Hillel Welcomes New Executive Director, Tilly Shames

By Lauren Kobrick & Jordan Korn

As I’m sure most of you know, Hillel has welcomed a new Executive Director this year. Although Hillel’s beloved previous Executive Director, Michael Brooks, left some big shoes to fill, Tilly’s response has been “I’m ready to bring my heels to this party!” As excited as she is to be starting out in her new role, our Hillel is even more excited and proud to have Tilly Shames leading the way into the future.

This new role allows me to see all we have done, but also to see our greater potential...

Tilly was born and raised in Toronto, Canada, bringing her Canadian accent (ask her to say “process”) and a love for Tim Hortons’ coffee, which she says is her “favourite” (pronounced with a ‘U’) to Michigan. She studied at York University in Toronto and received her undergraduate B.A. in Environmental Studies and Political Science. She earned a master’s degree in International Affairs from the Norman Paterson School of International Affairs at Carleton University in Ottawa, Canada. After college, she studied water issues at Ben Gurion University in Israel and then worked for the United National Environment Programme in Nairobi, Kenya. You might think that Tilly’s academic interests would make her an unlikely candidate for a Jewish professional career. However, her experiences during her undergraduate career and after set her on a different path from global environmental politics.

As a student, Tilly had no interest in getting involved in Hillel. One night during her third year of college, one of her friends invited her to a Tu B’Shvat seder (an environmental Jewish holiday). As an environmental student who had just returned from a leadership mission to Israel, she couldn’t think of an excuse not to go. At the event, she was greeted so warmly by the Hillel professional, Pearl Gropper, that it had an impact on her and opened her eyes to the positive effect a Hillel professional could have on students by being engaging and welcoming. She developed a friendship with Pearl, and ended up creating Jewish environmental programming for herself and her other unengaged Jewish friends who were in environmental studies. Tilly was able to intertwine her passion for environmental studies with her new interest in Israel and Jewish environmental ethics. It also helped the Hillel move beyond the traditional students it was reaching to students with other interests on campus.

After graduation, while working at the United Nations, Tilly witnessed a lot of anti-Israel sentiment, even in the Environment Programme. She said, “Even though I probably went to synagogue more regularly in Nairobi than I ever had in my life, I just didn’t feel I could comfortably be myself as a Jew and Zionist in the UN in Nairobi.” She returned to Toronto and soon was asked to join the Hillel of Greater Toronto team to support Jewish students facing a challenging Israel climate on campus. After several years of working with a team to develop Hillel’s positive, pro-active, pluralistic approach to Israel advocacy, she became Associate Director and focused on external relations. This allowed her to focus on building relationships and developing new partnerships on campus through initiatives like Holocaust and Genocide Awareness Week.

After five years of working with Hillel in Toronto, Tilly came to the University of Michigan Hillel in 2008 as the Berman Fellow. “I really wanted to focus on bringing a sense of vision and mission to our goals and to our programming,” says Tilly. After a year as Berman Fellow, she became Associate Director and continued to work with the students and program staff at U-M Hillel to set and implement strategic goals. Students now post these goals on Hillel’s walls as well as on the website each year. The goals are included in Hillel’s allocation process and have become what drives the students’ programming forward.

While she did a fantastic job as Associate Director, Tilly says she is “thrilled to be seeing the organization through new eyes as the Executive Director.” She says, “I’ve inherited a Hillel with great bones, a great foundation, and long-standing reputation. This new role allows me to see all we have done, but also to see our greater potential and set our vision for the future.” Tilly plans to do a lot more than simply maintain the reputation that was left for Hillel. She thinks it is extremely important that the staff and students of Hillel are constantly evaluating who they are now and how they can strive to make the Hillel even better. She emphasizes the innovation and creativity that can be brought to the organization by being entrepreneurs and “incubating the next big Jewish idea.”

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She is very excited about being able to use the goals, visions, and mission of the entire organization as the compass that drives Hillel forward.

Already we have seen her leadership help shape new initiatives. First is the Jewish Detroit Initiative, one of Hillel’s new Alternative Spring Breaks (ASB) for 2012. Tilly was involved in helping the group build a relationship with Detroit long before Spring Break. She finds this to be a very important expression of Tikun Olam, repairing the world. It is very easy to get stuck in the bubble of Ann Arbor, but Tilly is pushing Hillel to think more broadly. This broader vision is also reflected in the national Meet and Greets for incoming freshmen and the national fundraising events U-M Hillel has implemented this past year. “We are bursting at the seams in Ann Arbor and our community has become a national community.”

Tilly is excited for what lies ahead. “I’m really blessed to work with such an extraordinary team that is extremely creative and innovative and very supportive of our students and all of our organizations,” she says. She adds how lucky she feels to be part of the University of Michigan Hillel which has such a strong sense of community and leadership all across campus. She plans to continue to focus on “building leadership and community driven by Jewish values” and striving to find more ways to make our Hillel the best it can possibly be. We look forward to seeing the amazing plans she has for Hillel in the years to come.

From the Whiteboard of Tilly Shames

In reading the articles in this year’s newsletter, I find myself balancing the pride and humility that I feel every day directing our Hillel. I can’t help but feel proud. In looking at all that we have accomplished this year alone, from developing new groups like Outdoor Adventure and MEDx, new engagement initiatives like Know Your Neighbor and the Hillel App, and new leaders through our Jack and Barbara Berman Leadership Series, I am amazed at all that we have been able to achieve in the short academic year.

We have developed something unique in our Hillel: a true partnership. This is a Hillel driven by student leadership, student innovation, and student passion.

Every year we want to stand on the rooftops and share our stories through this newsletter and other media and events. And yet that pride is always balanced with the humility of what it takes to achieve such great heights. Nothing is accomplished in a silo or by any one individual in our Hillel. We have developed something unique in our Hillel: a true partnership. This is a Hillel driven by student leadership, student innovation, and student passion. We hire strong professionals (several of whom you will meet in these pages) who know how to develop leadership among others and build them up for success so that they can cheer from the sidelines rather than take in the spotlight. And we have a donor community of parents, alumni, trustees, and supportive friends, who share in our pride and support our efforts, whether they live down the street or thousands of miles away. Each one of us—students, professionals, and our community of support—all rely on one another to make this Hillel the success that it is.

