



Maine Jewish Museum

# MAINE JEWISH MUSEUM Annual Report 2023

## CARING & CAMARADERIE

### MJM Friends:

We are writing to thank all who have supported our work this year, to highlight our robust schedule of exhibitions and programs, and to ask you to consider using the enclosed donation card to contribute to our Annual Appeal Campaign (if you prefer, you can also use the QR Code at the bottom of this letter or go to <http://www.mainejewishmuseum/donate>). In these challenging and heartbreaking times, our little Museum is playing a big role, and our work has become even more critical, as have our funding needs. Your generous contribution will help us keep our building secure and our staff and visitors safe going forward. From that place of safety, we can carry out our twin missions of celebrating and honoring the contributions of Maine's Jewish community members, past and present, and fostering appreciation and understanding among people of all backgrounds through art exhibitions, historical displays, and diverse programming. Now more than ever, the Museum can serve as a welcoming space for people of shared and disparate cultures to come together. We look forward to partnering with you into the future to realize this goal.

Warmly,

Steve Brinn  
President

Dawn LaRochelle  
Executive Director



Excited Pre-Event Greeting at the MJM Fashion Show

### Volunteer of the Year

As a small, thinly-staffed Museum that consistently punches above its weight class, MJM is fortunate to have a core of devoted volunteers supporting our efforts. While we appreciate the hard work and dedication of all our volunteers, there is one



Jessica Lantos

who stands out for having gone well beyond the metaphorical extra mile in 2023: Jessica Lantos. Many of you know Jessica for her tremendous work on our permanent historical exhibition, "Maine Synagogues Past and Present." This year, as Co-Chair of our Exhibition and Program Committee, she was the key player in launching yet another permanent historical exhibition, "A Song and a Prayer: Cantorial Music in Maine." Jessica was also instrumental in bringing together cantors and musicians from across the state in our first-ever live cantorial concert, "A Song and a Prayer: Maine Cantors and Musicians in Concert". As if this were not enough, she also co-chaired the Host Committee for our biannual "Hall of Fame" event. It is with love and gratitude that we dedicate our Annual Appeal to Jessica, the recipient of our Volunteer of the Year Award. Mazel Tov, Jessica, whose invaluable contributions to MJM set a shining example for us all.



Maine Jewish Museum

# CULTURE & CONNECTION

## Connecting People to the Maine Jewish Experience & Jewish Mainers to Their Roots

**Illuminating the vibrancy** and complexity of Maine’s evolving Jewish community for a state, national, and global audience is at the heart of our Museum work. This past October, we unveiled our first new permanent online historical exhibition in over two years. “A Song and A Prayer: Cantorial Music in Maine” provides visitors with an introduction to Maine’s rich cantorial history through biographies and photographs, recordings and film. The opening salvo to this seminal exhibition was a first-ever concert featuring ordained cantors and musicians from across the state performing on stage in our century-old synagogue sanctuary. There was not a dry eye in the house after the Adas Yeshurun Choir (Rockland) ended the concert with a soulful rendering of Hatikvah. In May, we inducted eight new Jewish Mainers – Dr. Joel Bloom, David Brennerman, Max and Irving Kagan, Linda Lavin, Katherine Morgan, Melvin Stone, and Howard Trotzky – into the Maine Jewish Hall of Fame for their outstanding contributions to the State of Maine and beyond. And last Spring, our hybrid event, “S’mores, Swimming, and Shabbat: The

Maine Jewish Summer Camp Experience”, brought together over 100 attendees eager to hear our panel of cross-generational campers share their multifaceted camp experiences. Currently, we are in the process of updating our “Maine Synagogues Past and Present” exhibition and creating new historical panels for our second-floor walls for greater depth and breadth in our ongoing effort to make Maine Jewish history come alive for our visitors and supporters.



