



Greater
New Orleans
Section

National Council of Jewish Women

Bulletin

www.NCJWneworleans.org

Winter 2025-26

A FAITH IN THE FUTURE. A BELIEF IN ACTION.



Leslie Jacobs
2026 Hannah G. Solomon Award Recipient

National Council of Jewish Women, Greater New Orleans Section
invites you to join us for the

Hannah G. Solomon Award Luncheon

honoring Leslie Jacobs

Monday, February 2, 2026

Audubon Tea Room
6500 Magazine St.

11:30 a.m. – Cash Bar • Noon – Luncheon

Please send your reservation payable to NCJW GNO by January 22

c/o Kathy Shepard
3311 State Street Dr., New Orleans, LA 70125

\$75 per person • Reserved tables for 8 to 10 people
Complimentary parking

To make reservations online go to:
www.NCJWneworleans.org



Reflections from the NCJW Opening Event & Fall Meeting

This past November, I had the honor of moderating NCJW GNO's Opening Event & Fall Meeting at Congregation Gates of Prayer. Over 75 community members gathered to learn about one of the most urgent issues of our time: immigration and deportation. Our panel featured leaders whose work touches this issue from different angles – government, legal advocacy, community organizing, and direct support to immigrant families here in Louisiana.

What we heard was sobering.

Immigrant families, asylum seekers, and the advocates who support them are desperately trying to navigate an already complex system that is shifting rapidly. The people suffering the most are those

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The panelists at the Opening Event & Fall Meeting with moderator Aaron Bloch. From left: Allyson "Al" Page, Executive Director of Immigration Services and Legal Advocacy (ISLA), Marcela Hernández, Deputy Director of Familias Unidas en Acción, Leticia Casildo, Executive Director of Familias Unidas en Acción, and Alanna Rosenberg, former Section Chief at the New Orleans Asylum Office

Leslie Jacobs: Changing Schoolchildren's Lives for the Better

By Gail Naron Chalew

Since her Newman days when she chaired the Philanthropic Club and changed its name to Actions, Leslie Jacobs has been determined to use her "superpowers" – her strategic thinking skills, her tenacity, her willingness to work hard, and her strong sense of mission – to make a positive impact on the New Orleans community.

In honor of her more than forty years of volunteer involvement that dramatically revamped – and improved – the public education system in New Orleans, Leslie will receive the 2026 Hannah G. Solomon Award on Monday, February 2, at the Audubon Tea Room.

After graduating from Cornell, returning to New Orleans to work with her brother Steve in her family's insurance business, and with a new baby, Leslie began to look for ways to become involved in the community. When she toured Laurel, a public elementary school in the Garden District, the opportunity just "sang" to her, and the Rosenthal Agency became a corporate partner. In typical Leslie fashion, the business relationship turned into a true partnership – not a one-way relationship in which the company would simply fund the school's special programs. Instead, Leslie and her brother worked with the school to improve its ability to educate its students.

This partnership laid the groundwork for Leslie's key role in transforming New Orleans' public schools into a system of charter schools that has since become the most improved school district in the nation. What she saw at Laurel were children whose potential was, tragically, not being fulfilled: they were being failed by the system. This experience drove her to serve for three years on the Orleans Parish School Board, which she describes as a time when she "never worked so hard and accomplished so little," before being appointed by then-Governor Foster to the state board of education (BESE), where she served for twelve years and became the lead architect of New Orleans' reenvisioned education system.

Leslie attributes her ability to create positive change both to her knowledge of how to get the right people in the room and her desire to "be in the room where it happens." She notes, "My role is providing the connective tissue, to weave things together, to build trust among people. I also am data-driven, and accountability guides nearly every step I take."

She loves to "solve puzzles" and used this skill to identify the key issue of educational reform, which was "to free individual schools from centralized control and to give each one the autonomy to create its own budget and hire and fire staff," as Leslie puts it. "Becoming charter schools seemed to be the most effective way to achieve that goal," she adds.

Noting that a fundamental belief in the power of education is "built into my DNA," Leslie cites her mother, the first female tenured full professor at Loyola University, as a role model. Her mother also modeled strength in holding to unpopular beliefs: she was a confirmed atheist at a time when that was quite controversial.

In a similar vein, Leslie has been viewed as a contentious public figure but recognizes that anyone who is a changemaker inevitably stirs up controversy and "breaks some eggs." She has been spat on and accused of profiteering, and her motives and personality have been attacked. She advises, "Anyone who creates real reform has to have a layer of Plexiglas surrounding them. I never read social media, and I do my best to ignore those attacks."

