

» **The 'Turkey Bowl'** Family hosts its annual Black Friday football game. **See page 12**

» **Living Larger** JSL's Prentis Apartments sees first new one-bedrooms occupied. **See page 18.**

» **Latke Vodka** Celebrating the holiday and friendship with a NEXTGen tradition. **See page 35.**



David Einhorn of Oak Park and Joanne Alvin of Royal Oak at Latke Vodka

metro » cover story



Mamaloshen LIVES!

Yiddish language is alive and thriving in Metro Detroit.

Esther Allweiss Ingber | Contributing Writer

Affectionately called the *mameloshen* ("mother tongue"), Yiddish was the spoken language of European-based Ashkenazi Jews over several centuries leading up to World War II. Written with a Hebrew alphabet, Yiddish is a mixture of German dialects that encompasses Hebrew, Aramaic, Slavic and some Romance language vocabulary.

Millions of Yiddish speakers died or were displaced in the tragic German devastation. Zionists in Palestine disparaged Yiddish as a remnant of the Galut — the countries where Jews were most persecuted. The pioneers instituted a spoken Hebrew for the proud nation they were becoming.

Against that historical background, many were and still are ready to write off Yiddish. And yet ... a survey of the Metro Detroit community, extending to Ann Arbor, uncovered speakers, teachers and others interested in perpetuating Yiddish language and culture.

Three-year-old children learn the language at two Lubavitch elementary schools in Oak Park,

while students in Ann Arbor take Yiddish classes at the University of Michigan. An elderly man at Hechtman Apartments in West Bloomfield, administered by Jewish Senior Life, recites Shakespeare in Yiddish. Twenty-four Oakland County women recently celebrated 30 years for their conversation group. All of them, and more, belie the supposition that Yiddish is either a dead or dying language.

Sid Simon of Farmington Hills, whose parents took the *Forverts* Yiddish newspaper, is certain that "for the foreseeable future, there is going to be an active interest in Yiddish language, literature and performances."

As an example of the Yiddish contribution to world literature, Simon cited the "Tevye" character of famed Yiddish writer Sholem Aleichem. The impact of Tevye includes the Tony Award-winning musical *Fiddler on the Roof*, performed "in countless countries" and a popular film version in 1971. The setting is 1905 Czarist Russia in the so-called

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Praying Or Preying?

Local families receive calls, postcards from groups trying to convert Jews.

Robin Schwartz | Contributing Writer

The voice on the other end of the phone line sounded upbeat and friendly. "Hello, I'm calling for Mr. Tom Cantor," a woman said. "We're calling to find the Jewish people in the community. We want to send a free gift."

The Bloomfield Hills woman who answered that call was taken aback. She didn't know anyone by the name of Tom Cantor. Why was someone calling her house to ask if Jewish people live there, and what was this "free gift?" She asked not to be identified, but she shared her concerns with the *Jewish News*.

"I got the call right around Rosh Hashanah," she explained. "I told the caller I wasn't interested and I hung up, but it bothered me for days."

The woman was so disturbed by the out-of-the-blue phone call, she contacted the Jewish Community Relations

Council of Metropolitan Detroit and other agencies to report the incident. Heidi Budaj, the Anti-Defamation League's Michigan Region director, says the ADL also received several complaints from worried local residents.



Heidi Budaj

"The truth is, historically, these calls seem not to be intended to find Jewish people in order to target them for physical attacks," Budaj explained. "Instead, they are part of a campaign to find Jews and convert them to Christianity."

So, who is Tom Cantor? According to his website, he's the founder of the California-based Israel Restoration Ministries, a missionary group on an international campaign to convert Jews. His online bio calls Cantor "a successful Jewish businessman who came to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ in 1970." It goes on to say he's president and CEO of Scantibodies Laboratory Inc. in California, "one of the largest privately held bio-tech companies in the world."

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Four generations of Yiddish: Rabbi Israel Polter of Oak Park; daughter Shainy Weingarten of Flint; granddaughter Devorah Leah Stein and great-granddaughters Chaya'le, 3, and Bluma'le, 1, all of Southfield.

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Pale of Settlement, the Russian Empire territories where Jews were permitted permanent settlement.

“The experience of Jews in the Pale had something so generic in its human appeal that it crossed barriers of languages and culture,” said Simon, who attends performances at the New York-based National Yiddish Theater-Folksbiene.

Yiddish never stopped being relevant for Chabad-Lubavitch Jews.

“We speak Yiddish at home because our parents spoke Yiddish to us, and we value it so much that we want it for our children,” said Itty Shemtov, director of education at The Shul in West Bloomfield. “As a Chabad Chasidic family, [Yiddish] is a treasure not only because of the tradition and warmth it holds, but also because of the wealth of Chasidic teachings available in the original [language] from nine generations of Chasidic rebbes, or masters.”

