for ways to support and to collaborate with one another for the greater good. It is our goal for every member of TBI to feel like the Federation is your partner in enhancing Jewish life in our community. Truly we feel:

Kol Yisrael Averim Zeh v Zeh – Every Jew is Responsible for one another

Our Federation also counts on the support of this Jewish community to make a difference for Jews experiencing hardship in Israel and throughout the world. The recent worldwide economic downturn continues to place great stress on the Jewish agencies that provide support of poor and elderly Jews in the former Soviet Union, Europe as well as South America.

The situation is especially severe in the former Soviet Union. Over a quarter million Jews, perhaps as many as one million Jews, still reside in the former Soviet Union. For many, United Jewish Communities through our Federation and Federations all over the world, is the primary source of funds for food, clothes, proper shelter and medicines. Sadly, the UJC has had to drop 60,000 people from their program due to a lack of funds. Jews around the world need our help.

As the Talmud says, “I did not find the world desolate when I entered it; my fathers planted for me before I was born: so do I plant for those who come after me.”

May we all be blessed with health, happiness and a good new year and I pray that we all are also blessed with the strength and courage to make our community a happy place.