Her most powerful counterweight to these attacks, however, is her devotion to her mission: "Having students reach their full potential is what sustains me. I know I have changed the trajectory of tens of thousands of young people, who now have better lives because of what I did."

Although Leslie and her husband, Scott, have always maintained a residence in New Orleans, since 2018 they have returned only for long visits. They are now planning to spend much more time here. One reason for

their return is that Leslie's mission has not yet been fulfilled. In a recent email explaining why she is rebooting Educate Now!, the education advocacy organization she founded in 2008, Leslie wrote, "Here we are, twenty years after Katrina with New Orleans' education story still unfolding, and I find there are new issues that need distilling and new information that needs to be disseminated." Her first issue is to stop the city from diverting tax revenue designated for schools to its own budget.

Certainly, Leslie will continue to use her unique talents and skills to measurably improve the lives of New Orleans' schoolchildren.

Reflections from the NCJW Opening Event

(continued from page 1)

who came here seeking safety and stability, who work, raise families, and contribute to our communities. And yet many now fear leaving their homes for work, school, worship, medical appointments, or even groceries.

What we heard from the panelists is even more alarming: people in Louisiana are being detained past legal deadlines, deported despite valid court orders, and held in remote facilities in conditions that defy dignity. Our state now has the second-highest number of immigration detainees in the country.

The room's response made clear that our Jewish community feels the urgency of this moment. Guided by our own history – as immigrants, refugees, and survivors – we understand what it means to be vulnerable in systems of power. From our experience as activists and allies during the Civil Rights Movement, we also know how to show up when it's risky and hard.

We are facing the civil rights challenge of our time. Let's meet this moment together.

Aaron Bloch

Director of Jewish Multicultural & Governmental Affairs, Jewish Federation of Greater New Orleans

Want to help our immigrant neighbors?

Please email Lilli Geltman Vohs at lhgeltman@gmail.com to learn more about opportunities to volunteer your time and skills.



Members of the Hannah G. Solomon Award Committee surprising 2026 recipient Leslie Jacobs. Standing from left: Wendy Goldberg (Committee Co-Chair), Ina Weber Davis and Barbara Kaplinsky. Seated: Leslie Jacobs (award recipient), Susan Greenberg, Leslie Fischman, Melanie Bronfin (Committee Co-Chair) and Dana Shepard. Not pictured: Diana Mann, Madalyn Schenk, Kathy Shepard and Lilli Geltman Vohs

Presidential MESSAGE



As we step into a new year, we are reminded of the enduring values that have guided the National Council of Jewish Women for more than a century: compassion, courage, and an unwavering commitment to advancing the well-being of women, children, and families. Each year invites us to recommit ourselves to these principles – but this year, perhaps more than ever, we feel the urgency and the promise of our collective work.

We are so proud of our accomplishments thus far. We began the year working with Together New Orleans to ratify the future of the city platform. This project supports our commitment to improve life for the citizens of New Orleans.

In early November, our opening event was a panel discussion on “Immigration and Deportation & the Impact on Our Community.” Please see Aaron Bloch’s article in this newsletter. We were impressed by the number of attendees who reached out to help the NOLA immigration community.

NCJW® | Greater New Orleans Section

National Council of Jewish Women

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Our Advocacy Committee continues to fight for the rights of people on many levels. We currently have many challenges to voter registration laws at both federal and state levels. The changes primarily center on new requirements for proof of U.S. citizenship, mail-in voting rules and restrictions on voter registration drives. Since August, non-governmental organizations have been barred from offering voter registration services at USCIS facilities during naturalization ceremonies. For years, this has been a vital part of our outreach under the passionate leadership of Sylvia Finger. The National Council of Jewish Women, Greater New Orleans Section is a plaintiff in a lawsuit that challenges this new policy.

As we embark on this new year, let us carry with us a spirit of hope, a commitment to justice, and a belief in the collective power we hold. Together, we can ensure that the year ahead is not only brighter – but more just, more compassionate, and more connected.

Susan Greenberg and Diana Mann



National Council of Jewish Women

**Join us for
Reproductive Rights Shabbat
at Shir Chadash**
with guest speaker
Dr. Carol Roberts Gerson

Friday, February 27
3737 W Esplanade Ave.
6:15 p.m. Shabbat services
Dinner and presentation to follow



Past Presidents' Cabinet Annual Meeting and Luncheon

The NCJW GNO Past Presidents' Cabinet gathered for its annual meeting and luncheon at Rizzuto's Ristorante & Chop House on November 7. Co-Presidents Diana Mann and Susan Greenberg presented their State of the Section and were welcomed into the esteemed club. Thank you to June Leopold and Shellye Farber for chairing the event.