The late Rebbe Menachem M. Schneerson left behind recorded Yiddish talks that “lay out the foundation of our school,” said Rabbi Mendel Stein, develop-

ment director for the elementary and high school divisions of three Lubavitch *cheders* (schools) in Oak Park.

Jewish Educational Media in New York puts out a weekly video magazine called *Living Torah* to share the rebbe’s wisdom, and these thousands of hours of educational talks are part of the schools’ curriculum.

According to Stein, whose 3-year-old daughter speaks English and Yiddish, “I believe we are the only Yiddish-speaking school in the state [of Michigan]. You can express content better in Yiddish. We also believe it’s a holy language.”

Raised Conservative, Nathaniel “Nachum” Eichenhorn, 25, of Huntington Woods became more religious and moved to New York after graduation. He went to a Lubavitch yeshivah, where his Yiddish thrived.



Nathaniel Eichenhorn

Preparing to teach another 10-week Yiddish course at Isaac Agree Downtown Synagogue in

Detroit, Eichenhorn said, “Jews of my generation have a deep longing for a Jewishness their parents may have neglected, or even scorned.”

Yiddish teacher Daniella HarPaz Mechnikov, 44, of Huntington Woods sings a heartfelt Kol Nidre at the annual High Holiday services of Workmen’s Circle/Arbeter Ring (WC/AR) at the Oak Park Jewish Community Center (JCC), where the local organization is based.



Daniella Mechnikov

WC/AR is a progressive organization founded by Jews fleeing the poverty, oppression and rising violence of Eastern Europe in the late-19th and 20th centuries. “The Yiddish language was an integral part of the birth of WC/AR,” said local board member Arlene Frank of Detroit. “Cultural events included poetry readings, staged theater productions, music, political speeches — mostly in Yiddish — and the



Arlene Frank

handbills were printed in Yiddish as well.”

Mechnikov taught Yiddish at Temple Israel in West Bloomfield under WC/AR auspices. Marcia Kahn of Farmington Hills, whose son, Daniel, is an international klezmer musician, was herself motivated to learn more Yiddish after studying at KlezKanada, a one-week cultural program. She persuaded her temple to host Mechnikov’s Yiddish classes, which met in 2010-2011.



Aaron Egan

“Daniella taught me to read, and I even wrote a three-page paper,” said student Ina Lutz of Farmington Hills, who signed up because “Yiddish is part of my heritage.”

Lutz also praised

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Detroiters Aaron Egan who led informal Yiddish conversational sessions on alternate weeks with Mechnikov. A professional chef who has arranged several “Dinner with Bubbie” dinners in private homes for WC/AR, Egan studied Yiddish at U-M.

“Having my son, Aaron, connected to and interested in the language has brought me great joy,” Frank said.

Yiddish At Universities

Deborah Dash Moore, director of U-M’s Frankel Center for Judaic Studies, said the Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Detroit (JFMD) established and funded a position in Yiddish language and literature in the early 1980s, which was filled by Anita Norich, Ph.D. The native Yiddish speaker studied Yiddish literature at YIVO Institute for Jewish Research in New York and Hebrew University in Jerusalem.

Her students included Adat Shalom Synagogue Rabbi Aaron Bergman, who taught a FedEd class, “Yiddish Poetry, Songs and Curses,” last month for Federation’s Alliance for Jewish Education.

Moore said 15 students are enrolled in U-M Yiddish classes, a number holding steady.

“Last year, a student graduated who wrote an honors thesis on a Yiddish socialist movement in New York,” she said. “Graduate students of literature also study Yiddish, perhaps as part of the Comparative Literature program.”

Avery Robinson, 24, of Franklin, a Judaic Studies master’s student at U-M, is in his third semester of Yiddish instruction with Alexandra “Sasha” Hoffman, Ph.D. Misha Krutikov, Ph.D. is another U-M Yiddish teacher.



Avery Robinson

“The Yiddish-speaking world may not be as robust as it once was, but that does not make this language useless,” Robinson said. “There is still a large population of speakers and a wealth of literature and other historical information in Yiddish ... very relevant to Jewish identity and peoplehood.”

Joanna Mazurkiewicz of Poland is taking advanced Yiddish during her first year of a doctoral program in U-M’s Slavic Department. She formerly worked at the Jewish Theater in Warsaw.

“I am specializing in Yiddish theater,” she said, “because [it] is a ‘rejected daughter’ of Jewish culture. My aim is to attract people to get to know it. I am currently writing a play in Yiddish that I hope to be staged at U-M in 2014.”