I have been asked many times since January how I feel taking on this administrative role in our Hillel. The question implies that I am arms-length away from the programming, which is mostly true and that has been the biggest adjustment for me. But in this new position, I get to live in a space of gratitude every day. I can stand at the front of our Hillel welcoming hundreds of students into our space every Friday night. I can stand at the back of the room appreciating our staff and student leaders for a successful event, pointing out all of the positives around the room. I can write notes of appreciation on thank you letters to share how much your gifts mean to our organization and our students. And I can call parents to thank them for sharing their student with us for a short time. Being in this role allows me to be proud of what we do every day, and yet recognize all of the components that make this Hillel the success that it is.

When you read these stories, you will hear student voices explain how they became engaged, involved, and enriched by our Hillel. It could be an interaction with one student that made them feel welcome, or the support and guidance of a staff person who encouraged them to try something new, or the opportunity to be in Israel the first time, or our amazing gourmet chef’s cooking. One thing I know for certain is that all of it is a result of the triad of partnership we have created among our students, staff and community of support, and all I can say is thank you.

Lauren Kobrick (’14) is in the Gerald R. Ford School of Public Policy. She is from Roslyn, New York. Jordan Korn (’14) is in the College of LS&A. She is from Westport, Connecticut.

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In 1972, Michael Brooks came to the University of Michigan for a degree in Greek social history. However, a sequence of events took him beyond merely earning the degree and launched Michael into his lifetime passion of revitalizing Hillel. In the past 30 years, Michael, who was until 2012 the Executive Director of Hillel, transformed the University of Michigan Hillel from a small organization to one of the country’s largest, most well-run and model Hillels.

Michael, who studied at Brandeis and Harvard, came to Michigan when the organization was truly bare-boned. At the time he arrived, there were only a few student groups sponsored by Hillel: the Orthodox minyan, the Conference on the Holocaust, a kosher coop, and Israeli dancing along with a few other groups. Now, over 30 years later, the University of Michigan Hillel is not only one of the largest in the nation, but it also boasts over 55 student groups. U-M Hillel has made Michigan a top choice for Jewish students who are seeking a thriving, active, and welcoming Jewish presence on campus.

In addition to making Hillel an organization where Jewish students are able to get in touch with their Judaism, Michael has also made Hillel a place where students can feel at home, providing students with ceaseless guidance and solace through some of their toughest, most pressing years. Michael’s ability to genuinely listen to the Jewish students’ wants and needs has enabled him to create the monumental Hillel that stands today.

Michael’s accomplishments in the growth and development of Hillel’s programming and infrastructure pale in comparison to the impact he has had on countless students’ lives. Rabbi Elliot Cosgrove (‘93), a University of Michigan alum and devout Michael fan, describes Michael with great admiration: “Michael is a beautiful human being, a dear friend, and my teacher. As I’ve become a Rabbi of a large synagogue, my admiration has only increased for Michael, seeing the way he has built U-M Hillel.” Rabbi Cosgrove explains: “His gift is his ability to mentor people, to take young up-and-coming students at critical stages of their lives to help them grow into someone they didn’t know they could be.” Rabbi Cosgrove explains that without Michael’s mentorship, he wouldn’t be where he is today. “He saw the diamonds in the rough.” says Rabbi Cosgrove. “He believed in us and our potential.” Rabbi Cosgrove not only took guidance and mentorship from Michael, but also played racquetball with him (one of Michael’s favorite ways to engage with students). In the early 1990s, when Rabbi Cosgrove was a student, he remembers Michael honking his horn outside his door, letting him know that it was time for them to play racquetball at the CCRB. From there, the friendship began.

Another student influenced by Michael is Michigan alum Kevin Berman (‘01), who met Michael during his freshman year. Every other month throughout Kevin’s college career, he and Michael would get together for breakfast. To Kevin,
Michael’s gift was “teaching and empowering students to make a difference, to give a little bit of guidance to make something really big.” Kevin was chair of the Governing Board when he was a student and he continues to serve Hillel on the Board of Trustees.

Bill Berman, for whom the gorgeous Hillel building which opened in 1988 is named, has known Michael since 1968. Bill describes him as “the highest profile Hillel leader in America and the model of what a Hillel director should be.” Furthermore, Bill explains that Michael is, “a natural. He is always doing something to touch the lives of young people, he has a mission to reach out to Jewish students and make them feel better about themselves.”

Working directly with Michael at Hillel is also a joy. Diane Redman Pfahler, the current Director of Operations, has been working at Hillel alongside Michael for 18 years. When discussing her fondness and admiration for Michael, she describes a scene that happened a few years ago at a Shabbat, where students stacked a bunch of garbage cans and plates in a typical college student prank. Michael, seeing the mess that the students had made, did not relegate the task to one of the other members of the Hillel staff. Instead, Michael took the duty upon himself, going on his hands and knees to clean it up. Diane, tearing up as she tells the anecdote, explains how this is just one of many moments where Michael has shown what a caring, down-to-earth, and thoughtful person he is.

Everyone who is lucky enough to have met Michael Brooks can say they’ve been touched by his presence, warmth, and generosity of spirit. Michael has not only transformed the U-M Hillel into the well-run organization that it is today, but also directly impacted thousands of students’ lives, leaving a mark on Michigan alums all around the globe!
This past spring break, I took part in the Jewish-Detroit Initiative, Hillel’s first alternative spring break to Detroit, and I cannot rave enough about it! The goal of our trip was to create sustainable connections to the city and its residents through meaningful community service and dialogue. I came away from the trip having so many more questions about the city—about its positives and its negatives—but most definitely with a connection to Detroit that I never had the opportunity to create before.