Seated from left: June Leopold, Barbara Kaplinsky, Beth Hershberg and Dana Shepard. Standing: Loel Samuel, Susan Greenberg, Barb Herman, Diana Mann, Shellye Farber, Gail Pesses and Susan Hess

Strength In Numbers



Our shared efforts yield greater volunteer impact,
ensure philanthropic support goes further,
and foster a thriving community.
We are stronger together.

Please support the 2025-26 Personal Giving Campaign

You may donate online at www.ncjwneworleans.org or contact NCJW at (504) 861-7788 or Caroline Good at carolineleighgood@gmail.com.

Friendship and Photographs



Gathering at NOMA on October 29, members enjoyed each other's company over lunch followed by docent-led tours of two evocative photography exhibitions: "The View from Here: Women Photographers of the American Landscape" and "Dawoud Bey's Elegy," an exploration of early African American experiences as imagined through historical landscapes. Thank you to Vivian Cahn for arranging this program and to Naomi Kornman, member and docent, for her expertise and insights.

Gardening for Homeless Women and Children



In October, several of us put our sun hats on and got our hands dirty as part of the NCJW Community Service Gardening Project at the New Orleans Women and Children's Shelter. The shelter offers case management, life skills, education, employment assistance and 18 months of post-residential support for homeless parents and their children. Volunteers included Fran Dinehart, Tricia Kirschman, Leslie Rau, Ronda Kottle, Amanda DeLeon, Susan Greenberg and Carol Newman.



Bringing Awareness to Trans Lives

On November 18, in partnership with JPNOLA and Forum for Equality, we co-hosted an educational and equally powerful documentary film screening of "Disclosure: Trans Lives on Screen" followed by a Q&A panel discussion with three prominent local trans activists. The event was well attended, movie snacks were munched and many thoughtful questions were asked of the panelists.

This event was deliberately hosted during Transgender Awareness Week, which seeks to increase understanding of trans community members and issues the community faces, culminating in Transgender Day of Remembrance (November 20), the annual observance that honors the memory of transgender people whose lives have been lost to acts of anti-trans violence each year.



Event co-chairs Nancy Pesses of NCJW (first from left) and David Shulman of JPNOLA (far right) with the panelists Maxx Sizeler, Andrea Romero and Courtney Sharp.



Voting in 2026

Voter registration is a vital part of NCJW GNO's voting rights outreach. Please check our sign-up calendar to volunteer in 2026!



TOGETHER NEW ORLEANS

Together for a Stronger and More Equitable New Orleans

In September, NCJW GNO joined with 1,500 New Orleanians at Xavier University to win commitments from candidates for Mayor and City Council on the Together New Orleans (TNO) People's Platform.



From left: Barbara Kaplinsky, Robin Goldblum and husband Kent Box, Gail Chalew, Monique de la Cour, Sylvia Finger and Diana Mann



The platform, months in the making, focused on cost of living, public works, jobs and reliable energy. Representing NCJW were TNO board member Barbara Kaplinsky, Robin Goldblum, Kent Box, Gail Chalew, Susan Hess, Diana and Chip Mann, Monique de la Cour, Sylvia Finger, Lilli Geltman Vohs, Susan Greenberg and Gail Pesses.

Two months later, Together New Orleans held a rally and press conference on the steps of City Hall to launch the "People's Transition Team," the next phase in TNO's effort to change our city for the better by working with our elected officials and holding them accountable.

"Our view in Together New Orleans is that we need to organize our civic institutions around a specific platform for change, get commitments from candidates to support that platform and then engage hundreds of leaders from those institutions to work like heck to make that platform a reality," said NCJW's community service liaison Barbara Kaplinsky.



Welcome to Our Newest Members!

Amanda DeLeon

Anna Herman

Rabbi Lily Kowalski, RJE

(August 28-December 8, 2025)

Family Fun at the Ogden Museum

In November, NCJW helped with the Ogden Museum of Southern Art's Free Family Day. We enjoyed assisting with three art activities: watercolors, collaging, and stamp art.

The next Ogden Museum Free Family Day will be on **Monday, January 19** (Martin Luther King, Jr. Day). Volunteers can choose between two shifts: 9:30 a.m.-noon and noon-2:30 p.m. Please call or text DeeGee Liniado at (504) 919-4593 to sign up for either or both shifts! No prior art experience required.



Diana and Chip Mann at their art station at the Ogden Museum.

Mezuzahs Made by Moonlighters



Workshop participants show off their beautiful acrylic mezuzah creations.

