

# Rosmarin and Hirsh: Our vision for the Jewish future

*First Person*

By A. J. Rosmarin and Mike Hirsh

In 2015, we were on a mission to Israel with the Jewish Federation of Greater Dallas, touring an area near the Syrian border, when we suddenly saw a flurry of military aircrafts hovering nearby. Later, we learned that these planes were returning the bodies of two IDF soldiers who had been shot and killed. The next day, while visiting Mount Herzl national cemetery in Jerusalem, we witnessed the funerals for those very same fallen IDF soldiers.

This experience was a deeply emotional turning point for both of us — a call to redouble our efforts on behalf of those in need locally and around the world. This moment felt *bashert*, meant to be, and served to strengthen our essential commitment to foster strong Jewish life for generations to come. What follows are our reflections.

**A. J. Rosmarin's reflection**

Growing up in Louisville,

Kentucky in a Conservative Jewish family with parents who survived the Holocaust, the Jewish community was at the center of my life. My younger years were spent at the local Jewish Community Center and in Aleph Zadik Aleph (AZA) and a Jewish fraternity.

When my wife, Suellen, and I moved to Dallas, it felt natural to get involved in the Jewish Federation, which I think of as a kind of 'mutual fund' of Jewish philanthropy. We raised our two daughters in this vibrant community, and I am a longtime Federation board member and previous board chair. As a leader, it's been rewarding to allocate grants to local Jewish community agencies, as well as to Israel and around the world. I feel especially connected to the Western Galilee, our partnership region in Israel — and proudly serve on the board at the Western Galilee Medical Center in Nahariya.

Yet, despite these philanthropic wins, I have recently been thinking about the legacy we are leaving our children and



Stephanie and Mike Hirsh, pictured with their granddaughters, have taken the Jewish Future Pledge.



Suellen and A.J. Rosmarin are among the first Dallasites to take the Jewish Future Pledge.

grandchildren. How do we balance the need to provide for urgent necessities with our duty to make a longer-term impact? I often think about ways to ensure future generations feel a sense of connection to their heritage.

In the summer of 2019, I learned about the Jewish Future Pledge, an initiative that calls on all Jews to pledge half of the charitable giving in their will to support the Jewish people

and/or the State of Israel—and it was like a light bulb came on. Instantly, my wife and I knew that this would be an incredible way to ensure that our passion for Jewish causes would be conveyed to our children. The Jewish Future Pledge gives our daughters the space to make their own philanthropic choices, while clarifying our wish that a significant amount goes toward the Jewish future.

**Mike Hirsh's reflection**

Born and raised in Dallas in a Conservative Jewish home, my youth was filled with Jewish activity. Some of my fondest memories date back to junior high and high school, when I was in AZA — laughing, learning and volunteering with a group of friends, some of whom are still my best friends. Those experiences led me on a path of lifelong Jewish involvement.



Jewish Federation OF GREATER DALLAS

JCRC Jewish Community Relations Council

CSI Community Security Initiative

## Safety, Security and Antisemitism Town Hall

Tuesday, August 31, 2021  
6:30 PM  
via Zoom

Jewish Federation of Greater Dallas' Jewish Community Relations Council, Community Security Initiative and partners invite you to hear from local civic and communal leaders on what is being done to keep our communities safe and secure amid rising antisemitism nationwide.

**SPEAKERS**

Dallas Mayor Eric Johnson

Plano Mayor John B. Muns

Dallas City Council Member  
Cara Mendelsohn

Dallas City Council Member  
Jaynie Schultz

Plano Police Chief Ed Drain

Dallas Executive Assistant  
Police Chief Albert Martinez

Vice President of Central Division,  
Anti-Defamation League Cheryl Drazin  
Director of Community Security Initiative,  
Jewish Federation Bill Humphrey

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Dallas Mayor Eric Johnson



Plano Mayor John B. Muns



Dallas City Council Member  
Cara Mendelsohn



Dallas City Council Member  
Jaynie Schultz

**Virtual Safety, Security and Antisemitism Town hall slated for Aug. 31**

Dallas – The Jewish Federation of Greater Dallas' Jewish Community Relations Council (JCRC), Community Security Initiative (CSI) in partnership with many local Jewish organizations and synagogues, will host a Safety, Security and Antisemitism Town Hall for the greater Dallas Jewish community at 6:30 p.m. Tuesday, Aug. 31.