As many of the other participants on the trip, I am Detroit born. Although I grew up in the suburbs, I had minimal connection to the city. To quote one of my peers, the city felt almost “taboo” in that it was a city that was once great but is now unsafe, has little to offer, and is better left avoided. My involvement in the city was spurred not quite by a desire to form this connection, but by the endless opportunities for community action and social change within the city. After the week spent in the city, I am inspired by the Detroit residents who are actively working towards change in the city. Moreover, I am inspired by the network of young, vibrant, Jewish social entrepreneurs who are joining these community organizers in their efforts to revitalize Detroit.

I am excited to sustain these relationships, continue these conversations, and learn more about Detroit and community change through the continuation of Jewish-Detroit Initiative—which is now an official Hillel group!

Jewish social entrepreneurs who are joining these community organizers in their efforts to revitalize Detroit.

Meeting many of these individuals and learning from their experiences was only a tiny part of the trip. The majority of our time was spent working with students from Earhart Elementary Middle School in Southwest Detroit. In the mornings, we acted as an extra set of hands in K through 5 classrooms—something every teacher, in every district and city, needs and deserves. Through this experience, we learned a lot about the struggles within Detroit education and education as a whole, and we got to know amazing teachers and unbelievably cute kids!

At the end of each school day, we met with a group of Earhart eighth graders and walked to Latino Mission Society (LMS), a church in the area. Together we renovated a century-old bowling alley in the basement of LMS. After a week spent painting, cleaning, assembling foosball tables, and goofing off, we had created a youth space for kids in the area to go after school. One of the best parts of this project was the chance to get to know the Earhart students. We traded music and movie tastes, heard about their goals, and more. Not everything we learned was light and fluffy—we spoke quite a bit about the presence of gangs in South-
something meaningful to the community and I am proud to have been a part of it.

Furthermore, I am excited to sustain these relationships, continue these conversations, and learn more about Detroit and community change through the continuation of Jewish-Detroit Initiative (which is now an official Hillel group). And yes, here comes the plug: If this sounds like something you or someone you know might be interested in, or would in any way like to make a connection to the city of Detroit, please contact me (Hayley Sakwa hsakwa@umich.edu) to get involved!

Hayley Sakwa ('14) is in the field of Organizational Studies. She is from West Bloomfield, Michigan.

From these conversations, my perspective on community action began to shift. Rather than fixating on the negative issues in a community, I learned that organizing is instead about harnessing the positive qualities of a neighborhood. For example, it seems to me that the same sense of loyalty and family unity that might fuel gang involvement, could also fuel an investment in community involvement. While I do not think that the youth center we created at LMS will solve all of the neighborhood problems, I do think it allows kids to make good choices, like the Earhart kids who decided to come to the bowling alley for ice cream sundaes instead of going to a fight after school. To me, this was a project that offered something meaningful to the community and I am proud to have been a part of it.

Earhart students, Aalieya Jarrells, Rousfiel Rodriguez and Marc Rivera take advantage of the bowling alley JDI helped build as Eli Newman ('13) gets ready to take his turn.
Two major holidays celebrations were revamped with new components this year: Tu B’Shevat and Purim.

A Tu B’Shevat seder was held this year with a dinner event focusing on environmental activism. Held in the Dana Building of Natural Resources and the Environment, the dinner was a way to incorporate environmental conservation education with a holiday that celebrates nature and the trees—specifically, the “birthday of the trees.” Students brought their own vegetarian dishes to add to the kosher dishes provided by Hillel, in a potluck-themed dinner called Yerkot which can translate as greens or vegetables. The dinner was titled for its reference to both trees representing the holiday and to its symbolism of the environment. According to Hillel’s Assistant Director, Rabbi Seth Winberg, the event was a way of engaging several different audiences and bringing people together through both enjoyment and education of an important Jewish holiday.

Avery Robinson (’12), one of the organizers, said he considered the event a success. Avery added, “what set this seder apart from most other seders, here and across the country, were the engaging and dynamic speakers.” Robinson said that among those who spoke at the event were a farmer, a pickler, a convenience store fresh food supplier, and over fifty students. One speaker was a Michigan graduate named Nate Lada (’08), who founded and manages Green Things Farm and CSA (community-supported agriculture) in Ann Arbor. He spoke about his journey from Hebrew Day School to today and how Jewish texts have helped shape his farming journey. His discussion was focused on the importance of agriculture and respecting the Earth as central to the Jewish tradition. “Winter is an important season for farmers because this is when the harvests are planned,” Nate said, prompting the students to raise their glasses of white grape juice to the bounty that is not yet here.

After Nate shared his story, Noam Kimmelman, also a Michigan alumnus (’09, ’11), introduced the group to his initiative, Fresh Corner Café, which serves and caters healthy “grab and go” meals made from fresh high-quality ingredients. While an undergraduate student at Michigan, Noam started this company that brought fresh produce to convenience stores throughout the city of Detroit, enabling residents to access fresh and healthy fruits and vegetables. Noam wove the environmental justice mission of Tu B’Shevat into the fabric of social and food justice. Noam was followed by Blair Nosan, another Michigan alumnae (’08), and Lead Pickler of Suddenly Sauer, who shared her approach to environmentalism through food preservation, like pickling and fermentation.

Spring, the season of growth and new beginnings, brought out the slightly rosé grape juices for the second Kiddush. According to Robinson, “between the discussions, (we ate) the seven-species salad, and various other seasonal dishes. Everyone was treated to a nourishing evening.” He also noted that “rather than leave this as just one great event, follow-up conversations are being planned to continue to engage and motivate this learning.”

Another holiday this year, Purim, also brought many students out to a Megillah reading on Erev Purim, as well as a concert featuring Israeli hip-hop group Hadag Nahash. Hillel provided transportation from the Megillah reading to the Blind Pig, the Downtown Ann Arbor club where the concert was held with the popular hip-hop group, who were on their United States tour. Hillel student group American Movement for Israel (AMI) sponsored the event, and was responsible for the planning and setup of the club activities. “Who’s excited for Hadag Nahash?! AMI Chair Alyssa Adler (’14) asked the packed crowd, to a rousing response of cheers and excitement, with Hillel students dressed in a variety of Purim costumes.
With the club packed to its capacity of 400 and the lights dimmed low everywhere but on stage where bright lights lit up the six-piece band, the band played some of their most popular songs, such as “Ha Mechona Shel Ha Groove” and “Lazuz.” The band, which included everyone from a trumpet player to two rappers, gave students an opportunity to dance, sing, and enjoy themselves through both common English chants and Hebrew choruses, with their fists held high in the air to celebrate Israel, their faith, and the sense of community felt strongly in the room.

