Building Forward

A Celebration of Slifka Center’s 25th Anniversary Renovation

October 13, 2022  ·  14 Tishrei 5783
80 Wall Street, New Haven CT 06511
Dear Friends,

It is our pleasure to welcome you here this evening to celebrate the completion of Slifka Center’s first major renovation in its storied history. This project has been a central part of our tenure here over the past four years, and we are humbled and honored to celebrate this special occasion with all of you.

There are so many people to thank, and they are listed in this booklet. In particular, we’d like to thank Rabbi Jim Ponet, Dr. Donald Cohen z”l, and Alan Slifka z”l and family. Without these pioneers Slifka Center would not exist. We stand and celebrate on their shoulders.

It is so appropriate that this celebration is happening on the Jewish festival of Sukkot. Coming as it does immediately after Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, Sukkot is a corporeal holiday. Among other symbols, we eat in a Sukkah – a temporary and vulnerable hut – rather than in the confines of our sturdy, secure homes. The roof is porous to water and sunlight, the wind penetrates the walls, and the winds can collapse or displace it. Inhabiting such spaces, Sukkot reacquaints us with our fragility, rekindles our appreciation of the protections we are fortunate to have, and orients us to the careful balance in which we are supposed to live with nature around us and God above us.

The impermanence of the Sukkah stands in stark contrast with the Slifka Center in which we celebrate tonight. It was built of CMU block – which is sturdy, and also difficult to renovate – the opposite of impermanence. The purpose of this renovation was to keep the water out of the ceiling, the wind out of the walls, and protect those inside from any and all threats. We expanded the dining hall, renewed the kitchen from top to bottom (and the plumbing below the floor) and made it a place where Yale’s Jewish community will gather for decades to come.

Indeed, Slifka Center is about the everyday and the eternal, where students gather to eat, gather, study, pray, improve the world, discuss the ideas that will transform the future of the Jewish people and the world, encounter their peers, mentors, and others who will change their lives forever. When Sukkot is over we go back inside – and Slifka Center is where the Yale Jewish community goes. We are proud to have prepared this place for its next 25 years and beyond – thank you for celebrating with us.

Mazal tov, Shanah Tovah, and Chag Sameach!

Uri Cohen, Executive Director
Rabbi Jason Rubenstein, Howard M. Holtzmann Jewish Chaplain

Our Purpose
Slifka Center nurtures Jewish life at Yale, cultivating cultural, spiritual, religious, and intellectual experiences that enrich the lives of Yale students in a way that endures.

We empower Yale students to grow as Jewish adults, connect with each other across personal histories, and drive compassionate and welcoming community — all inspired by Jewish ideas, traditions, and values.

What We Do
- Warm celebrations of Shabbat and Jewish holidays
- Engaging explorations of Jewish texts and ideas
- Welcoming meals in our kosher dining hall
- Soulful expressions of Jewish religion and spirituality
- Constructive opportunities to engage with Israel
- Stimulating experiences with the arts
- Productive actions to make the Jewish values of kindness and justice real in the world
- Slifka Center advances the interests of Yale’s Jewish community in times of crisis and every day

Front cover: Left image: Former Yale President Howard L. Bockos (left) joins Sylvia Slifka z”l and Rabbi James Ponet at the 1993 Slifka Center groundbreaking. Right image: Current Slifka Center leadership – Uri Cohen, Executive Director (left) and Rabbi Jason Rubenstein, Howard M. Holtzmann Jewish Chaplain (right) – with President Peter Salovey (center) at President’s office.

Joseph Slifka z”l, Sylvia Slifka z”l, and Rabbi Richard Israel z”l were the leaders who founded Slifka Center.

Jewish Center of the University (JCU) 1948-1969

Our History
Joseph Slifka z”l: the founder of Slifka Center
Sylvia Slifka z”l: the wife who nurtured the Center

Dr. Donald Cohen: the early advocate, pioneer, and Board President of Slifka Center
Dr. M. David Jakobovitch: early advocate, pioneer, and Board President of Slifka Center

Rabbi Arthur J. Blank is the Chief Rabbi of Hebrew College.
Rabbi Howard M. Holtzmann is the Raphael M. Bernstein Professor of Rabbinics at Slifka Center.

Joanna z”l and Daniel Rose, Alan Slifka z”l, and Sylvia Slifka z”l: Central figures in Slifka Center’s founding
We thank all those who made
Building Forward Possible.
Construction and Design

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Melanie Ginter, Co-Chair
Doris Zelinsky, Co-Chair

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Mark Landow, Landow & Landow Architects
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Jim Jamieson, Jamieson Architects
Altieri Siebor Wieber Consulting Engineers
CANY Building Enclosure Consulting
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Babidge Construction
Michael Anthony Contracting

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Avi Cooper - Student Design Committee Chair
Miry Hilibrand - Student Input Coordinator
Saul Roselaar - Student Representative
Daniella Shear - Student Representative
Robin Landow - Interior Design Consultant
Juli Goodman - Slifka Staff Representative

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Saul Roselaar - Student Representative
Daniella Shear - Student Representative
Robin Landow - Interior Design Consultant
Juli Goodman - Slifka Staff Representative

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Ziv Eisenberg, Managing Director
Alex DeLeon, Building Superintendent
Margarita Nieves, Operations Manager
Don Joseph, Building Superintendent

Office of the Provost
Yale Facilities
Alumni Affairs and Development
Yale Hospitality
Information Technology (IT) at Yale

Parking & Transit
Public Safety
Business Operations
Environmental Health and Safety
New Haven Affairs

We thank the following Yale offices & departments for their help in this project:
Office of the Provost
Yale Facilities
Alumni Affairs and Development
Yale Hospitality
Information Technology (IT) at Yale

Parking & Transit
Public Safety
Business Operations
Environmental Health and Safety
New Haven Affairs

with gratitude to Ambassador Miron Reuben, Counsel General of Israel to New England, for his office’s contributions to this evening’s program.

We especially salute Peggy Gries Wager, who helped conceive of and lay the groundwork for this project as both Interim Executive Director and as a long-time member of the Slifka Center Board of Trustees.

Go eat your bread with joy & drink with a good heart — Ecclesiastes 9:7

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Slifka Center
Jewish Life at Yale