

Jewish Federation to honor Steve and Joyce Gerber at Main Event

Jeffrey Lazor, special to the WJN

The Jewish Federation of Greater Ann Arbor will recognize the volunteer achievements of Steve and Joyce Gerber at this year's Main Event on December 11. Steve and Joyce have worked on behalf of the Jewish community of Greater Ann Arbor for more than 25 years and have contributed positively to every facet of community life.

Building and sustaining the community comes as second nature to the Gerbers. In addition to being active campaign solicitors on behalf of UJA and the Federation, Joyce has co-chaired Super Sunday for five years, co-chaired Jewish Family Services' Friends of the Family Committee, and serves as a volunteer for the University Musical Society, Performance Network, Detroit Opera House, Purple Rose Theater, and many more. As one of the founding members of the Soviet Jewry Committee in the 1970's, Joyce understands the importance of reaching out and aiding



Steve and Joyce Gerber

those in need. "Helping and caring about others is what makes us human and humane," remarked Joyce.

Steve Gerber is the consummate volunteer taking on leadership roles in almost every Jewish agency in Greater Ann Arbor, and many more in the general community. His volunteer resume, which is two pages long, reads as a community's volunteer wish list. "Steve and Joyce Gerber are everything a community can expect of their volunteers. They give of their own resources for the community, they give of their time to help the community, they inspire others to give of themselves and they spread themselves among many worthy causes. All of Ann Arbor benefits from having Steve and Joyce as part of the community," stated David Shtulman, executive director of the Jewish Federation of Greater Ann Arbor.

Steve has worked with the Jewish Federation of Greater Ann Arbor, Jewish Family Services (he currently serves as board president), Eastern Michigan University Hillel, the Jewish Community Center, Hebrew Day School, and

University of Michigan Hillel. Steve also volunteers for Glacier Hills, with Joyce for Arbor Hospice and Hospice of Michigan, as well as other local non-profits in the Greater Ann Arbor area. "We should all strive to help others and give of ourselves—not until it hurts, but until it feels good," said Steve.

The Main Event, which draws in over 600 community members every year, is a fitting place to showcase our community's most dedicated volunteers. "Steve and Joyce are so important to the success of our communal agencies. Honoring them at the Main Event, our community's largest program, is befitting of their accomplishments and hopefully will move others into action," remarked Judie Lax, a 2008 Main Event co-chair.

In between their volunteer commitments, Steve and Joyce managed to have successful careers, have been married for 42 years, and have two children and one grandson. ■

Social justice approach to kashrut

Ruth Kraut, special to the WJN

Following well-publicized labor and environmental violations at a kosher meat packing plant in Postville, Iowa, many Jews have asked the question, "What does kosher really mean? Can kashrut address social and environmental concerns?"

On December 7 Rabbi Morris Allen will be speaking on "Heksher Tzedek: A Social Justice Approach to Kashrut." The talk will be held at Beth Israel Congregation (2000 Washtenaw Ave.), at 7:45 p.m. Rabbi Allen's visit is co-sponsored by Beth Israel Congregation, the Ann Arbor Reconstructionist Havurah, Temple Beth Emeth, and the University of Michigan Hillel.

Heksher Tzedek is a new kind of "justice certification" for kosher foods, which will certify that the production of these foods meets specific health, safety, environmental, labor, and corporate transparency guidelines. *Heksher Tzedek*



Rabbi Allen Brit Tze

is a shared effort between the Rabbinical Assembly and the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism. *Heksher Tzedek* was recently endorsed by the Reform Movement's Central Conference of American Rabbis.

Rabbi Morris J. Allen has served as the first spiritual leader of the Beth Jacob Congregation in Minneapolis, Minnesota since August of 1986. In addition to his responsibilities at Beth Jacob, Rabbi Allen is involved in numerous local and national initiatives on behalf of a wide variety of causes and issues. He is currently leading the Conservative movement's work on producing a *Heksher Tzedek* standard. He has been involved with Minneapolis-based Jewish Community Action and their work on behalf of non-documented workers, particularly in the Hispanic community. Rabbi Allen was ordained by the Jewish Theological Seminary in 1984, and received his bachelor's and master's degree in social work from the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

Rabbi Allen writes, "We should not be eating food that has been produced in a way that has denied the dignity of the labor! We should not be more concerned about the smoothness of a cow's lung than we are about the safety of a worker's hand." ■

Chanukah Wonderland

Chana Kroll, special to the WJN

This winter, area youth (and the young at heart), will have a chance to step back in time and learn the ancient art of hand-pressing olive oil, then step into the futuristic world of a Chanukah multimedia center, or enjoy some complimentary *sufganiot* (jelly doughnuts) and traditional latkes at Chabad of Ann Arbor's Chanukah Wonderland. The Chanukah Wonderland will take place in the heart of Ann Arbor's downtown area—making it a convenient stop after a day of work or shopping, or as part of a family night out. A relaxed fairground-style arrangement creates an inviting place to simply hang out and enjoy the company of family and friends. A variety of shops and food vendors will be on hand, although the Chanukah Wonderland is much more than just a place to enjoy a shopping excursion in a Jewish atmosphere.

