



LEVITE JEWISH COMMUNITY CENTER ANNUAL REPORT 2022





OUR MISSION

The mission of the Levite Jewish Community Center is to enhance Jewish identity by providing programs and activities that promote cultural enrichment, cultivate educational development, and provide for the well-being of its members.

At our core

Through the lens of Jewish identity and values, the LJCC provides a welcoming, family-oriented gathering place for a diverse membership to engage in meaningful experiences of the mind, body, and soul.

The LJCC prides itself on being a welcoming facility to people of all faiths, ages, genders, sexual identities, and socioeconomic backgrounds. We are a family-oriented recreational and educational facility that is open to the entire community. As a recipient of Birmingham Jewish Federation and United Way of Central Alabama dollars, we impact thousands of Birmingham residents annually.

 bhamjcc.org



FROM THE PRESIDENT

Last year was an incredible year at The J. We simplified our membership model. The Jewish Food and Culture Fest was called “the best event the Jewish community has put on in Birmingham.” The inaugural J’la Gala raised nearly \$120,000 while the 46th annual Sam Lapidus Montclair Run (SLMR) was dubbed a “perfect event.” As always, the Cohn Early Childhood Learning Center is at capacity. Significantly, we also underwent a seamless leadership transition while in the midst of expanding our talented staff.

And who hasn’t paused to chuckle at one of the weekly marquee messages in the parking lot?

Our management team has diversified our revenue sources, with last year’s fundraising highlights including the just-completed Community Circle Campaign

along with the aforementioned Jewish Food and Culture Fest, the J’la, and Sam Lapidus Montclair Run. In addition to funding from United Way of Central Alabama, The Birmingham Jewish Federation, and The Birmingham Jewish Foundation, top grants in 2022 came from GoodUse, the Daniel Foundation of Alabama, and Hill Crest Foundation.

We continue to maintain a net debt position that has been reduced by 75 percent since 2019 – *a reduction of more than \$1 million from December 2019 to December 2022*. We are excited to enter 2023 in a strong financial position and are eager to pursue additional funding opportunities that support our work.

HILTON BERGER

President, LJCC Board of Directors



The nearly 1,400 runners who took part in the 46th annual Sam Lapidus Montclair Run raised \$86,000 for The J and the Alabama Center for Childhood Cancer and Blood Disorders.

2022 GOALS

Enhancing our brand with quality programming

- Increased collaboration with The Birmingham Jewish Federation and the Jewish Community Relations Council
- New Jewish programming, including Southern Jewish Voices, weekly “The Jewish Course of Why,” two cooperative family-oriented events with PJ Library, a candy seder event for families, showing *Kiss Me Kosher* at Sidewalk Cinema, Rosh Hashannah hike, menorah lightings, Sukkah lunch
- Expanded collaborations with N.E. Miles Jewish Day School, Alabama Holocaust Education Center, Alabama Humanities Alliance, American Red Cross, The Birmingham Jewish Federation, Glenwood, Chabad of Alabama, CJFS, Food Bank of Central Alabama, Knesset Israel, and PJ Library
- Weekly *Shabbat Shalom* newsletter now opened by 5,500 readers – a 70 percent increase since January 2022
- Membership has increased by 18 percent, including a six-percent rise in total membership units

Increasing and diversifying revenue

- Overall increase in total revenue of 30 percent vs. 2021
- 193 individuals gave more than \$146,000 to The J in 2022 – a 60 percent increase in donors and a nearly 200 percent increase in donations vs. 2021
- Corporate donations of \$92,000 – a 385 percent increase vs. 2021
- At nearly \$800,000, grants were up 320 percent vs. 2021

Addressing facility needs

- Renovation of indoor pool
- Cosmetic updates include new carpet in lobby and hallway, fresh paint, pictures in main hallway
- Pizitz Auditorium refreshed with a \$25,000 grant from Daniel Foundation
- Began implementing first year of security assessment recommendations as part of FEMA grant
- Invested \$159,000 to begin upgrading HVAC thanks to GoodUse grant

BRIDGING B'HAM

Jewish Food and Culture Fest

Some 2,000 people showed up for last year's Jewish Food and Culture Fest — a gift from The J that serves all comers from Birmingham's Jewish and non-Jewish communities. “It was the best event the Jewish community has put on in Birmingham. Ever,” declared LJCC Board Vice President Terry Bernstein.