MJM Summer in the Garden Series

## Exhibiting Contemporary Artists with Maine and Jewish Connections

**Our vaunted Arts program**, under the able stewardship of Curator in Residence Nancy Davidson and Curator of Photography Nanci Kahn, continues to exhibit what the *Portland Phoenix* recently described as “some of the best art in Maine,” featuring artists with Maine and Jewish connections. In 2023, our exhibitions included nationally and internationally acclaimed artists Oliver Solmitz, Sara Crisp, Garry Mitchell, Natasha Mayers, Rush Brown, Bob Katz, Sue Michlovitz, Lynne Shulman, Howard Fussiner, Leia Sochor, Magi Leland, and Henry Isaacs, among others. And currently, Israeli-born Maine photographer Yoav Horesh’s interactive exhibition “PerSlovak 2.0” explores what it looks like to be Jewish by allowing visitors to disassemble and reassemble portraits of his mixed Ashkenazic and Sephardic

family members, with the ability to create more than nine million possible faces that do not exist but could have been an Israeli hybrid. This exciting and extremely topical MJM exhibition is on exhibit for the first time outside of Jerusalem and St. Petersburg.



MJM Gallery





Maine Jewish Museum

# ■ COLLABORATION & COMMUNITY

## ■ Cultivating Community

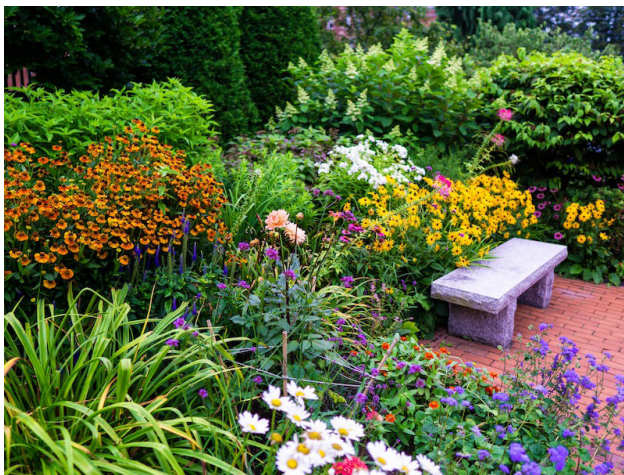
**Our Jewish core is a springboard** for broader outreach, and our shared affinity with other marginalized communities inspires our programming. In August, we held our inaugural “Fashion, Food, and Fun(d) raiser: A Celebration of Our Diverse Community.” Rwandan pop-star and new Mainer Clarisse Karasira’s soulful soprano was the lead-in to a runway show showcasing 31 Maine Jewish, immigrant, BIPOC, and LGBTQIA + fashion designers and models. From an 85-year-old Hungarian rabbinical gown to drag, from a Jewish tartan tallis to West African ceremonial garb, from a Moroccan caftan to Chinese qi pao, the stories we wear were on full display and the common threads – literally and figuratively – that bind us were revealed to a packed crowd of 210 attendees. The excitement the event generated was palpable, and we were featured in *Eat Drink Lucky* and the *Society Page* of the *Portland Press Herald*. Another MJM first this summer: our “In the Garden” line-up, a series of community-centric Jewish-themed events that took place in our magnificent garden – one of only two public garden spaces in Portland’s East End. Whether you wanted to learn mah jongg or try tai qi or get your blood pumping with the RBG Workout, there was something for everybody. The series finale, was, appropriately, a book launch for Judy Rakowsky’s *Jews in the Garden...* in the garden! And when cooler climes brought us back indoors, we brought community leaders, including Portland City Councilor Pious Ali, Portland’s new Director of Justice, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Umaru Balde, and the Executive Director of the Council of American Jewish Museums (CAJM) Melissa Martens Yaverbaum, as special guests for “Coffee, Crullers, and Kibbitzing: Pre-Opening Drop-In and Social Hour at the Museum.”