Davey Rosen, Hillel’s Assistant Director of Student Leadership and Programming, said that this new way of celebrating the holiday is a tradition he saw as well-embraced by the community. He thought there was “a lot of excitement for the show” and there was a big crowd from the moment the doors opened. The band and subsequent festivities were all an “energetic and innovative way to bring people together for the holiday,” Rosen said. “Hadag Nahash brought a lot of energy and weaved together fun and funky music.”

Purim day also brought new opportunities to engage Hillel frequenters and new students alike. With different locations for Megillah readings in the morning, including a Women’s Megillah Reading organized by Shoshi Lockshin (wife of Rabbi Seth Winberg), and two different daytime lunch festivities, many students continued to celebrate the holiday and share what Purim means to them. Both of these holidays laid a solid framework for a tradition of engagement and broadening outreach to new Hillel students, a tradition Hillel has always upheld and continues to strive for with each new and innovative celebration.

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Jewish Students Go Into the Wild

By Atara Lakritz

Fun, friendships, and the great outdoors...what could be a better combination? The answer is the Hillel Outdoor Adventure group! This group was created by siblings Teddie ('12) and Max ('15) Olender to provide an outlet for Jewish students to enjoy the outdoors together. Being adventure-lovers themselves, it was a no-brainer for the Olender team to reach out to their fellow students while exploring the great outdoors.

After participating in an outdoor adventure, our members leave enthusiastic about their experience with our Hillel group and excited for the next adventure.

At the beginning of the year, the Hillel Outdoor Adventure group’s kickoff event included a weekend camp-out at Silver Lake State Park. Seven adventurers hiked an impressive six miles into the November sunset and enjoyed a hot dog dinner, cooked outside, of course. The group roasted marshmallows and finished the night with some board games before settling in to rustic bunk beds in their rented camping cabin.

Jake Steinerman ('12), who hiked and noshed at Pinckney State Park, says, “It’s a good way to get some exercise and fresh air, and to hang out with other Jewish students.” Similarly, Adam Tannenbaum ('15), who joined the skiing and snowboarding outing, says he liked having fun while being around people he “felt safe and comfortable with and could connect to.” That stems from the Jewish connection he found with Outdoor Adventure, he says.

The Jewish principle of bal tashchit, meaning “do not destroy,” is the guiding value for Jewish environmentalism and living sustainably. Hillel’s Outdoor Adventure group has fostered a greater appreciation for our natural surroundings by following this principle. “As Jews, it is important that we add to the goodness of the earth, rather than take away from the natural world,” says Davey Rosen, U-M Hillel’s Assistant Director and staff advisor for Hillel Outdoors.

The newly created group also strives to involve those who are not already involved with Hillel. They believe bonding over the outdoors is the perfect way to integrate both Hillel regulars and those who are not already involved in Hillel. “After participating in an outdoor adventure, our members leave enthusiastic about their experience with our Hillel group and excited for the next adventure,” say Teddie and Max. “Going on adventures outdoors together can lead to a stronger and larger Hillel community, as friends and relationships are built during our time together.”

The group closed out the year with a cookout in Hillel’s lobby to kick off 24/7 Study Hours. During study breaks, diligent students enjoyed a hot dog—or veggie dog—or two, chatted with friends new and old, and enjoyed themselves despite the downpour outside.

Though his sister Teddie graduated this spring, Max is excited about new possibilities for next year. He’s planning a canoe trip on the Huron River next fall, and more camping, hiking and skiing fun.

Atara Lakritz ('14) is majoring in International Studies. She is from West Bloomfield, Michigan.
Hillel Gets Technologically Savvy

By Andrew Shapiro

Jewish students now have a different, more technologically focused way to connect to the Jewish community on campus than in the past. Students are now updating U-M Hillel's communication with innovations such as apps and "Hillel Highlights" videos to keep Hillel current. The implementation of newer technology is making interactions more engaging and meaningful.

Through the app students will be able to reserve meals, check service times, or provide feedback to the executive board.

Jon Rubins ('13) and Jeremy Klaben ('13) recognized that signing up for meals at Hillel was not an efficient process. As Rubins explains, "[Hillel] is not where it should be" with its technology development. They decided to create an innovative solution: a smartphone app. Though perhaps less appealing than Angry Birds and other popular apps available, the app that Klaben and Rubins are planning will serve a practical role for students. Through the app students will be able to reserve meals, check service times, or provide feedback to the executive board, to name a few examples. Furthermore, myHillel—an intended feature of the app—will provide more individualized information, significantly cutting down on spam or unwanted messages. Rubins states, "The whole point is to engage and focus on the needs of the students."

Student focus groups have made recommendations ranging from the inclusion of an intramural sports feature to suggestions for a name for the app. Rubins and Klaben hope that the new app will simplify the jobs of Hillel staff members as well. In fact, Rubins says the next step in the process is to coordinate the Hillel website with the app to avoid redundancy while helping reach as wide a range of an audience as possible. The Hillel app will arrive at an app store or android market near you in the near future.

Rubins and Klaben aren't the only innovative Hillel members on campus. David Rosenwein ('13) has created three-minute "Hillel Highlights" videos which capture the memorable moments of the previous week while previewing the week to come. He also acknowledges the student volunteer of the week and ends with an invitation to Shabbat dinner. Groups within the Hillel community nominate members or events to be featured in the three-minute video. In upcoming episodes, Rosenwein states, "I hope to have star appearances from athletes or other group leaders on campus." The "Highlights" videos, which have been well-received, can be viewed on YouTube, Facebook, or www.umhillel.org. As Rosenwein proudly declares, "Hillel Highlights is a way to show students, alumni, [and] other Hillels why our Hillel is so unique."