The annual event was a huge effort for staff and the numerous volunteers who prepared and served food, served as cashiers, and staffed the *Yom Ha'Atzmaut* tent that celebrated Israeli Independence Day. The months of Herculean logistics were orchestrated by Community Engagement Director Katie Hausman Grace.

The most popular menu items were the sampler plate of brisket, a cabbage roll, whitefish salad, a potato *boureká*, and matzah ball soup; the brisket plate (oh, that sauce!); and the corned beef sandwich (stack it up!).



Mark your calendars now for the 2023 Jewish Food and Culture Fest on April 30 and the J'la on July 30.

Inaugural J'la Gala

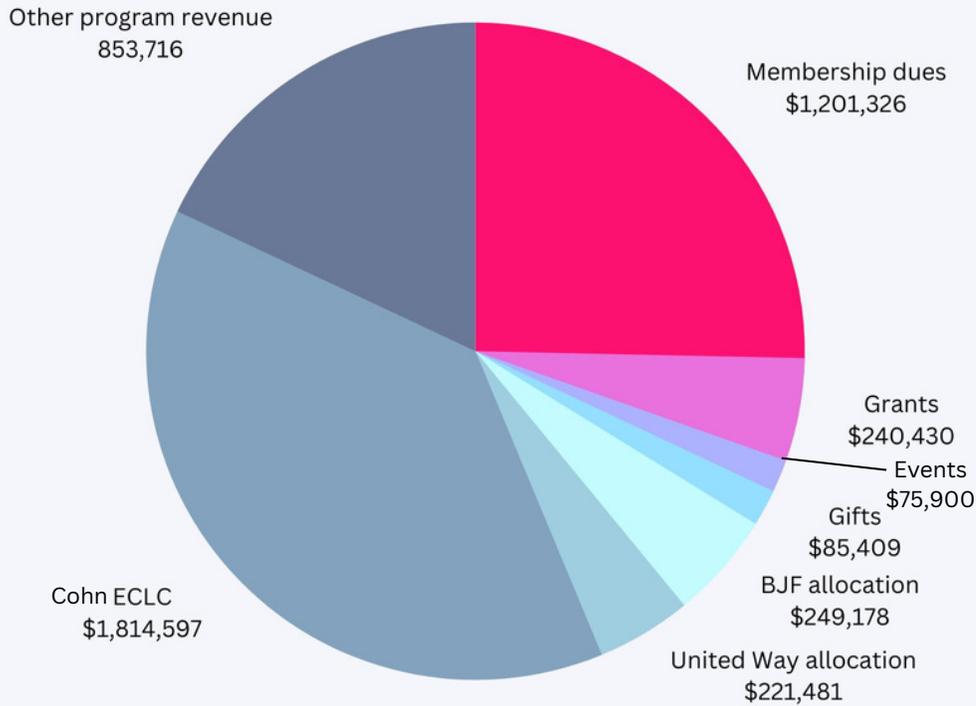
During the pandemic, The J chose to dedicate its limited resources to serving the community, which included opening the Cohn ECLC to children of first-responders at no cost and continuing to make our programming available to anyone regardless of financial situation.

But these efforts — along with the larger toll taken by the pandemic — came at a cost that severely impacted The J. So we created a new fundraising event: the J'la Gala.

