

Mary Sue Grossman Accepts Executive Director Position with Beth Israel



Mary Sue Grossman, Program Director for the Center for Jewish Life, has accepted the position of Executive Director with Beth Israel Synagogue in Omaha. "While it is very difficult to leave my work with the Jewish Federation of Omaha and the CJL, I am excited to accept this position with Beth Israel. It has been such a pleasure to use my abilities to help our wonderful Jewish community, and my new position will allow me to continue with that work in another way," she said. Mary Sue's last day with the JFO is Tuesday, May 31.

Mary Sue joined the management team of what is now the Center for Jewish Life on May 13, 2004. The agency had originally been called the "Bureau of Jewish Education," later changed to "Jewish Education and Library Services." Subsequently it became the "Center for Jewish Education" before establishing the name it has today, the "Center for Jewish Life." "While there were a number of name changes over the years, the mission of the agency has remained essentially the same – 'to

maximize involvement of Omaha's Jewish community in imaginative, compelling and meaningful Jewish experiences'," Mary Sue said. In her years with the agency, Mary Sue has devoted her time and talent to developing and implementing programs tailor-made to fulfilling that mission.

Mary Sue states that it is impossible to identify "favorites" of all the programing she has done, yet she reflected that her involvement with the Partnership 2GETHER program through CJL has been particularly satisfying. The program promotes people-to-people relationships between Israel and communities throughout the world. Omaha is one of 12 additional cities in the U.S. partnering with the city of Akko and the Matte Asher Region. "I have seen so much growth in understanding and appreciation of Israel and Israeli culture through this program," Mary Sue relates. "Working with Partnership has been a true highlight and seeing the many people who have established lasting relationships through this program is quite special," she shared.

The Partnership program is closely related to the Community Shaliach program whose goal is also to make connections between Israel and the United States and to bring Israel to America. Mary Sue has been an integral part of the success of several schlichim from Israel on assignment to Omaha. These committed people have shared their love and knowledge of Israel through programs such as "Eye on Israel" and specialized programs at the synagogues, the schools, the Rose Blumkin Jewish Home, and speaking engagements throughout the city. Mary Sue has been there to help direct, guide, encourage, and support the work of Omaha's schlichim.

Adult education is a cornerstone of the CJL, and Mary Sue has been a leader in developing, organizing, and overseeing numerous programs over the years. From *Introduction to Judaism* to participation in *The Global Day of Jewish Learning*, to the *Friday Learning Series* and the recently developed *Klutznick Learning Series*, hundreds of people have benefitted from the programming in these areas. "I think these programs work well because of the cooperative efforts involved with the synagogues, the

Klutznick Chair of Jewish Civilization at Creighton University, the Natan and Hannah Schwalb Center for Israeli and Jewish Studies at the University of Nebraska Omaha, and all the committed people from the community” Mary Sue emphasized.

Mary Sue’s program expertise has been instrumental in the success of the Jewish Omaha Film Festival, the Jewish Book Month, the Dorothy Kaplan Book Discussion Group, the PJ Library Program, Shalom Baby, and the numerous one-time programs. Her organizational skills and attention to detail have ensured that not only the content but also the logistics of the events were conducted in a professional, efficient, and thorough manner. Mary Sue noted that “This year’s co-sponsorship of the Jewish Omaha Film Festival with the Institute for Holocaust Education was particularly gratifying. The festival experienced record-shattering attendance with over 800 people, and we received a large number of positive comments about the quality of the films shown.”

If one area of her work could be singled out as an area that she cherished the most, it would undoubtedly be the work of administering the scholarship and grant programs. “These programs demonstrate in the most tangible way the commitment the Jewish Federation of Omaha and the Jewish Federation of Omaha Foundation has to our community,” Mary Sue said. “Every year thousands of dollars support the participation of our community’s children and young adults in a wide variety of programs that foster their development and strengthen Jewish identity. What could be more gratifying than that?” These programs include the Jewish Experience Grants for summer residential camp participation; Israel Experience Grants that help with the costs of an educational trip to the country that participants soon consider to be ‘home’; the Passport to Israel program that offers a savings program for families for a future trip to Israel for their children. Mary Sue has also been the administrator for the scholarship program. The majority of the scholarships awarded are need-based and funds are provided from over 40 sources including endowments, foundations, and allocations from the Jewish Federation of Omaha’s Annual Campaign. “The scholarship committee accepts tremendous responsibility in ensuring that funds – which are always limited – are awarded in a fair, equitable, and consistent manner. While I have been responsible for putting together the materials for the committee to review, it is through the hard work of everyone on the committee that the decisions and awards are made. We all share in the joy of seeing what these funds help to accomplish,” Mary Sue said.

In reflecting on her work with the JFO, Mary Sue shared, “I look back on the past 12 years with a bit of amazement and am very proud of being a part of the exciting work that has been done. I have developed so many friendships in this wonderful community and realize that those friendships are perhaps the best part of my years on campus.”

A sampling of comments from Mary Sue’s colleagues speaks highly of the respect others have for the work she has done.

“While serving as the chairperson of Omaha’s Partnership with Israel (P2G) committee, I have been fortunate to work with Mary Sue. She has been my extremely organized and enthusiastic guide, and best of all, she has become a dear friend in the process. I wish her success in her new adventure!” ~ Patty Nogg, Chairperson, P2G Committee-Omaha

“As past president of CJL, I was fortunate to work closely with Mary Sue for several years. Her dedication and meticulousness to her agency will be impossible to replace. The Federation is losing an exceptional employee.” ~ Bonnie Bloch, Past President CJL

"In all of her enthusiasm and knowledge, Mary Sue Grossman has for many years embodied the Center for Jewish Life. For me, this has meant many meaningful and creative opportunities to work on adult education projects through which Mary Sue has enriched the lives of so many members of the Jewish community. But I know that "adult education" is only one of the many areas in which she has provided inspired and inspiring leadership. Personally, I am deeply saddened that Mary Sue is leaving the Center, but I am also hopeful that we will continue to benefit from her unique qualities of leadership, sincerity, and sensitivity as she moves to her new position at Beth Israel. So, it is 'Farewell, Mary Sue,' and 'Welcome back'—both at the same time." ~ Dr. Leonard Greenspoon, Klutznick Chair in Jewish Civilization, Creighton University

"Mary Sue has been a valuable asset to the Jewish Federation of Omaha, bringing knowledge, creativity, and compassion to the Center for Jewish Life. Beth Israel is lucky to have her." ~Alan Potash, CEO, Jewish Federation of Omaha

Mary Sue is transitioning to a place that is already familiar to her. "Beth Israel has been an amazing home for my family for over 40 years. I'm excited for the opportunity to work with the clergy, the board, and our congregation in the capacity of Executive Director." Mary Sue said that she is looking forward to being a part of the positive, dynamic energy that is characteristic of the leadership of Rabbi Ari Dembitzer. "There won't be a shortage of ideas," Mary Sue said with a smile.

Equally excited is Beth Israel's President Toba Cohen-Dunning. "We have been so fortunate at Beth Israel to have a long history of exceptional people as Executive Directors. When my father, Jack E. Cohen (of blessed memory), was president of the synagogue in the 1980's, Jake Besser served in that role. My dad relied upon him heavily. He always said that the person in this position is of utmost importance because there are so many details that must be attended to that are beyond the role of either the rabbi or the board of directors. It holds true today. To have Mary Sue Grossman assume this position on June 1st is nothing short of amazing and we are all thrilled to welcome her."

We invite you to attend a farewell reception for Mary Sue on Tuesday, May 31 between 2-4 pm in the Kripke Jewish Federation Library.