

# PLAN YOUR



...so that it's not just a fairy tale.

**\*BREAKING NEWS\*  
FOR ALL JEWISH  
HOUSEHOLDS  
THIS JUST IN:**



**SHARON SHAMUS\*,  
THE BELOVED LEAD CANDLE  
OF CHANUKAH MENORAHS  
EVERYWHERE, HAS OFFICIALLY  
ANNOUNCED HER  
RETIREMENT!**

(FYI - A \*Shamus is like a Cohan in Judaism — a guide, a leader, and definitely someone who is held in high esteem. Unlike a Cohan who has various ancient rules, - nothing, absolutely nothing, says a Shamus can't retire!)

By **LORETTA SAFF**



Yes, readers, you read that right — Sharon, our dependable, steady, **LEADER OF THE PACK**, is stepping down to explore "other opportunities!"

Oy! The rest of the candles were in a fiery fury. "Sharon? Retire? She's too important to leave!"

But Sharon had been thinking about this for a while. Last year at the Annual Chanukah Board Meeting someone overheard Sharon say, "I wait all year to flicker for only eight days! This bright and twinkling 'Glow Girl' is feeling bored. I have a special long-lasting light, and I want to use it to spread my shine."

Playing the role of an investigative reporter, I interviewed a few of her closest candle-colleagues. Here's what they said:

**Benny the Blue Candle:** "She's Retiring!? But she's the Shamus! Without her, how will we know when to glow?"

**Rina the Red Candle:** "Who will light us?" she cried. "Who will guide the way for us to bring joy to the holiday?"

**Wilma the White Candle** (apparently, she's the wise one) told me the whole story:

"On the last night of Chanukah last year, with the smell of latkes in the air and the kids anxious to get the dreidel game started, it was time for the lighting. Sharon was in place at the center of the menorah, setting the mood and bringing everyone together to begin the prayers.

It was beautiful. Everyone sang and the kids started shouting, GIMMEL! GIMMEL! COME ON, GIMMEL!"

"Then, once it was just us candles, Sharon started flickering. That's her sign when she wants to tell us something."

"Candles," she said, "I've made a decision. This is my last night as your lighting leader. I'm stepping down." We were gasping! Some of us started to wobble and melt too fast.

Sharon smiled. "Calm your wicks, my friends. I've planned ahead." We all fell silent. Planned ahead? How is that possible? Can candles do that?

She flickered toward the table, and we all looked down. There, poking out of the candle box, was a tall, thin, unusually beautiful candle that had to be a Shamus!

"This is Sheila," Sharon said. She's a graduate of The Shamus Institute and has been 'shadowing' me for the last seven days. SHE will be the new Shamus!"

"And suddenly — ahhh — all the candles relaxed. We were so relieved. Sharon was a great Shamus. She cared about us."

"But what about her? I asked. Is Sharon really happy?" I had to ask, "What does a retired Shamus do?"

"Well," said Wilma. "Actually, she's glowing brighter than ever. She started making her plans a long time ago. Now she's met a lot of new friends at the Shamus Institute, and she's already started mentoring there!"

Wilma paused for a moment and then leaned in closer. She won't be dimming down, that's for sure. She said she's been asked to model her glow at some downtown gift shops and has even put herself on all the substitute candle lists for local Havdalah services!"

I closed my notebook and smiled. I knew there was a lesson to be learned here:

**Planning ahead isn't just practical... it's the spark that keeps your flame dancing.**

Take advice from a very smart Shamus — and have a Happy Chanukah!

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## Local Voices

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conversations mean a lot. It makes it easier to bring up hard topics." And when community member Teena Cohen heard about antisemitism in local schools, she leveraged her relationship with her local state representative. "I called my representative and asked him to talk to the school superintendent."

Questions arose about criticism of Israel. Irwin Venick, a member of the Nashville Jewish Social Justice Round Table, asked, "What is the space for criticizing Israel without it being considered antisemitism?" Bernstein said there is a line that should not be crossed. "There is a place for criticizing Israel but not denying Israel the right to exist. It's important to maintain that context."

After the community event, Bernstein sat down with The Observer to talk more about Israel and antisemitism in today's world. A question arose about how to bridge a generational divide when talking about Israel. "I think you have to have a baseline," said Bernstein, "The baseline is Israel has a right to exist as a Jewish state, and then everyone can have commentary around that." He said sometimes there is a loss of nuance, leaving out room to be critical but still acknowledging Israel's existence.

When it comes to engaging in dialogue about Israel, Bernstein says it is often hard to feel knowledgeable. "We have to pivot ourselves to become more comfortable with the current state of social media and how people are learning and getting information." He said it is important to maintain context and that framing is critical.

For an organization like Jewish Federations, the challenge is to be able to meet people where they are and also address the diversity in communities. "There's a way to do it, it's not going to be popular because it's a change for Federations. It's to address the issue, reframe it and then message that." He adds it is time to focus more of the work on domestic issues facing the Jewish population.

Turning to the role of Federation in today's climate, Bernstein says it is important that it maintain itself as the central address of the Jewish community. "There's no other Jewish entity that has the breadth and depth of the system, which makes it one of the most powerful things in the Jewish community. One of the things that keeps the Federation above board is being distinctly down the middle. As Abe Foxman told me, you get hit on both sides of traffic when you're down the middle which means you're doing something right."

Bernstein says that while some com-



munities have a majority that leans in one direction, it boils down to leadership to determine the messaging. "Some of it is a business decision, some of it is the nature of the community, some of it is the leadership that is involved." He adds that for JFNA, leadership definitely has the vision for the direction of the organization. And he believes when Federations take a middle ground it is easier to have private, more nuanced conversations with those on either side.

The conversation turned to the topic of mission trips, particularly to Israel. Despite a growing divide within the Jewish community, Bernstein believes these types of experiences remain relevant and important. "People going to see Israel is a major play in how people will understand. Because right now their definitions are built in periodicals. When they see a country that is diverse, that has LGBTQ rights, has rights for minorities, has rights for Arabs that are staying in Israel and don't want to leave, you have Jews that are as reform or agnostic as they are Chasidic, all living in one place. When they see that physically it blows their mind because of what they thought it would be from the media."

Bernstein's visit to Nashville was initiated by Jewish Federation of Greater Nashville CEO Judy Alperin, who is hoping to participate in the mapping project. She says, "We have a very strong, vital Jewish community here that is looking to continue building on relationships we have with our friends, neighbors, and allies. This initiative will provide us with the necessary tools to move forward toward that goal." •



## Happy Chanukah

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