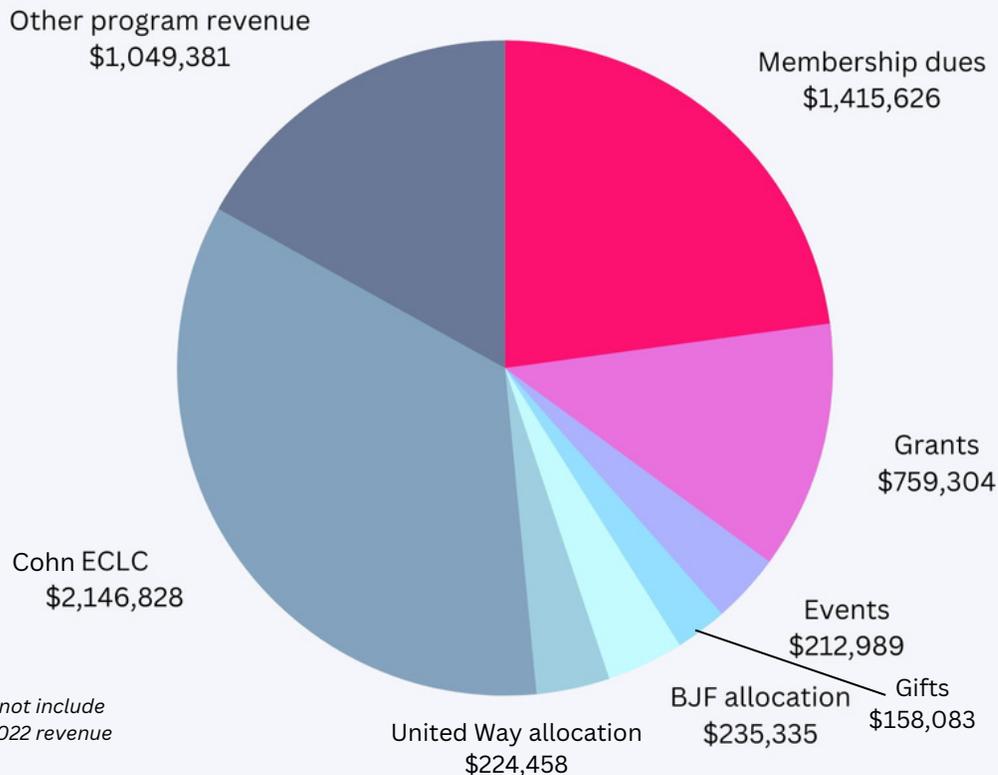
Perhaps our greatest impact in Birmingham is the ability to provide a welcoming environment where diverse people make connections with each other. This was exactly the goal of The J'la, an event that featured a gourmet kosher meal and ended up raising more than \$110,000.



2021 REVENUE: \$4,742,037



2022 REVENUE: \$6,202,005 (↑30%)



2021 revenue does not include CARES Act funds; 2022 revenue is unaudited.



Interim Executive Director Brooke Bowles takes a walk with members from Glenwood, a residential and community service provider of autism and behavioral health services.

MAKING STRANGERS NEIGHBORS

I was privileged to join the team here at the LJCC in November 2021. The values of “The J” as spelled out on the website truly resonated with my nonprofit career: providing a welcoming and open environment, cultivating memorable life experiences and meaningful relationships, and embracing and celebrating diversity.

It took less than a week for me to see all these values act together in perfect harmony as I met some old friends from Glenwood who were taking advantage of their LJCC memberships. I knew I had landed in the right place.

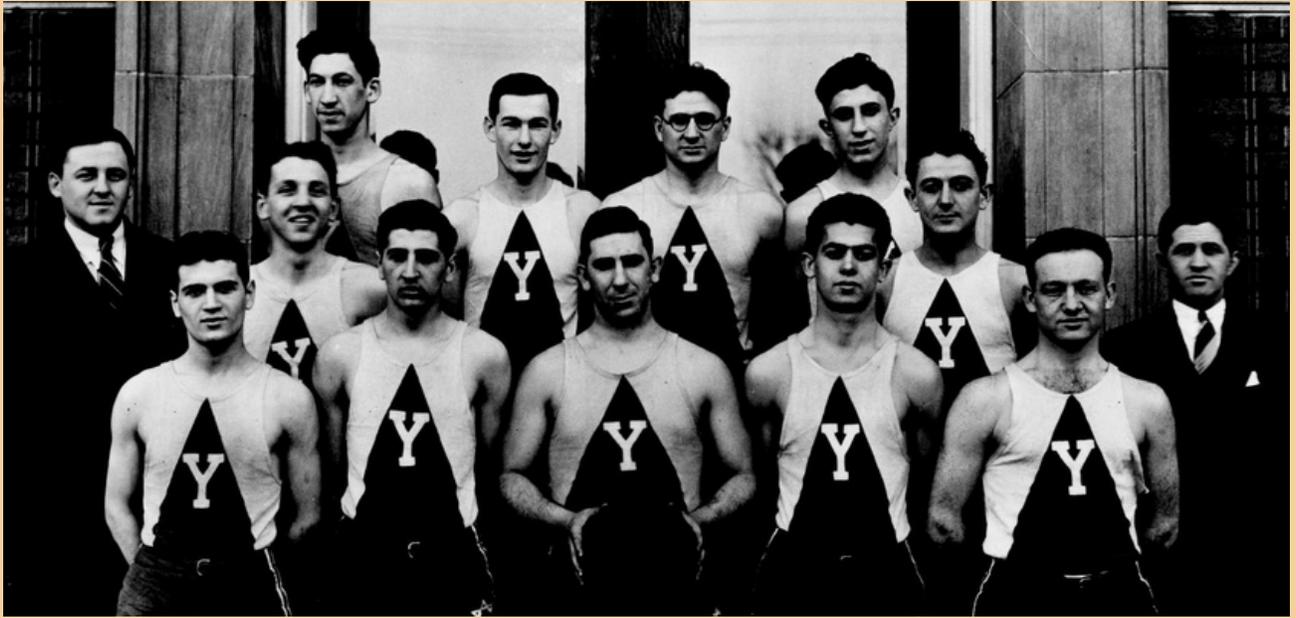
The Torah tells us multiple times to love the stranger, to welcome the stranger, to provide and care for the stranger, and to not oppress the stranger. Living up to this responsibility will help that stranger to become our neighbor.

