

Dear Friends of Hillcrest Jewish Center,

It seems it was just yesterday when we bade farewell to Lesley and Cantor Fuchs, but believe it or not, it has been almost four years that Hillcrest Jewish Center has been without a Cantor.

And these past four years weren't just a normal four years – they were very challenging, marked by a pandemic which affected the lives of all of us as well as our congregational life. The first months of mandatory lockdown, and the true concern and overwhelming fear due to COVID lingering until very recently, kept many of our members away from congregational life. True, Hillcrest Jewish Center put together a robust structure of virtual programs and classes, and many of our members took advantage and continue to take advantage of this robust structure. And yet, many other members got accustomed to a Shabbat morning without shul, or streaming Shabbat services in their pajamas, or they took advantage of the technology available to virtually explore other shuls. In the past years, many of our “regulars” moved away, got sick, passed away, or drifted away. While this is not the exclusive reality of Hillcrest Jewish Center, it still influences all of us.

Despite the challenging reality I depicted in the previous paragraph, during the last four years, a combined effort by dedicated staff and volunteers kept Hillcrest open and thriving. Our daily minyan, one of the few in-person existing daily minyanim in the non-Orthodox world, fills us with pride. We are truly amazed by the knowledge and dedication of lay leaders who became *klai-kodesh de-facto*, leading services daily, during Shabbat, Chagim, and even High Holy Days, giving *divrei Torah*, leading classes, programs, musical havdalot, and more.

We are extremely grateful to our dedicated staff and custodians, led by our executive director, who not only did their work diligently, but became part and parcel of the Hillcrest Jewish Center family.

And yet, new and old challenges remain, including demographics, finances, limited outreach and inreach, and the need to develop new leadership and new programs.

It is because of these new/old challenges, and because we all believe in our beloved shul and its mission, that we are very excited to welcome Cantor Rachel Black, her husband Eric and their daughter Cora, and our new executive director Nadine Kochavi, into our Hillcrest Jewish Center community.

Cantor Rachel brings to us not only her beautiful voice and knowledge of nusach and melodies, but most importantly, her enthusiasm and an always needed new fresh approach.

Nadine Kochavi brings to us organizational and leadership skills, the importance of strategic planning, and the best practices she learned through her extensive work for United Synagogue and UJA New York.

As I welcome Cantor Rachel and Nadine, I take this opportunity to again thank our lay leaders who stepped up and continue to step up to the plate by leading services, programs and

committees, and to everyone, lay leaders, staff, and custodians, who strive every day to make Hillcrest Jewish Center a better place.

Many blessings,

Rabbi Manes Kogan