Through activities, games, and shows that educate while they entertain, the Wonderland brings Chanukah to life. Some of the more popular activities returning from last year's Wonderland include a Maccabee movie theater showing Chanukah- and Jewish-themed films, a Chanukah Lego menorah contest, and Chanukah sand art. Children and adults alike can test their



culinary skills by making *sufganiot*, or decorating Chanukah cookies.

There will be a public menorah lighting at the Chanukah Wonderland each evening at 5:45 p.m. There will be a family program on December 24, with a Chinese dinner following the menorah lighting, children's activities, and adult discussions. Hot dogs and other foods will be on sale other evenings.

Chabad has also added a few new attractions this year. Each day there will be a different Chanukah-themed show. A Chanukah balloon show, Dreidel Magic, Chanukah in Lego Land, Chanukah in Chocolate Land, and latke-making are some of the shows already planned.

The Chanukah Wonderland will take place December 21–29, on the lower level of the Town Center building, 500 East Washington Street. Programs will run Sunday through Thursday, 11:30 a.m.–7 p.m.; Friday, 11:30 a.m.–3 p.m.; and Saturday, 7–10 p.m. Admission is \$2.50. ■

In this issue...



Chanukah lights

Page 10



Election 2008 results

Page 20



Gerald Ross and his ukelele

Page 25

Washtenaw Jewish News
2935 Birch Hollow Drive
Ann Arbor, MI 48108

NON-PROFIT ORG.
U.S. Postage PAID
Ann Arbor, MI
Permit No. 85

On Another Note

Gerald Ross, with music in his life

Sandor Slomovitz, staff writer.

Back in the late 1970s I remember seeing Gerald Ross play Mozart's *Rondo a la Turk* on solo guitar—no small feat—to accompany famed percussionist Percy Danforth, who played the bones. Long a familiar face on the Ann Arbor and national acoustic music scene for his work with the Lost World String Band, among others, Ross, besides being an excellent guitar player, is also accomplished on Hawaiian steel guitar and Cajun accordion. In the past few years he's taken up the ukulele and has played and taught at ukulele festivals from Portland to New York, from Chicago to Dallas.

WJN: Did you grow up in a musical family?

Gerald Ross: No. Not musical at all. I'm the only person in my family who played music. All three of my brothers had music lessons in school. I never did. I grew up in Detroit and in the Detroit Public Schools system you get your musical instrument in fifth grade. When I was in fifth grade we were in the process of moving from Detroit to Southfield, and so somehow, when I brought home the note from the music teacher, it got lost [laughter] and I never had any music lessons.

My first experience in showbiz was in my synagogue choir. From the time I was ten years old, until I was thirteen, a little after my bar mitzvah, I was in our all-boy synagogue choir in Southfield.

WJN: Which synagogue?

Ross: B'nai David. My grandfather was so proud of me. He thought I was going to become a rabbi. I had no intention of becoming a rabbi. To me it was total showbiz. I just liked the idea of singing. We had wonderful harmonies, we had costumes, and we were treated like stars, we got to hang out backstage. The only hard part was getting there every Saturday morning at seven. But I just loved the whole showbiz aspect of it. We were all young kids. We drove the cantor nuts. He tried to keep us in line and we were a bunch of twelve-year old kids, but we did sing well together.

Then I started to play guitar when I was fourteen, when every kid in the neighborhood had a guitar. This was about 1967, 1968. A friend of mine showed me how to play a couple chords on the guitar and I was amazed. I was able to make music! I went over to his house every day after school and played those two chords over and over. [Laughter]

WJN: That's exactly how I started, too.

Ross: I remember I bugged my parents to buy me a guitar for my birthday. It was at Montgomery Wards, a thirty-dollar guitar. I told them, "I'll pay for half of it, if you'll pay for half of it." They thought, "OK." And it stuck.