Howard Lupovitch, Ph.D., director of Cohn-Haddow Center for Judaic Studies at Wayne State University, said he and Margaret Winters, Ph.D., the university’s provost and senior vice president of Academic Affairs, “have discussed in a



The *Freylekhe Fraynt* (Happy Friends) group was formed in 1983 to perpetuate speaking Yiddish.

Yiddish You Should Know

Many Yiddish words have worked their way into everyday speech. Even those who are not Jewish know the words chutzpah, kvetch, klutz, mentsh, nosh, shlep, schmooze, shtick and oy! Here are a few more to add to your vocabulary — and maybe remind you of your grandmother or great-grandmother:

- **Maven:** an expert.
- **Bisl or bissel:** a little bit.
- **Bupkes:** less than nothing (literally

horse or goat droppings).

- **Gornisht:** more polite, but another strong sense of nothing.
- **Mishpocheh:** family.
- **Shlimazel:** someone with constant bad luck.
- **Shmendrik:** a jerk or stupid person
- **Gey Avek:** get out of here, go away.
- **Grepse:** to burp.
- **Pupik:** belly button.
- **Shanda:** a shame, a scandal.
- **Zaftig:** juicy, plump, a buxom woman.

preliminary way the possibility of having a Yiddish course or program at Wayne.”

WSU Board of Governors member Eugene Driker, a Detroit attorney, chairs the Yiddish Book Center (YBC) in Amherst, N.J., which has rescued more than a million Yiddish books over the last 30 years.



Eugene Driker

“The YBC is now working on a new Yiddish college text, which will combine print and online features,” Driker said.

He speaks at the annual Sholem Aleichem Institute (SAI) Holiday Assemblies for the Jewish New Year, currently held at Hillel Day School in Farmington Hills.

Yiddish Around Detroit

According to longtime SAI president Alva Dworkin of Farmington Hills, a retired educator, the organization began in 1926 as an independent, non-partisan Jewish *shule* (school) in Detroit. Children studied Yiddish and Jewish history.



Alva Dworkin

Under the direction of scholar Moishe Haar, SAI, now in West Bloomfield, evolved into an adult community that perpetuates the Yiddish language through Jewish cultural, educational and social activities.

Dworkin and the recently deceased Jack Boxer, who co-led a Yiddish class for Institute for Retired Professionals members at the Oak Park JCC, sold their Yiddish-English book, *Gefrishte Mayses* (Freshened Stories) during the 14th International Association of Yiddish Clubs (IAYC) conference held in Novi in August 2011. IAYC publishes *Der Bay*, an Anglo-Yiddish newsletter. Attendee Sid Simon was intrigued to meet a Yiddish teacher in his 40s from Japan, who is translating Yiddish into Japanese.

Social worker Naomi Pinchuk of Southfield made Yiddish accessible during the eight years she led a conversation group at Hechtman Apartments in West Bloomfield. Eichenhorn started as the new leader on Oct. 24; the group meets Thursdays at 2 p.m.

“Naomi’s Yiddish is spectacular,” said Lee Henkin of West Bloomfield.

The group was “free form because a third of the participants [usually about 15] were not real Yiddish speakers,” Pinchuk said.

When Hechtman residents Meyer King and Yona Friedman told stories in Yiddish from their own background or history, or brought in interesting articles from the *Forverts*, Pinchuk, and sometimes resident Shoshona Wolok, provided English translations.

Despite having only 5 percent eyesight because of macular degeneration, King, 96, has memorized and recited speeches from Shakespeare and Gilbert & Sullivan



Yiddish Limerick

The Shabbes Meal

Mir benchn di licht un di challah
ud vine**
Di tishtakh*** is white un di
glasslakh**** will shine.
Di kreplakh geshmak***** and
the soup is so good
There’s nothing that tastes like
the Shabbesdikeh***** food.
So kum gikh tzum tish,***** we’re
ready to dine.*

- * **Mir benchn di licht** — I bless the candles
- ** **un di challah un vine** — and the challah and wine
- *** **di tishtakh** — the tablecloth
- **** **di glasslakh** — the little glasses
- ***** **Di kreplakh geshmak** — the kreplach are tasty
- ***** **Shabbesdikeh** — of Shabat
- ***** **kum gikh tzum tish** — come quickly to the table

— Rachel Kapen’s Yiddish limericks appear in the JN around holidays.

in Yiddish — both at Hechtman and at the Yiddish *Vinkl* (Yiddish Corner) that used to meet at Temple Shir Shalom in West Bloomfield.

