

May 2025 Hebrew Tabernacle Officer and Board Candidates

Candidate for Board President – Michael Klein



I would be honored to be considered for the position of President of the Hebrew Tabernacle. I am proud to have been born and raised in Washington Heights and of the third generation. I attended Hebrew School at Mt. Sinai, although I was brought up in a family with Jewish values in the Reform Movement. I began working professionally immediately after I graduated from Baruch College. I retired from MTA New York City Transit as a Senior Director back in March of 2022 after working there for 38.6 years. I've supervised a diverse staff while administrating multimillion dollar capital construction projects. This has freed up more time to devote to the Hebrew Tabernacle (HT). Melanie and I became part of the HT family in 1999 when we were looking for the right place for our wedding. Since then, we have been involved in synagogue life cycle-events from baby naming, B'nei Mitzvahs to remembering loved ones.

I have volunteered in many capacities, serving as a member of the Board of Trustees, Associate Treasurer, and Vice President. I am the Chair of the Building, Seder, Ritual Committees and serve on the Licensing Committee, a strong supporter of the Yad b'Yad (Legacy of the Sisterhood). I was honored to receive the Community Leadership award at the HT gala. You will usually find me at services, participating and making sure everything is as it should be. I take my role as a Jew very seriously, guarding our Torahs, making sure they are properly handled and cared for. Growing up and remaining in this community with my immediate family has allowed me to develop and maintain friendships at various houses of worship and local organizations.

Throughout the years I have volunteered with many HT events. Melanie and our daughter Julia (a proud Hebrew School grad) volunteer with me for all sorts of things, like the Purim Carnival, Rummage Sale, and Community Passover Seder with me, just to mention a few. In the day-to-day life of HT I have worked on many grants such as energy efficient lighting upgrade, parapet wall and roof restoration and have assisted with many others. In addition to maintaining the mechanics and systems for our building and working hand in hand with our custodians, I have been involved in major projects such as replacing drain lines for the roof, backyard and ground floor bathrooms, installation of a hot water heater, new gas lines the exhaust / fire suppression system for the kitchen as well as the installation of the air-conditioning system. I have saved the congregation thousands of dollars by doing projects on my own and have been there in times of emergencies. Currently I am working with the Building Committee on a comprehensive phased plan for infrastructure repairs and continued plastering and painting throughout the building.

I have attended the URJ Congregational Bootcamp Conference to increase and augment the experience I have gained, with practical and current concepts and methods. I would love to apply modern methods to my old-time goals of increasing membership, engaging the younger generations to carry the torch and keep Judaism alive in their lives. I want to continue reaching out and visit our senior and homebound congregants with our Chesed Committee. Some of my top priorities are to keep working on making Hebrew Tabernacle a fully operational synagogue and community center, setting us on sound financial footing and keeping an eye on the future while celebrating the past.

At this point in my Jewish life's journey, I feel the time is right to take this next important step. I find myself well placed, well informed to increase my function on the board, serving the Hebrew Tabernacle in the ultimate capacity. I appreciate your support and help in electing me President of Hebrew Tabernacle.

Candidate for Vice President - Rebecca Gonzalez



I would be honored to serve a two-year term as Vice President on the Hebrew Tabernacle's Executive Committee. It has been a true honor to serve on the Board of Directors over the past two years, alongside so many devoted congregants who give their time, expertise, and energy to strengthen our community.

I've been a public elementary school teacher on the Upper West Side for more than 15 years, and I'm also a proud parent of two children who attend the Hebrew Tabernacle school. My daughter, Julia—who will turn 12 this summer—is approaching her Bat Mitzvah, and my son, Alex, is 7. Both have flourished in the warm and welcoming environment of the Hebrew Tabernacle, and as a family, we deeply value the

spirited, multi-generational family services and shared Shabbat dinners that bring us all together. I look forward to continuing to grow within this community. It's deeply important to me to pass on Jewish traditions, values, and rituals to my children—not only as part of their heritage, but as a source of connection and belonging. I see the Hebrew Tabernacle as a kind of rich soil—nurturing a sense of identity, community, and continuity in which my children, and all of us, can continue to grow and put down roots.

I would be honored to serve in this new role and to contribute in whatever ways I can to the future of our HT. I'm excited to continue building and supporting our community together.

Candidate for Vice President – Desma Holcomb



I would be honored to serve the Hebrew Tabernacle community and the Board as Vice President. As Board President and a Board member, I have been committed to working with all of you to fulfill our mission—nurturing a love of Judaism among adults and children, helping repair the world, and engaging leaders among both our new and longtime members. I served on the Search Committee which brought us Rabbi Paula Feldstein. As a leader at HT, I support diverse religious services for our diverse membership. I have motivated neighbors to join and members to offer volunteer skills, time, and funds.

I retired as Director of Labor Education at a union, the NYS Nurses Association. I have used my skills in education and organizing for our Social Action Committee. With my master's in economics, I enjoy analyzing our finances and planning our fiscal future.