When I was fifteen, I joined a high school rock band. I went to the first rehearsal and there were ten guitar players there, and I said to myself, "There is no way I'm going to get in this band." That night, I went out and bought a used electric bass. The action was this high off the fingerboard. [Gerald holds his hands apart to show how far off the neck the strings were, and laughs.] And the next day, I was the bass player in the band. A couple of months after that, I got my first paying gig. We were real bad. [Laughter]

WJN: That's where we all start.

Ross: We got a job playing for a teen dance at a local community center on a Saturday night. We knew four of five songs and we played them over and over again, all night long. At the end of the night I got eleven bucks. [Laughter] I couldn't believe it. I had eleven bucks in my hand!

WJN: So did you at that point think, music career?

Ross: No. I just liked playing music. I went through high school and moved up here to go to college. I went to Eastern, but I lived in Ann Arbor the whole time.

WJN: What did you study at Eastern?

Ross: Psychology. I got my degree in psychology, but I played music throughout college. I played bluegrass in a band called Stony Creek, back in the '70s for three or four years. We had an every Friday and Saturday night gig at the Spaghetti Bender in Ypsilanti. I got real sick of bluegrass, but it was good money. It paid my rent.

Then I moved with my girlfriend, who is now my wife, to Lansing, because she was going to medical school at Michigan State. And I fell in with the Elderly Instruments crowd. [WJN note: Elderly Instruments is one of the largest, best known folk music instrument stores in the country.] I started playing with the Lost World String Band. I'm still playing with them. We played on Prairie Home Companion a couple of times. That has gotten us a lot of gigs. It's amazing how many doors that opened for us.

WJN: What is your day job, now. Did you continue with psychology?

Ross: No. I graduated with a psychology degree and immediately became a full-time musician. [Laughter] While I was playing with Lost World, you know, we were making enough money to starve. I was also working at Elderly Instruments and giving music lessons. That helped pay the rent. I did that till I was 29 years old. That year, Lost World was putting out our first LP. For a year before we put out the LP we'd go to all our gigs with a little spiral notebook, put it on the front of the stage and tell people, "We're putting out an album, write your name down on the list and we'll send you a letter when the album comes out." So, a couple of weeks before the album came out, Paul Winder, our fiddle player, who was then working as a computer programmer at Michigan State, said to me, "You want to see what I do every day?" He said, "We have to write a program to generate mailing labels, so we can send people notification about this LP." You know, back then you couldn't buy programs. You had to write all this stuff yourself. So I went with

him to his office and he showed me how computer programs work. And it just made sense to me. It made total sense how it all worked, and I decided, "Well, you know the music thing is OK, but I would like to have a nice steady paycheck coming in." So I went back to Washtenaw Community College and I got a two-year Information Sciences degree in nine months because I already had a Bachelor's Degree. I started working as a programmer in 1983.

WJN: And that's what you've done since?

Ross: Yes. I started at little companies around Ann Arbor that had great ideas, but went out



Gerald Ross

of business. Then in 1991 I started working at the University as a programmer. And I've risen up through the ranks, [Gerald adopts a mock-pompous tone] and now I'm a senior software engineer!

WJN: What kind of music did you listen to as a kid?

Ross: My mother and father's record collection had the Barry Sisters, they had Theodore Bikel. My grandmother lived in our neighborhood in Detroit, and in her basement she had one of those windup Victrolas, and she had all these old 78s, old Yiddish klezmer 78s. Remember on the TV show, *Hee-Haw*, how they'd play the banjo real fast, then stop and tell a joke? She had these klezmer records where they did the same thing! They'd play the clarinet real fast, then they'd stop and tell a joke in Yiddish. [Laughter] And I would listen to those records. But the funny thing was, she had all these klezmer records, but buried in there was a Chuck Berry 78 of *Johnny B. Good*. [Laughter] I don't know where that came from.

And then, you know, growing up in the 1960s we had Beatles records and all sorts of things. I liked the acoustic music, the folksy stuff.

WJN: When did you discover the ukulele and steel guitar?

Ross: Steel actually started before bluegrass. For five or six months I was in a Western Swing band called Armadillo Rose in Ann Arbor. Mark Erlewine of the Erlewine brothers played pedal steel in that band. I was exposed to that music then, but that was pedal steel guitar. I don't play the pedal steel guitar. I play the electric lap steel. That's the big reli-

gious divide in the steel guitar world.

When I was with Lost World I played slide guitar, blues slide guitar in open D tuning. I always liked the sound of Hawaiian music but I couldn't figure out how they got that sound. I just couldn't get it out of open D tuning. And there was no instructional material for this kind of music back then.