Noemi Herzig, director of the Jewish Community Center’s Active Life program, asked Pinchuk to lead a monthly Yiddish Conversation Club at both JCC buildings, starting at 1 p.m. Wednesday, Dec. 11, in Oak Park and at 2 p.m. Monday, Dec. 23, in West Bloomfield. Seniors in the program “would like to hear the language of their youth again,” Herzig said. A Yiddish consortium with speakers and discussions is another program being planned.

Yiddish conversation also is offered at West Bloomfield-based Meer Apartments, administered by Jewish Senior Life. Something different is Yiddish bingo on Sundays at the Park at Trowbridge in Southfield. The game goes on without staff involvement; Vivian Kean is the weekly caller.

About 60 percent of the 220 residents identify as Jewish, but anyone interested in bingo likes playing Oy Vey Bingo, according

to activities director Jenny Marroni. "You don't have to know how to pronounce the words, which is helpful for non-speakers," she said.

Anyone interested in learning Yiddish can try an online course through Mango Languages in Farmington Hills, which has several Jewish founders, including Jason and Michael Teshuba. Mango introduced its Yiddish course within the last year; courses often are free through local public libraries.

Longtime Yiddish Group

After her mother died, Emily Arnold, 86, of West Bloomfield mentioned to a friend that they should organize a Yiddish group. That was the beginning of *Freylekhe Fraynt* (Happy Friends). Another original member since November 1983 is Charlotte Goldin of Walled Lake.

"We're an independent group that came together for the love of Yiddish," Dworkin said, noting that the women involved come from "different points of view in terms of Jewishness," including members of Congregation Beth Shalom in Oak Park, Temple Israel in West Bloomfield and Congregation Shaarey Zedek in Southfield.

"Other Yiddish groups fall apart if you say, 'Let's just talk,'" Arnold said. "Our group has always had a structured program," including officers, dues, monthly theme and Yiddish song.

Before each meeting, the women catch up on their lives in English. Then the conversation is mostly Yiddish to discuss books, articles and the program theme.

"The group has a really warm, friendly feeling," Arnold said.

"People from our Russian population and other English-speaking residents have found common ground in speaking Yiddish," said Colleen Janis, administrator at Teitel Apartments in Oak Park, part of Jewish Senior Life. "It's interesting that people from completely different worlds come here and then discover they have almost a secret language [Yiddish] that they can use to communicate with each other."

Eichenhorn said, "I think outside of New York, Yiddish thrives most in Detroit. The number of Jews who are conversant in Yiddish in Oak Park is enormous when compared with Jewish communities of a similar size."

To him, "Detroit is a great place for Yiddish and Yiddish culture." □

'Beyond Swastika And Jim Crow'

The Holocaust Memorial Center Zekelman Family Campus and Charles H. Wright Museum of African American History are partnering to host a two-event series, Dec. 5 and Dec. 12, focusing on Jewish-African American relations.

The presentations are part of a current Holocaust Memorial Center exhibit, "Beyond Swastika and Jim Crow," which is on display through Dec. 15. The exhibit tells the story of Jewish professors who fled Nazism and came to America in the 1930s and 1940s, finding teaching positions at historically black colleges and universities.

The first event takes place at 7 p.m. on Thursday, Dec. 5, at the Holocaust Memorial Center (HMC) in Farmington Hills.



Howard Lupovitch

Howard Lupovitch, director of the Cohn-Haddow Center for Judaic Studies at Wayne State University, will present "Emancipation and Abolition: The Transatlantic Search for Freedom."

Admission for the event is \$8 (free for HMC members).

Lupovitch will explore the activism of a group of Jewish freedom fighters who fought for Jewish emancipation in Central Europe until 1848 and then came to America and joined with the Abolitionists to fight against slavery.

On Thursday, Dec. 12, at 7:30 p.m., the Charles H. Wright Museum (315

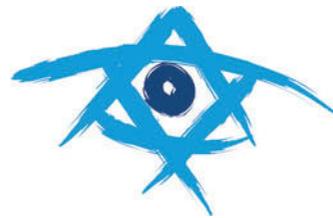


Genna Rae McNeil

E. Warren Ave.) in Detroit will host University of North Carolina Professor of History Genna Rae McNeil for a presentation on "Convergence in the Midst of Conflict: African Americans and Jewish Relationships, 1930-1954." Admission is free.

McNeil will discuss the courage of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who was martyred in Germany during World War II, the impact of Jewish scholars at historically black colleges and universities, and Jewish defenders of the rights of African Americans prior to the Civil Rights Movement.

"The strong relationship between Jews and African Americans is not something that everyone knows about," said Stephen M. Goldman, HMC executive director. □



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