MJM Celebrates Our Diverse Community

## ■ Inspiring Creativity Through Collaborative Partnerships

**Maine has an outsized creative community**, and when we collaborate instead of compete, we have an outsized impact. This year, our collaborative partners included friends old (Etz Chaim, the



MJM Grounds

Jewish Community Alliance of Southern Maine, Documenting Maine Jewry, the Holocaust and Human Rights Center of Maine, Portland Hadassah) and new (the Maine Jewish Film Festival, Hole in the Head Review, Mayo Street Arts, Ovations, the Immigrant Welcome Center). We also collaborated closely with diverse middle and high schools, including King Middle School, the Friends School, Sebattus Middle School, and Libson High School, to bring the Museum to the schools and the schools to the Museum through our Delet Program. “Delet” means “door” in Hebrew, and the Delet program aims to open doors to greater understanding and combat antisemitism by teaching youth with little or no knowledge of Jews or Judaism about Jewish history, religion, and culture, with an emphasis on Maine Jewry.

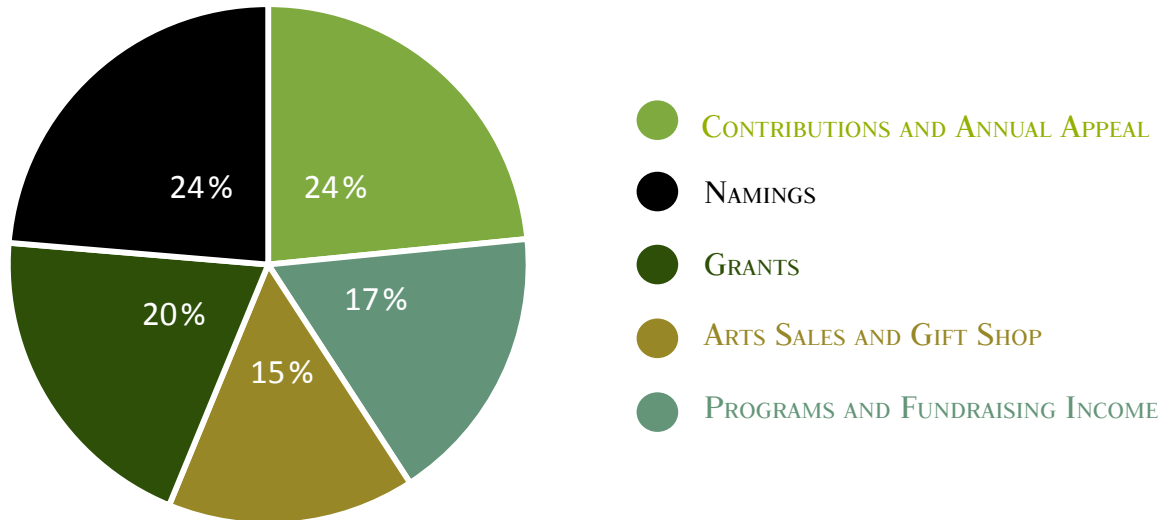


Maine Jewish Museum

MAINEJEWISHMUSEUM.ORG/DONATE

## MJM 2022–2023 Revenue Sources

Our work is sustained by an appreciative public that engages with our exhibitions and programs, by the generous volunteers who give of their time, by the businesses and foundations that sponsor us, and by the many individual donors like you who respond to our appeals.



## New Normal, New Challenges

We, like you, remain devastated by the October 7 terrorist attack on Israel and the ongoing human suffering in the region. Antisemitic incidents in the USA were already at their highest level since the 1970s prior to October 7 and have now increased by 400%. While Maine has, fortunately, not yet seen the same surge in hatred and violence as other parts of the country, the mass murder in Lewiston is a stark reminder that it just takes one individual with one gun to unleash a bloodbath and shut down a state. Out of an abundance of caution, we have therefore hired security guards during our open hours and at all special events. We are also considering other security measures such as the kind of buzz-in system found at almost every other Jewish organization in the greater Portland community.

You can help us continue our mission by donating as generously as possible and by putting us in touch with others you know who share your passion for Maine Jewish history, culture, and the arts.

*Thank you.*



MJM Sign & Garden