Technology that seemed unrealistic a short time ago is now not only reasonable, but well within reach. Students on U-M campus will undoubtedly find this technology makes it easy to connect to Hillel and to the Jewish community.

Andrew Shapiro ('14) studies in the Stephen M. Ross School of Business. He is from Westchester, New York.
By Nikki Koll

Many Jews raised in the United States are taught about Israel as their “homeland” and recognize the importance of Zionism. However, many Jews are not fortunate enough to visit Israel during their childhood, restricting their understanding and appreciation for the country to what they learn through their parents and in religious school. For that reason, Taglit-Birthright Israel was developed in 2000 “to strengthen participants’ Jewish identity; to build an understanding, friendship and lasting bond with the land and people of Israel; and to reinforce the solidarity of the Jewish people worldwide.”

As a part of the birthright program, University of Michigan Hillel partners with trip organizer IsraelExperts to send students on a Taglit-Birthright Israel trip that allows students to experience the unique culture, beauty, history, accomplishments, and inspiration the country has to offer.

I think one of the greatest aspects about Birthright is the opportunity to experience a little bit of every place.

Additionally, the opportunity to explore prominent Israeli landmarks was particularly exciting to prospective Birthright participants. Some of the specific sites students anticipated visiting included the Western Wall, Masada, and the Dead Sea. Before going on Birthright, Stacey recalled learning the significance and the stories behind these places and could not wait to see them in person.

Another major aspect that excited these students about the trip was the chance to create lifelong bonds with fellow University of Michigan students. Eva believed that going to Israel for the first time with her peers would allow her to grapple with religious questions and have a more enriching experience than she would if she went on this trip alone.

We interviewed students both before and after the trip to inquire about their expectations and experiences. We were interested in how participants’ anticipations before attending the trip compared to their impressions once they returned home.

Students who applied for the trip had various expectations and hoped to accomplish numerous goals through their experiences. Before they embarked on their journey in December, Stacey Mates ('12), Eva Tulchinsky ('14) and Jamie Goode ('14) were interviewed and said they were anxious to create a personal connection with the state of Israel.

When she was interviewed before the trip, Jamie discussed the personal connection she was hoping to establish with the state of Israel. Specifically, she said that she wanted to gain a better understanding of her Jewish identity, what it means to be a Jew, and how to better integrate Judaism into her day-to-day life.

Some of the guys exfoliating at the Dead Sea. From left to right: Alex Allweil ('13), Michael Lourie ('14), Jeff Lavine ('14), Steven Zuckerman ('12), Seth Fireman ('15), Noah Stone ('13), and Joe Gelber ('13).
Traveling to a distant land may seem scary to some, however Stacey felt otherwise. When asked if she was nervous, she said “I’m not nervous, I think it’s because it hasn’t hit me yet that I’m going to Israel for the first time in 10 days. I am so excited!”

Regardless of how students felt entering the trip, most students returned extraordinarily elated. Some words used to describe the experience include “life-changing”, “unbelievable”, and “educational.”

As the trip progressed, students forged an unimaginably strong tie with Israel. For Jamie, this bond was felt upon her visit to Jerusalem. She said driving to the city and seeing it for the first time was unlike anything she had ever seen before. Eva experienced a particularly strong connection at the Western wall. She said, “I could never have ever dreamed that walking up to the Western Wall I would feel so connected to everything in Israel. It was a feeling I couldn’t imagine before; it was an emotionally charged moment.”

Students commented on the vast amount of knowledge they gained in only 10 short days. Eva said she learned so much it “blew her mind”. Stacey also felt that the trip was very informative. She said, “Our tour guide, Gigi, was incredible and taught me everything from the history of the state to its ecological systems to the current conflicts with bordering countries. I left the trip feeling a lot more knowledgeable about the past and current state of Israel.”

Gaining insight into Israeli culture was a very exciting part of the trip for the students. Eva enjoyed eating Shakshouka, a famous Israeli breakfast food, and loved sleeping in the Bedouin tent and kibbutzim. Stacey recalled picking fresh fruit and vegetables at the ecological center, riding camels at the Bedouin tent, eating over-sized bagels on Ben Yahuda Street, and seeing the sunrise during the 4 a.m. climb up Masada. She said, “I think one of the greatest aspects about birthright is the opportunity to experience a little bit of every place.”
U-M Students and YouthVille Detroit Connect Through Maize and Blue Games

By Jamie Burke

Combining their love for sports and charity, a group of students came together to develop a new University of Michigan student group called Maize and Blue Games. This exciting new group enlists U-M students to participate in team sports to raise money to support YouthVille Detroit.

The best part about the games is that [they] facilitated healthy athletic competition—something we all benefited from growing up—in order to positively affect the lives of children.

Evan Kourtjian ('13) believes “the best part about the games is that [they] facilitated healthy athletic competition—something we all benefited from growing up—in order to positively affect the lives of children.” Casey Smith ('12) said “seeing the tournament become a reality meant the world to [the] group. All along our goal was to give back to a community we care about through a medium we care about, and we were able to do that through this dodgeball tournament.” Freshman Referee Will Lederer describes how it “was fun to see the winners compete against varsity athletes like football player Jordan Kovacs.” “It was great to feel the positive energy and excitement of all the participants that contributed to the success of the tournament,” he continued.

Planning is underway for The Maize and Blue Games’ next event in the fall of 2012, and although the sport has not yet been finalized, you can be certain it will be a team sport, with the hopes of continuing to raise more money for YouthVille Detroit.

Jamie Burke ('15) in the college of LS&A. She is from Palm Beach Gardens, Florida.

Jacob Lurie ('12), one of the new group’s leaders, explained that the mission of Maize and Blue Games is to help provide Detroit children with a safe and fun place to go after school. YouthVille Detroit was a perfect fit. Dr. Gerald K. Smith founded The Detroit Youth Foundation on the belief that “young people need a safe place, [and] responsible, caring adults engaged in their lives, to be intentionally involved in their own development.” YouthVille Detroit’s 1,300 members aged 11–19 participate in various programs, including leadership and career development as well as educational enrichment.