In 1997, my wife and my two sons went to Disney World in Florida for a vacation. We went to the Polynesian Review, and they had a really good Hawaiian band there. They had a wonderful steel guitar player who I've since become friends with. I watched the whole show, came home and said, "OK, you gotta figure out how to do this." I went up to Elderly, bought a steel guitar, started looking around to see where I could learn to play this thing, and found out about the Hawaiian Steel Guitar Association. They have a yearly convention in Joliet, Illinois. So, I went there by myself. I was scared. I didn't know anyone there. I didn't know what to expect. It was incredible. It was the friendliest group of people. They took me under their wing. They said, "No, you're doing it all wrong." They showed me how to tune it to get the Hawaiian sound and all of a sudden this whole world opened up.

WJN: And that's how the ukulele came about, too?

Ross: No, that's just since 2004. When I worked at Elderly we sold ukuleles. I knew how to play a couple of chords. I never really paid much attention to it. In December of 2004, I wanted to buy myself a present and I went on the Internet and I saw this really cool ukulele, all solid wood, for \$150 bucks. I said, "What the hell, it'll be fun. I'll leave it on the coffee table. It's small, I can easily grab it, play a few tunes." So it came, and it was a pretty good instrument. It played beautifully all up and down the neck, it had nice tone.

I have a recording studio in my basement, where I record into my computer. After I had the uke for a month or so, I was accumulating a nice repertoire of tunes, and I noticed that there was a bulletin board for ukulele players on the Internet and some people were posting songs. So, I recorded two songs, and I posted them on the Flea Market Music Bulletin Board. Literally, within fifteen minutes, I was getting emails. "How long have you been playing? What tunings do you use? Who are your influences? Do you give lessons? Can I come over to your house?"

Honestly, when I bought that uke, I thought I was the only person in the world still playing them. [Laughter] I didn't know how big the whole thing was. Those two songs rocketed me to stardom in the ukulele world! [Laughter] Then I recorded a couple more songs, (by now I have 30 or 40 songs on my website that people can download for free) and more and more people started hearing me and I decided to put out a CD. I now have another one out and I'm working on a third one.

With that first CD and the Internet, I started getting gigs. I started getting invited to all these ukulele festivals. I was even invited to the Maui Festival this year, which sounds very impressive, but it's spelled M.A.U.I, which stands for the Mid-Atlantic Ukulele Invitational, [Laughter] held in Annapolis, Maryland.

Continued on page 26

Going to your company's holiday party?

Don't feel left out or be forced
to nibble on carrots sticks and water.

Quality Kosher Catering Plated Carry-out Meals

(Available to all area Hotels, Restaurants,
Catering Halls and Private Homes)

Beautifully prepared by our expert chefs,
plated on China dishes with Silverware
and sealed by our Moshgach (kosher supervisor)

Hard-Crusted Dinner Roll
Fresh Garden Salad with Dressing
Chicken or Fish Entrée Selections
Starch and Vegetable to compliment your entree
Variety of Desserts to choose from

\$50.00 per meal (2 meal minimum)
Delivery available

CALL 248-352-7758
WWW.QUALITYKOSHER.COM

Mention this ad for 5% discount or Charitable donation

Stories from Bishop Tutu

Rabbi Robert Levy, special to the WJN

Archbishop Desmond Tutu told this story. Recently in Amsterdam a 400 year old elementary school honored Bishop Tutu. The school was renamed the Desmond Tutu School. At the ceremony to mark the change, a young student from the school asked the Archbishop if he were the school's founder.

The mistake was not so far from the truth as Bishop Tutu is one of those founders of modern righteous. We live in a world awash with opportunities for inhumanity on ever growing scales. Desmond Tutu is a foundation stone for justice.

Tutu came to Hill Auditorium on October 29 to accept the University of Michigan Wallenberg Medal and give the Raoul Wallenberg Lecture. Wallenberg and Tutu are well placed in the same thought. Without them and precious other few, our age would be far darker: with them goodness has more than once prevailed over the tide of evil. Tutu is a pastor to the world and a champion for humanity.

He said, "We are the God carriers. Our worth is intrinsic. Each one of us is a stand in for God." Perhaps not the first time such sentiments were ever uttered. Several rabbinic maxims come to mind. Yet here stood a man acquainted with the evil of oppression bordering on servitude who prevailed with holiness.