My active involvement in synagogue life started three decades ago when Miriam Frank & I co-chaired the Hebrew School at Beth Am. Our daughter Ruth Frank-Holcomb was in elementary school then, and I became a Jew by choice. After we joined the HT family, Ruth became Bat Mitzvah. I was so happy to marry Miriam in 2010—after a very long engagement (24 yrs)—under the chuppah in our sanctuary.

Candidate for Vice President – Rita Hamburg



I would be honored to serve a third term as a vice president of The Hebrew Tabernacle (HT). During my vice-presidency, I have been active on several dynamic and rewarding committees including: Membership, Program and Social Action.

Together with Sara Silver, our former assistant treasurer, I have helped organize NY Blood Drives at HT every quarter for the last several years. In partnership with New-York Presbyterian Hospital, I have also helped arrange for the annual flu shot clinic at HT. These

programs will continue into the future.

For the past 35 years, I have led weekly, 90-minute, co-ed, gentle stretching/strengthening exercise classes for adults in HT's social hall. The classes take place on Monday evenings from 7:00p-8:30p and Friday mornings, from 10:00-11:30a. As an experienced physical therapist, I bring my expertise in musculo-skeletal conditions to these classes by tailoring the exercises to the participants' needs. The cost for each session is \$20 and I donate 100% of the proceeds to HT. I have brought in nearly \$8000 this year and the monies, which are placed in the Tabernacle's operating budget, pay for the staffing and other costs related to the quarterly emergency blood drives.

Two generations of the Hamburg family have been actively involved in the leadership of HT for over 50 years and counting. My father-in-law, Dr. Max Hamburg, was a president of the Tabernacle in the 1970's and his wife, Traude Hamburg, was the Sisterhood President for many years. My husband Mark is a former President of HT (1999-2004), and I have served as a Tabernacle VP and, for 20 years, as a member of its Board of Trustees. In March, 2021, I retired from my position as the Site Director of Rehabilitation Therapies at NewYork-Presbyterian Hospital, Columbia University Irving Medical Center, after having worked there for 35 years.

My email address is rita.hamburg@gmail.com. Please contact me if you have any questions about the exercise class; if you have ideas about new programs; or if you want me to reach out to prospective members.

I look forward to continuing working energetically and cooperatively with the Tabernacle's executive board and its board of trustees; with its clergy and with the other Tabernacle committees and constituents towards the goals of increasing our membership and our community involvement.

Candidate for Secretary – Dr. Laurie Slodounik



I am a clinical psychologist and early childhood educator who has lived in Hudson Heights since 2009. I currently work as the Early Childhood Psychologist of the Abraham Joshua Heschel School, a pluralistic, progressive Jewish day school near Columbus Circle.

Along with my husband, Aaron, and my two children, Ezra and Amos, I have been an active participant in the HT congregation for over ten years. I joyfully co-led Tot Shabbat services for several years, before happily handing the reins to Rabbi Paula. Currently I am the secretary of the Social Action Committee and an active member of

the team that has organized and run Mitzvah Day for the past two years. I began on the board as co-chair of the Tot Committee, and am currently serving as one of our Vice Presidents. My family and I are eager participants in our Hebrew School and love attending family services regularly. I feel profoundly grateful for the warm, inclusive, creative, and meaningful Jewish community that we are building together under Rabbi Paula's inspiring leadership. I am excited by the opportunity to contribute further to our community as Board Secretary.

Candidate for Treasurer – Todd Rubenstein



I have been involved in Hebrew Tabernacle's budget as Treasurer and Associate Treasurer for many years. In the past year I assisted with the Social Hall Renovation and making the basement area accessible for users with disabilities. We have a wheel chair lift, a fully accessible toilet and with member involvement we now have a social hall that can be used by our membership for all kinds of events.

In prior years I have worked closely with our committees in getting a fully functional modern air-conditioning. This allows us to use our building year-round. I have worked to help bring in clergy that can not only run services but can engage the congregation for all life cycle events. I will continue to work to bring our congregation to better things in the coming years.

Candidate for Associate Treasurer & Board Member – Iris Snyder



My husband and I have lived in Washington Heights since 2006, and absolutely love this neighborhood. We've been a part of the Hebrew Tabernacle community since our oldest, Elijah, participated in the Tot Shabbat program when he was a toddler (he's 15 now). Both our sons have attended Hebrew School for 7 years and each has looked forward to class every week as Shelly and the teachers teach Hebrew and religion in such a fun and engaging way! And, their Bar Mitzvahs at Hebrew Tabernacle with Rabbi Paula were such a joyous occasion! Our friends and family all commented on what a lovely and warm community we have, and we completely agree!

We have made great friendships through our years at the synagogue and it's been wonderful the last few months to be able to contribute to the finance committee. My professional background has been focused on Finance in the food and beverage industry for the past 20 years. I am currently the CFO of Oliver Winery. I love working with numbers, but I also like coaching and mentoring others (reach out if you need Excel tips!). It's been great working closely with Treasurer Todd Rubinstein and Bookkeeper Jesse Gerber over the last 1.5 years, and I would be thrilled to continue that work as Associate Treasurer.