The inaugural Maize and Blue Games event was a campus-wide Dodge Ball Tournament on February 18th in the University of Michigan’s Intramural Sports Building. Sixteen diverse teams of students participated in the hopes of making it to the championship round to face a special team composed of celebrity student athletes. The tournament was a success, raising more than $1,000 in donations. Because of the help from local businesses such as Papa John’s, who served pizza, Arbor Springs, who donated water, and Chipotle, who donated chips and salsa and sponsored the registration table, 100% of the proceeds from the event were donated to YouthVille Detroit.

Evan Kourtjian ('13) participating in the tournament.

One of the participants competing in the tournament.

The Maize and Blue Games Board after a successful tournament.
“Know Your Neighbor” Launches at U-M Hillel

by Lizzy Schapiro

This past summer five students active in U-M Hillel attended Hillel International’s Engagement Institute at Washington University in St. Louis, Missouri. We had a great group of students including the 2011 chair of the governing board Jon Horstein (’12), the 2011 treasurer and 2012 chair of governing board David Rosenwein (’13), our Masa Israel Intern Tali Ribnick (’12), a leader of AMI (American Movement for Israel) Shira Sandler (’13), and me, a leader of Challah for Hunger. We were all enthusiastic about engaging with students active in Hillels throughout the world.

KYN was a way for us to call upon the members of our community and ask them to put forth that extra effort to make everyone feel welcome at Hillel.

At the Engagement Institute, we participated in simulations where we played out different scenarios that one might find him/herself in when participating in a Hillel sponsored event. One afternoon, we met as a group to discuss a particular simulation. Because we were passionate about bringing this energy we found at the Engagement Institute back to our Hillel community, we were throwing out ideas, like kickoff events and new Hillel merchandise, things that would spark a fire under our Hillel community. I thought that adding a theme or slogan to our name would make Hillel more memorable and would be more welcoming to incoming freshmen, just as at the University of Michigan there is a theme for the semester, the most notable being “The Michigan Difference.” Suddenly the theme hit me and seemed to just roll off of my lips: Know Your Neighbor.

A combination of warmth and empowerment, Know Your Neighbor (KYN) simply means engaging with new people. In our proposal to implement KYN into our Hillel, we wrote, “Often times, we try to create events with the goal of attracting as many bodies as possible, but we don’t just want a collection of bodies, we want to create community.” To those of us at the Engagement Institute, KYN was a way for us to call upon the members of our community and ask them to put forth that extra effort to make everyone feel welcome at Hillel.

Know your Neighbor launched at the beginning of the 2011 fall semester. Allie Conn, Berman Fellow at U-M Hillel, created a video introducing KYN and blasted it onto social networks like Facebook and Twitter. We made KYN pens that were given to students at Mensch’s welcome back BBQ and introduced KYN to all the group leaders. Name games and bonding activities spread to every Hillel group and soon became a staple of group meetings.

What I love most about KYN is the energy and passion for meeting new people. This desire to reach out to new people has always existed in our Hillel community and in the Jewish community at large (who doesn’t love a good game of Jewish geography?). All we had to do was call attention to this desire, and be inclusive, and our community responded immediately. KYN has given a name to the spirit of the University of Michigan Hillel, and we will continue to encourage our community to know their neighbors.

Lizzy Schapiro (’14) is majoring in Art History. She is from Scarsdale, New York.

KYN coordinator Lizzy Schapiro (’14) getting to know 109,901 of her neighbors at a University of Michigan football game.
Rabbi Seth's goal is to help students become quality Jewish adults who help build community from within.

Rabbi Seth decided to become a rabbi for many reasons. After attending a Jewish day school and then a public high school where he was one of only five Jews, he realized the importance of a Jewish education. While the Judaic Studies classes he took at York University were very broad, Rabbi Seth was looking to study Jewish texts for a “sense of independence and ownership of my own Jewish identity”. Rabbinical school gave him the instruction he desired.

Since he started working at Hillel, Rabbi Seth dove into bringing Jewish education to the community. He teaches large classes, like Jewish Philosophy and Friday Night Learning, but in his opinion, “a lot of Jewish learning is most effective based on simple one-on-one education.” It is clear he genuinely wants to get to know the students of Michigan, learn what they care about, and help them discover what kind of lives they want to lead as Jewish adults.

According to Rabbi Seth, there are Jewish education classes or events at Hillel almost every night of the week. From “Waffle Wednesdays” (where students discuss articles and information they have brought in while enjoying waffles they help make) to “Radical Jewish Ideas” on Thursdays, there is something for everyone. Be they Socratic discussions, learning the Talmud, or even discussing and learning about our subconscious daily Jewish actions, Hillel’s learning programs are popular amongst a variety of students. In addition to Jewish learning, Rabbi Seth has encouraged the continued diversification of Hillel’s outreach. For example, he spoke to a multi-faith engineering group about the ideals and spirituality of Judaism.

Rabbi Seth is passionate about his work and eager to make an impact on the University of Michigan. His goal is to help students become quality Jewish adults who help build community from within by being a strong part of Jewish community. Meeting Rabbi Seth was a great experience and I know he will continue to be a positive influence at the University of Michigan Hillel for many years to come.

Allie Komrower ('15) is in the College of LS&A. She is from River Vale, New Jersey.
Assistant Director Davey Rosen in the Spotlight

By Chloe Hirsch

You may recognize the name Davey Rosen as the lead guitarist of the infamous punk rock band, The Suburban Yuppies, which toured from West Bloomfield to Farmington Hills in the 90’s. But if that doesn’t ring a bell for you, then you’ve probably seen him around Hillel where he is the Assistant Director, or you may have even gone on a Taglit-Birthright Israel trip with him!

Davey hopes to “support our students as they create exciting and dynamic Jewish lives on campus” in the future.