Another story: In South Africa most white people did not bother to learn the names of their black servants. The women were all called "Sarah," and the men "boy." His father was a school headmaster called "boy." As a child, Tutu wondered how his father bore this public humiliation. Then soon after returning to South

Africa from England he learned. His daughter wanted to play in a playground with some other children. Over her dismay and protests he needed to refuse her innocent request. Such is the truest cost of oppression. As Bishop Tutu said, "Dignity trod under foot."

From his greeting of "Good evening," and our response, Archbishop Tutu showed humanity, not achievement; gentleness, not deserved greatness. The lecture was marked by friendly wisdom, not an expert's knowledge. A pastor's touch.

There was righteous indignation. A finger pointed at the evils of the world. No one was led to believe that a sweet, kind, Godly disposition would fix the world. Yet the charge to fight for righteous rested on the foundation of God and God's goodness.

He told a story of a woman who felt enriched by the terrorist attack that left her to this day filled with shrapnel. He told stories of ordinary human beings who committed the unspeakable. He told us that we can be that evil and that, more gloriously, we have the incredible capacity for goodness, for transcendence, for kindness.

Tutu pointed us to a world in which the strutting evil falls under the power of love. Yes, voting for the first time at the age of 63 in the land of his birth, Bishop Tutu told us of love. And as we were gathered in admiration, he thanked us in deep honesty and joyous laughter for our part in the struggle for South African freedom. Though he jokingly made us all citizens of South Africa, we seriously felt kinship with this rock of goodness. ■

Gerald Ross, continued from page 25

WJN: The last time I saw you in concert you sat in with the Cleveland-based klezmer band, Yiddishe Cup, at the Ark Coffeehouse. It was fun to hear you play pedal steel with them. Not your typical klezmer instrument!

Ross: It's comic relief. You know, the Jewish guy on the Hawaiian guitar.

WJN: How did you and Yiddishe Cup meet?

Ross: My wife is an alumna of U-M and in the late '90s, she said, "We've heard about this Camp Michigania thing. Let's give it a try one year." So we went up to Michigania and we walked into this crowd of people that have known each other for years and the first night you're there, if you're a newcomer you get up and introduce yourself and then all the old timers introduce themselves. After my wife and I introduced ourselves, Bert Stratton stood up. And everyone has known Bert for years there. He said, "Hi, my name is Bert Stratton and I'm a klezmer musician." And everyone in the room laughed. So, afterwards, I walked up to him and I said, "Are you really a klezmer musician, or were you just joking back there?" He said, "No, I really am. I've got my clarinet back in my room." I said, "Well, I've got my guitar here. Do you want to play some tunes?" We played tunes together all week long at Michigania.

WJN: How about music in your family now? Are your kids also musicians?

Ross: My oldest son, David, is 23, and Jonathan is 19, and they're both musicians. They both went to Pioneer and David played saxophone in the band and Jonathan played trumpet. But they each have three or four guitars; both play bass and ukulele, because there's always some laying around. So it's really easy to play music with them at home.

WJN: Twenty years ago did you have any idea that this is what you'd be doing in music now?

Ross: No. To be really honest with you, it's been the ukulele and the steel guitar that have opened everything up for me. I've always played guitar, and I've always thought I was a pretty good guitar player, but there are a zillion guitar players out there and there are a zillion guitar players that are better than me out there. [Laughter] But with the ukulele and steel guitar, I've found this really nice little niche. People seem to really like it and I'm getting better gigs with the steel and the uke than I did with the guitar. The scary thing is that I'm considered an old timer now. I don't know how the hell that happened! [Laughter]

One thing I really like about the ukulele, I notice when I go to these weeklong camps, or weekend long camps, most of the people who go to those things are baby boomers. Some of them are people who gave up music. They played guitar when they were in college or high school and they gave up for whatever reason. They got tired of it, they couldn't get past the F chord.

WJN: Bar chords, the bane of all beginning guitarists.

Ross: Yes, bar chords. And they decided they were total failures. Well, many times, they weren't failures, they just had lousy instruments. They couldn't push the strings to the fingerboard. There is no way anyone could play those instruments. But when I go to the uke camps now, it's amazing to see these people play the ukulele, because it's so easy to get a pleasant sound out of it, so easy and so fast. And all of a sudden they have music in their lives again. It's really nice to see. ■

HAPPY CHANUKAH

Spread
the
light
of the
season!



www.hillers.com

Hillers's

**U.S. 23 & WASHTENAW
IN THE ARBORLAND MALL**

**WE ARE PROUD TO FEATURE MANY
FINE FOODS FROM ISRAEL**

WIN A \$100 HILLER'S GIFT CARD
register online www.hillers.com/register