My passion is people. And while I have a special affinity for people who are underserved or underrepresented, I enjoy connecting with everyone who comes through our doors. My favorite part of my work is a daily walk through our facility. Sometimes that means starting a conversation with a parent on the pool deck or being approached by a member working out on the Sokol Fitness Floor, or it might mean giving a tour to a prospective member. I love being able to connect with so many people here.

Thank you for allowing me to be a small part of building our neighborhood and community here at The J.

BROOKE BOWLES

Interim Executive Director



A Young Men's Hebrew Association basketball team from the 1930s

GOING STRONG SINCE 1906

At the turn of the last century, Birmingham's Jewish community needed a boost. Even though it was growing — much like their adopted city's overall population — there was an increasing sense that more cohesion was needed. So a group of young men from Knesseth Israel Synagogue met in 1906 to form an association that would provide a social outlet (initially for young Jewish men only). Dr. Henry Swedlow was elected president. Assisting him were S.J. Levine, Mosley Sugarman, Jake Allen, Isadore Shapiro, Moses Cohen, Jake Goldstein, Sol Adelson, J.M. Levine, and Louis Walowitz.

The group rented the upstairs of a house, charged themselves dues, wrote bylaws and a constitution, and set out to find members. By 1910, the young organization had 50 members, and President I.R. Rubenstein reported \$144.66 in the bank. After convincing Louis Pizitz and J. Goldstein to help furnish the club, the group then arranged to purchase a lot in downtown Birmingham at 6th Avenue and 17th Street for \$4,500. They planned for their new building to become part of the Young Men's Hebrew Association, or YMHA, a national organization that was founded in New York City in 1874.

In 1919, "The Y" carried out some serious fundraising that resulted in the purchase of a new piece of property on 7th Avenue and 18th Street for \$20,000. Congregation Beth-El purchased the original facility.

A cultural center

The 1920s saw The Y become a social, cultural, and educational center for the community.

Classes in “Americanization” were offered to the city’s many immigrants. Various social clubs were formed, including The Grand Order of Aleph Zakik Aleph for Jewish teens. Dances were held and a drama group performed. Under the sponsorship of Temple Sisterhood and the Council of Jewish Women, the first kindergarten was established. The athletic program became a point of pride in the community as its basketball team racked up an enviable record.

Eventually The Y became affiliated with a growing number of other Jewish associations in Birmingham under the banner of the National Jewish Welfare Board.

The Y hired Eve Bandman as its first female employee in 1929. Under her direction, women were offered craft, art, fitness, and storytelling classes, plus a glee club and a social group that planned dances. Women petitioned for and got a separate shower facility.