Candidate for Board – Ben Epstein



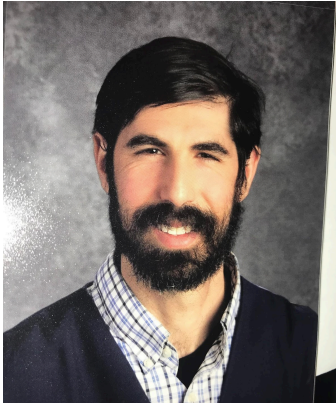
I was born in Jerusalem and raised on the Upper West Side where my identity as a Jew was shaped. My parents were active members of the egalitarian West Side Minyan and deeply engaged in political and social issues. With that foundation, I developed a strong appreciation for core Jewish values such as social justice, inclusivity, and compassion. Since 2006, my wife Ulrika and I have made our home in Washington Heights. As we became young parents, we searched for a Jewish community in which to raise our daughters and found Hebrew Tabernacle. Under Rabbi Paula's leadership, it has met our needs not just as a synagogue, but a Jewish home for our family.

Our daughter Annika celebrated her bat mitzvah here and now volunteers in the Hebrew school, where our younger daughter Eliana is currently a student.

Professionally, I'm a media consultant, television producer and director. Over the years, I've produced hundreds of hours of programming, including for hit shows like American Pickers and Undercover Boss. I've also show-run and developed new formats for brands and networks such as Discovery, A&E, and Sundance. I recently launched a media consulting startup that helps organizations and leaders tell their stories with clarity, authenticity, and impact.

I would be honored to join the board of Hebrew Tabernacle and work collaboratively to ensure our community grows and thrives. I hope to use my experiences and skills to amplify our congregation's voice, vision, and values—both within and beyond our walls.

Candidate for Board – Alex Gordon



I had not found a Jewish home until I started attending Hebrew Tabernacle, and I thank Hebrew Tabernacle for helping me reconnect with my practice of Judaism. My family is primarily secular, and though I was a Bar Mitzvah, I did not belong to a Jewish community. My wife Michelle is Unitarian, so I bring the experience of being part of a mixed family. I joined Hebrew Tabernacle in 2022 when my daughter Madelyn asked to begin Hebrew School in preparation for her bat Mitzvah. Now both our children attend Hebrew School. I have felt warmly welcomed and accepted at services and have enjoyed the supportive community here. I hope to serve on the board to support the community and pay forward the warm and welcoming experience of coming here.

I moved to New York City in 2004 to pursue a career in theater and wound up teaching theater, math and science across middle school and college for the past 19 years. Currently I am a science teacher at Manhattan East. Michelle and I have lived in Inwood the past 18 years. We have long appreciated the art shows and community around Hebrew Tabernacle. I bring years of experience as an educator and look forward to supporting the vibrant and engaging Hebrew school as a board member.

Candidate for Board – Denny Chern-Kelk D. D. S.



Denny is a native New Yorker, born and raised in Washington Heights. A graduate of PS/IS 187 and later NYU WSUC and NYU College of Dentistry, she is currently a clinic site director at Bronx Care Health System's Department of Dentistry. She has been an active board member since her daughter Rachel was in Hebrew school. Denny is a past Vice President, one time acting President, and has been an active member of the building committee throughout some of the most complex projects (like the gas line, water lines, ansul system and air conditioner just to name a few). Currently co chair of the building committee, formerly chair of the rabbinical search committee that selected Rabbi Paula, and chair of the Cantorial search committee when Rabbi Paula convinced Cantor Wolff to join our clergy, Denny has also helped in the kitchen with Kiddushes, and holiday

events and has a soft spot in her heart for the Purim Carnival that she passed on (after a decade of running it) to Loren. Denny has a lot of ideas and energy and hopes to continue to support Hebrew Tabernacle as an active member of the board.

Candidate for Board – Stephane Sesquin



I was born in France and grew up in Paris. My family is Ashkenazi from Eastern Europe and arrived in France in Late 1920s (Poland on my mother's side and Ukraine/Lithuania on my father's side, my father was born Szeskin and the name was changed after the war). I grew up in a fairly secular environment but with a strong Jewish culture. I was Bar mitzva-ed at the temple of the Place des Vosges in Paris Marais district. When I grew up, it was only conservative temples that existed and I feel closer to the HT reform style.

I came to study in the early 2000s in NYC and met my now wife Amanda. We lived in Paris for a few years and moved back to NYC in 2008 and settled on Cabrini Blvd in 2009 where we had our 2 sons. (Jonah will be having his bar mitzvah this May while Samuel had his 2 years ago). I have been working in the financial software field.

We are very attached to the neighborhood and we believe the Hebrew Tabernacle is a big part of it. I would bring to the Board my experiences of being part of a mixed marriage, being foreign (and now a US citizen), and being a parent of kids brought up in the neighborhood. I have enjoyed being part of the HT community and board (for the past 2 years) and think being part of the board is a great way to give back to the community and participate in it.