Moonlighters hosted a mezuzah making workshop with local artist Emma Fick on November 5 at CH Studio Shop on Magazine Street. We had a great time getting creative and chatting with new and old friends. Moonlighters programs are planned quarterly. If you have any ideas for upcoming programming or are interested in getting involved in our committee, please do not hesitate to reach out to Lilli Geltman Vohs at LHGeltman@gmail.com.

Thank You!

THANK YOU to the
JEWISH ENDOWMENT FOUNDATION
for their generous support of NCJW
through an annual distribution from the
BABS AND J.E. ISAACSON MEMORIAL FUND



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OF LOUISIANA

Although Babs is no longer with us, her lasting legacy will continue to support the NCJW initiatives which meant so much to her.

THANK YOU TO THE
OSCAR J. TOLMAS CHARITABLE TRUST
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THROUGH THE ANNUAL NCJW SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM
NCJW APPLAUDS
THE LEGACY OF OSCAR J. TOLMAS



Bushels of Cheer



Board members and officers spent part of their December meeting filling holiday treat bags and making greeting cards for children of the Louisiana Center for Children's Rights. The nonprofit law center helps children caught up in the juvenile justice system so they can thrive in their homes and communities. Ryan Hill, the center's development director, expressed appreciation to the women of NCJW's Greater New Orleans Section for their generosity. "The young people love surprises like these," Hill said. "Just goes to show that a little bit of kindness and love from our community goes a long way."

Celebrating Our Community Service Partners

We were thrilled to celebrate our community service partner unCommon Construction at their new facility in Central City on September 20. The unCommon Campus allows the nonprofit to expand its workforce development programs and provide more opportunities for high school students to gain real-world, work-based learning experience.



Amelia Halstead (second from left) and Diana Mann (far right) of NCJW with Aaron Frumin and Taylor Pettit of unCommon Construction.

Mark your calendars

"Turnaround" Film Screening
JANUARY 15

Ogden Museum Free Family Day
JANUARY 19

Hannah G. Solomon Award Luncheon
FEBRUARY 2

New Members Event
FEBRUARY 26

Repro Shabbat at Shir Chadash
FEBRUARY 27

NCJW Scholarship Program Donations



The Irma M. Isaacson Memorial Scholarship Fund enables the National Council of Jewish Women, Greater New Orleans Section to provide needed financial assistance to Jewish students in New Orleans pursuing academic or vocational goals.

- ◆ Tricia Kirschman
In memory of Betty Smith
- ◆ John and Amy Gainsburgh Haspel
Annual donation
- ◆ Hallie Timm Bonin
In memory of Harold Pesses
- ◆ Walter Isaacson, Lee Isaacson and Nancy Bissinger Timm
In memory of Irma M. Isaacson and Marjorie Isaacson Bissinger

The Clara and Roy Schwarz Book Fund provides each Irma M. Isaacson Memorial Scholarship recipient with additional funds for the purchase of books.

- ◆ John and Amy Gainsburgh Haspel
Annual donation

(as of December 4, 2025)

Birthday Dollars



- ◆ Amy Alexander
- ◆ Rebecca Alexander
- ◆ Margaret B. Epstein
- ◆ Celia L. Katz
- ◆ Carole Cukell Neff
- ◆ Karen Reitman
- ◆ Jane Sizeler
- ◆ Marie Wolf



Greater
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National Council of Jewish Women

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PLEDGE
RECOMMIT TO
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ncjw National Council
of Jewish Women



TURNAROUND

The Reinvention of New Orleans' Public Education System

PRODUCED BY DARCY MCKINNON & ABRAHAM FELIX EDITED BY DAVID OSBORNE
CO-PRODUCED BY CAT MIGUEZ & JILLIAN GODSHALL PRODUCED BY ALEX WILTZ & SAM NGA BLUM ASSOCIATE PRODUCED BY KATIE PHAM
LINE PRODUCED BY RACHEL WITWER ASSISTANT EDITOR ALENA COVER COLOR BY KYOTOCOLOR SOUND MIXED BY MATT COBY MUSIC BY CALI WANG

Bloomberg Philanthropies Gusto

Please join us for a screening of

**"Turnaround: The Reinvention of
New Orleans' Public Education System"**

**Thursday, January 15
5 p.m.**

**The Broad Theater
636 N Broad St.**

This event is co-sponsored by
NCJW and GNO, Inc.

NCJW®
Greater
New Orleans
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National Council of Jewish Women

 **GREATER NEW ORLEANS**
INC
REGIONAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Our 2026 Hannah G. Solomon Award recipient,
Leslie Jacobs, is prominently featured in the film.

Scan the QR code below to RSVP!