The Great Depression

Even though the Great Depression hit The Y hard, the board voted to extend all membership privileges to the unemployed and to everyone who was unable to pay. Its job posting board helped The Y become a second home for people seeking work, and food was offered to all who were hungry. Meanwhile, the successes of The Y’s basketball and baseball teams were a source of Jewish pride. In addition, Samuel Ullman’s gift of books in 1930 launched a library that became a statewide resource as it grew to more than 500 volumes of Hebrew and English titles. Pleas for financial support kept The Y alive.

The Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, sponsored by The Y, rehearsed and performed regularly. By 1937, nearly all Jewish

organizations in the city met regularly at The Y, as did organizations like the Girl Scouts and Boy Scouts of America.

Wartime

In 1938, with the approaching war in Europe, The Y offered free memberships to German refugee families. By 1940, the Jewish Welfare Board requested that The Y coordinate social, religious, and recreational activities for Jewish soldiers stationed at Fort McClellan in nearby Anniston, which led to The Y hosting Birmingham’s first United Service Organization club. At its peak, some 1,200 Jewish and non-Jewish servicemen visited the facility monthly.

Although declining membership due to World War II created financial problems, people and organizations rallied to help pay off various debts. By war’s end, The Y stood as the meeting place for cultural, educational, and recreational activities — so much so that the esteemed Rabbi Stephen Wise was the honored guest at an annual meeting.

In 1949, the organization changed its name to the Jewish Community Center of Birmingham and elected women to the board — the first organization in the city to do so. But it became apparent that the downtown facility was no longer adequate for the needs of the community, and a search was on for a new location. Although plans were put on hold when the Korean War caused a dramatic increase in construction costs, in 1955 the JCC secured 70-acres from Republic Steel Corporation along Montclair Road. Construction began the following year.

Over the past half century, what is now the Levite Jewish Community Center — affectionately known as “The J” — has grown to include outdoor and indoor pools, the Sokol Fitness Center, Pizitz Auditorium, the Cohn Early Childhood Learning Center (CECLC),

tennis courts, a kosher kitchen, and five miles of hiking and biking trails. The J's campus also hosts the Birmingham Jewish Federation and N.E. Miles Jewish Day School.

The J was honored to co-host the Maccabi Games with the City of Birmingham in 2017. Also known as the "Jewish Olympics," the event saw The J take center stage for the international event that involved nearly 1,000 teenage athletes from around the world.

Pandemic shutdown

The Covid-19 pandemic forced the facility to close its doors for nearly three months starting in March 2020. As the pandemic raged during the next two years, the staff did its best to embrace pandemic-related restrictions by holding group fitness classes outside and online, and hosting various programs online. The restrictions, along with widespread economic issues, led to a 30 percent drop in memberships. Fundraising efforts also suffered a major blow in 2020 when the annual Jewish Food and Culture Fest was canceled and the 44th annual Sam Lapidus Montclair Run was run virtually.

Meanwhile in the CECLC, Herculean efforts to meet strict new government standards not only allowed the CECLC to reopen after just one week, but it generously offered free slots to the children of first-responders and essential workers who were battling the pandemic daily.

Serving the city

As the nation emerged from the pandemic, 2022 will be remembered for strong rebuilding efforts at The J, including accelerated fundraising along with internal reorganization and efforts to address the aging facility.

Today The J prides itself on serving as a bridge between the Jewish and non-Jewish communities by welcoming people and families of all faiths, ages, genders, sexual identities, and

socioeconomic backgrounds. In 2021 alone, we gave out more than \$128,000 in need-based scholarships across our programs.

We are grateful for the support we receive from our local partners, including United Way of Central Alabama, The Birmingham Jewish Federation, and The Birmingham Jewish Foundation. Their assistance — along with that of our members and donors — helps us reach thousands of neighbors through our camps and programs, and events like our annual Jewish Food and Culture Fest, J'la Gala, and Sam Lapidus Montclair Run. 



Above, community members gather at The Y in downtown Birmingham in 1939. Below, waiting for a gourmet kosher meal at the inaugural J'la Gala in a spruced-up Pizitz Auditorium at The J in 2022.



THANKS TO OUR FUNDING PARTNERS



The Birmingham
JEWISH FEDERATION



United Way
of Central Alabama, Inc.



On the cover: Membership Director Cody Bass (left) and member Marquise Johnson compare talents. (Photos courtesy B'ham Now)