The forum is in response to community concerns about potential antisemitic acts in public spaces and at Jewish institutions, and to ensure that local civic leaders are aware of and prioritizing the concerns of the Jewish community.

The community town hall will feature remarks by Dallas Mayor Eric Johnson, Plano Mayor John B. Muns, Dallas City Councilmembers Cara Mendelsohn and Jaynie Schultz, command staff from both the Dallas and Plano Police Departments, and security professionals from ADL Texoma and the Jewish Federation of Greater Dallas. Registration is requested by Aug. 25. For more information and to register for the Town Hall, visit [jewishdallas.org/jcrc/townhall](http://jewishdallas.org/jcrc/townhall).

This event will be held virtually. In accordance with public health guidance, the Federation has decided not to hold in-person events until Sept. 1. This policy will be reviewed for reconsideration after that date.

After my wife Stephanie and I met at the University of Texas and got married, we moved to my hometown. As our professional success grew, Jewish philanthropy became a greater focus. While serving on the board and as president of the Jewish Community Center in the late '80s and '90s, I was involved with helping to settle an influx of Jews from the Soviet Union. That experience opened my eyes, not just to those in need in my own community, but to financially disadvantaged and unaffiliated Jews in other countries who require our help.

Around the time of the Dallas Federation's impactful 2015 trip to Israel, my wife and I began updating our wills, adding in Jewish philanthropic commitments. A CPA by profession, I help clients plan their estates and manage their finances, so I'm used to thinking ahead.

Several years later, A. J. worked to bring the Jewish Future Pledge leadership to the Dallas community, and I was well-positioned to get involved. Stephanie and I eagerly signed the Pledge and sat down with our adult children and told them about the pledge we'd made and why we were so passionate about it. Having seen our involvement in the Jewish community, they were not surprised by our decision, but we were able to reflect as a family on our shared values.

The critical conversations that we initiated with our families soon led to other conversations with friends, and we found that many in the Dallas Jewish community were equally interested in being part of the initiative. Signing the Jewish Future Pledge is a moral commitment that motivates you to take the next step to include Jewish organizations in your estate plan. No matter how much you can contribute, your pledge

sends a powerful message and will make a significant impact.

We live in an uncertain world. It is thanks to the generosity of someone who lived many years ago that we can live through today's challenges, so let's offer a little bit of certainty to future

generations.

For more information about the Jewish Future Pledge contact Donna Ostrower, JFGD chief development officer, at [dostrower@jewishdallas.org](mailto:dostrower@jewishdallas.org), call 214-615-5220 or visit [jewishdallas.org/jewish-future-pledge](http://jewishdallas.org/jewish-future-pledge).

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**Community Spotlight**



**Harold Gernsbacher**

For more than 40 years, Harold Gernsbacher has dedicated himself to serving the Jewish community locally, nationally and abroad. The UT-Austin grad grew his family's Fort Worth food service supply business, and after it sold, launched several other successful enterprises. Currently, he is developing a real estate portfolio and will open Chillin', a kosher nitrogen ice cream store. Harold is the treasurer of the Jewish Federations of North America and chair of its Secure Community Network (SCN). He is a past member of the board of both the Jewish Federation of Fort Worth and Tarrant County and the Jewish Federation of Greater Dallas, where he's held multiple leadership positions. He has been a member of the Jewish Agency for Israel's board of governors. Among his non-Jewish passions are the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation and Operation Kindness. He is always quick to pitch-in wherever he's needed. Harold and his wife, Lesli, are parents of a blended family of six children. He is delighted to be the grandfather of Theo and Sadie. The family are members of Shearith Israel, Ahavath Sholom and Chabad of Dallas. "After over 40 years of volunteerism both here and in Israel, we are at a critical juncture of finding harmony in our community. We must work together to find new paths that fit the current and next generations. We have to hold anger and apathy at bay, and care for our community as one voice," says Harold.



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