Davey graduated from North Farmington High School in 1998 and, unlike his peers who continued on to college after graduation, Davey went to Israel with Young Judaea Year Course. Bold decision, you might think, but he had developed a passion for Israel and Jewish history after spending a high school semester in Israel. Also fueling his passion were many summers spent at Camp Ramah in Canada, where, according to its website, young people “develop skills and leadership, close friendships and a Jewish consciousness that lasts a lifetime.” Davey could be the poster child for the camp!

After his time in Israel, Davey kept with the warm weather theme and moved to Los Angeles to be a rock star while also attending the University of Judaism, where he received a bachelor’s degree in modern Jewish History and Thought. In 2004, Davey moved to New York City, where he worked for Young Judaea and completed his Masters’ Degree in Informal and Communal Jewish Education at the Davidson School of the Jewish Theological Seminary. It was in New York that he met his future wife, Jillian, and he also worked as the family educator at Congregation B’nai Jeshurun.

Davey later moved to Boston to be the Assistant Director at Camp Ramah in New England.

Why then did Davey come back to Michigan? Because he’s “all about living an exciting and dynamic Jewish life and that requires exciting and dynamic Jewish communities.” Davey joined our U-M Hillel community in July 2011 because he believes that “Michigan students are critical thinkers and have a desire to ask big questions.” Davey hopes to “support our students as they create exciting and dynamic Jewish lives on campus” because “it is people that define community, and the U-M Jewish community is strong, diverse, smart and fun!”

Davey has enjoyed getting to know the Michigan students and getting to “work with them to create their Jewish community.” Davey hopes that students will take advantage of opportunities such as joining a Taglit-Birthright Israel trip or working with a group to craft a new mission statement, and that they “consider their core values, … think about their place in this world as Jews, Americans, whatever their identity may be, and … know their decisions impact well beyond themselves.” Davey is a great addition to our Hillel!

Chloe Hirsch (’15) is in the College of LS&A. She is from Scarsdale, New York.
Making a Difference in Israel and Michigan

By Lauren Kobrick & Jordan Korn

This winter, Hillel formed a new organization called Medical Exposure (MEDx). Leedor Lieberman ('13), its founder, shared the story of its formation with us.

“Last summer, I wanted to volunteer with Magen David Adom, an Israel ambulance service. The ambulance service has a non-denominational program that is open to all international individuals to train as first responders. After training, we can ride in ambulances alongside Israeli EMTs. I thought this was a great idea so I spread the word around campus and found eight other students who wanted to volunteer for the summer.”

The goal of MEDx is to expose students to medical environments through volunteer and learning opportunities.

Leedor tutored the students for 2–3 months in introductory Hebrew before they went to Israel. A basic level of Hebrew is required for all volunteers. Once in Israel, the Michigan participants found the program hosted people of various ages, religions, and origins. All volunteers were required to complete a 60-hour training course and then were dispersed to different volunteer locations across the country. The Michigan group volunteered in Tel-Aviv, Ramat Gan, and Bat Yam and lived together in apartments in downtown Tel-Aviv.

Leedor described the volunteering as “addicting” as everyone was eager to add extra shifts to their days. One of the best experiences for the volunteers was getting to know other volunteers and drivers at each station. In addition, all the volunteers came back with a feeling that they impacted people’s lives. Leedor said, “we saw births and deaths, but overall the experience was amazing and one that I can’t compare to anything I’ve ever experienced.”

When the eight volunteers returned to the University of Michigan, they wanted to encourage other students to experience what they did. However, they realized that while volunteering in Israel was amazing, they could still find that reward by volunteering in medical settings in our Michigan community. This led to the formation of Medical Exposure, or MEDx. The goal of MEDx is to expose students to medical environments through volunteer and learning opportunities. Members are often in medical fields, and are encouraged to participate in opportunities that will help them refine their goals and interests in medicine.

Thirty students attended MEDx’s first meeting, and the newly created Facebook group has 74 members! The group’s first event, hosting a Medical School/School of Public Health student panel, had enormous success. The panel allowed students to learn about different health careers and application processes for different departments, and to ask questions of students in these medical related departments on campus.

Later in the year, MEDx co-hosted “The Obesity Epidemic: A Jewish Perspective” with the School of Public Health. Award-winning researcher on obesity, Dr. Mendel Singer, discussed the correlations between Judaism and obesity. Also, MEDx is setting up weekly volunteering at Ypsilanti’s Hope Clinic to give students the opportunity to work in a volunteer-based health clinic. Finally, MEDx is in the process of organizing another Michigan group to travel to Israel next summer. The student leaders hope to inspire a new group of students to volunteer in Israel by exposing them to serving people through medicine in Ann Arbor.

Lauren Kobrick ('14) is in the Gerald R. Ford School of Public Policy. She is from Roslyn, New York. Jordan Korn ('14) is in the College of LS&A. She is from Westport, Connecticut.
Thank you to all those who have made generous gifts to Hillel from July 1, 2010 to June 30, 2011.

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Summer Meet and Greets

By Arielle Weingast

The weather was gray; it matched my mood perfectly. In about four or five days, I was to leave for my first semester at Michigan, and the last thing I wanted to do was go to a Hillel Meet and Greet. I thought I had better things to do with my time — hanging with friends, packing, anything seemed better than going to a stranger’s house and meeting other Jews from New Jersey entering their freshmen year at Michigan. Little did I know this Meet and Greet would be the perfect opportunity to introduce me to Michigan’s Jewish community in addition to helping me meet other incoming freshmen interested in maintaining a Jewish identity in college.

As I walked into the house, I recognized a girl I knew from Facebook and through friends. She smiled, waved and said, “How are you?” This girl, Carly Skinder (’15), is now one of my best friends. And although this encounter was brief, her friendliness was warming and her similar curiosity was reassuring. To this day, we always laugh about our first meeting. Carly says the Hillel Meet and Greet was the “ideal way to ease into the school year.” Not only did it introduce her to her peers who were “also eager to get involved in a smaller community on campus,” but it also comforted her.

As much as I did not want to go, my mom wanted to go even more. Since I was involved in my temple all throughout high school, she wanted to make sure I would have a Jewish home on campus. I am not so sure I would have used it. During Welcome Week, my roommate and I decided to venture to Hillel for Shabbat Dinner. There were hundreds of students there, some observing the prayers religiously, while others were there to eat and gather before going out for the night. It was great to see so many different levels of observance in one place, as well as so many different students all gathering for Shabbat Dinner.

Since the experience was such a positive one for me, I was very interested to hear what Sallie Abelson, Development Director of U-M Hillel, had to say about these summer Meet and Greets. When I sat down with her, she explained to me that U-M Hillel had hosted these events in Washington D.C., Los Angeles, New Jersey, Chicago, New York City, Boston, Detroit and Ann Arbor. In total, around 200–250 freshmen and their parents attended one of eight Meet and Greets. Sallie said Hillel’s intentions were to “inform, have the students meet each other, and give helpful hints to the freshmen and their parents.” The purpose of the Meet and Greets “is to help the students become familiar with the university and Hillel and decrease anxiety about the college experience, especially for out-of-state students.” And they did just that.

As a result of attending the New Jersey Meet and Greet, I found a sense of security knowing that Hillel was available to me in more than just a religious aspect. Hillel offers a very simple and rewarding way of meeting great friends—just another one of its many perks.

Hillel is currently working on plans for this upcoming summer. Parents or students who are interested in a Meet and Greet in your area should contact Sallie Abelson at (734) 769-0500 or salliea@umich.edu. If you are aware of any incoming underclassmen who might be interested in attending, please email U-M Hillel at umhillelmg@gmail.com or call Sallie Abelson.

Arielle Weingast (’15) is majoring in Communications and Psychology. She is from Tenafly, New Jersey.

Summer 2012 Meet and Greets for new students and their parents

**Boston**
August 16, 7:00–9:00 PM
Hosted by Elisa and Steven Silverman, parents of Peri (’13) and Eliot Silverman (’15), at their house in West Newton, Massachusetts.

**New Jersey**
August 19, 11:30 AM–1:30 PM
Hosted by Elaine and Stuart Berger, parents of Jonathan Berger (’13), at their house in Pine Brook, New Jersey.

**New York**
August 19, 4:00–6:00 PM
Hosted by Andrea and Harry Krakowski, parents of Rachel Krakowski (’15), at the Skyline Hotel, 725 10th Ave. at 49th St. New York, New York.

**Washington D.C./Baltimore**
August 21, 7:00–9:00 PM
Hosted by Lisa and Mitch Eisen, parents of Ariella Eisen (’15), at their house in Potomac, Maryland.

**Chicago**
August 22, 7:00–9:00 PM
Hosted by Hilary and Allan Greenberg, parents of Joanna Greenberg (’13), at their house in Highland Park, Illinois.
distinctly remember the first time I walked into the University of Michigan Hillel. I had just spent the day unpacking my belongings and my parents and I decided to go to the Hillel Café for dinner. Chaim Frenkel ('12), a friendly sophomore who was dining at the Café, greeted my family and ended up inviting me to hang out with his friends later that evening. I instantly knew this was the place for me.

I loved Hillel because of the community, because of its diversity, and most of all because I felt like I had a new home.

As a freshman I was shy. I had graduated from an Orthodox Jewish Day School in New Jersey with 48 students in my grade and now I was embarking on a journey where there would be over 4,800 students in my freshman class. My roommates seemed very different from me and I was worried about fitting in while maintaining my Jewish identity. Because I was dining on the Hillel kosher meal plan, I became a regular at Hillel and within the first couple of weeks I began to feel more comfortable. This was largely due to the older students I met at Hillel who took time to advise me on classes, majors, and summer plans.

I enjoyed the Hillel community; I was making friends and meeting a diverse group of Jewish people. I could walk in to Hillel on Friday night for Shabbat dinner and see people dressed in all different ways. Contrary to my expectations, everyone got along. At any given table you could find a number of people in suits, jeans, and everything in between, all chatting and celebrating Shabbat together. This is something I found to be remarkable.

Never did I see myself getting involved in Hillel’s leadership. But at the end of my freshman year I participated in the American Movement for Israel, a Hillel group, and some upperclassmen began to speak to me about running for the Governing Board of Hillel. I had a strict policy of staying away from politics. However, as my sophomore year continued I began to reconsider. I loved Hillel because of the community, because of its diversity, and most of all because I felt like I had a new home. I realized that to ensure other Jewish students would continue to have incredible experiences with Hillel it was my responsibility to be a part of the leadership of this diverse community. In the middle of my sophomore year I ran for Hillel Governing Board and was elected by my peers to be treasurer.

My year as treasurer is one I will never forget. As a unit we accomplished so much, and on an individual level I grew from the experience tremendously. The direct impact I was able to have on an organization and on a university that I deeply care about was invaluable to me. I was able to learn from the Hillel staff, my fellow board members, and most importantly the students whom I represented. Together we made Hillel a welcoming environment where students felt comfortable and engaged. We worked on initiatives such as jNET, which sought to engage students who did not necessarily feel comfortable in the Hillel building.

In November I was elected as Chair of the 2012 Governing Board. There is a lot of work to be done. Luckily, I am surrounded by wonderful, hard-working, and skilled board members who share a vision for Hillel. We have made it our mission to enhance our leadership development by asking leaders to choose the skills they want to improve; to offer more freshman programming by reconstructing the student group “First Year Students of Hillel” (FYSH) to meet the diverse needs of freshmen; and to recognize the dedication and hard work of student volunteers who create the incredible programs throughout the year for our community.

My first semester as chair has been phenomenal. I truly love the impact we have made so far and am even more excited to see more of our other plans come to fruition in the fall. The vision I have, that I hope will stay with Hillel, is that every Jew on campus can feel like they have a community to support them and a place to call home. Being Jewish is different for everybody and you don’t have to enter our building to be engaged in our thriving community.

David Rosenwein ('13) is majoring in Political Science. He is from Springfield, New Jersey.