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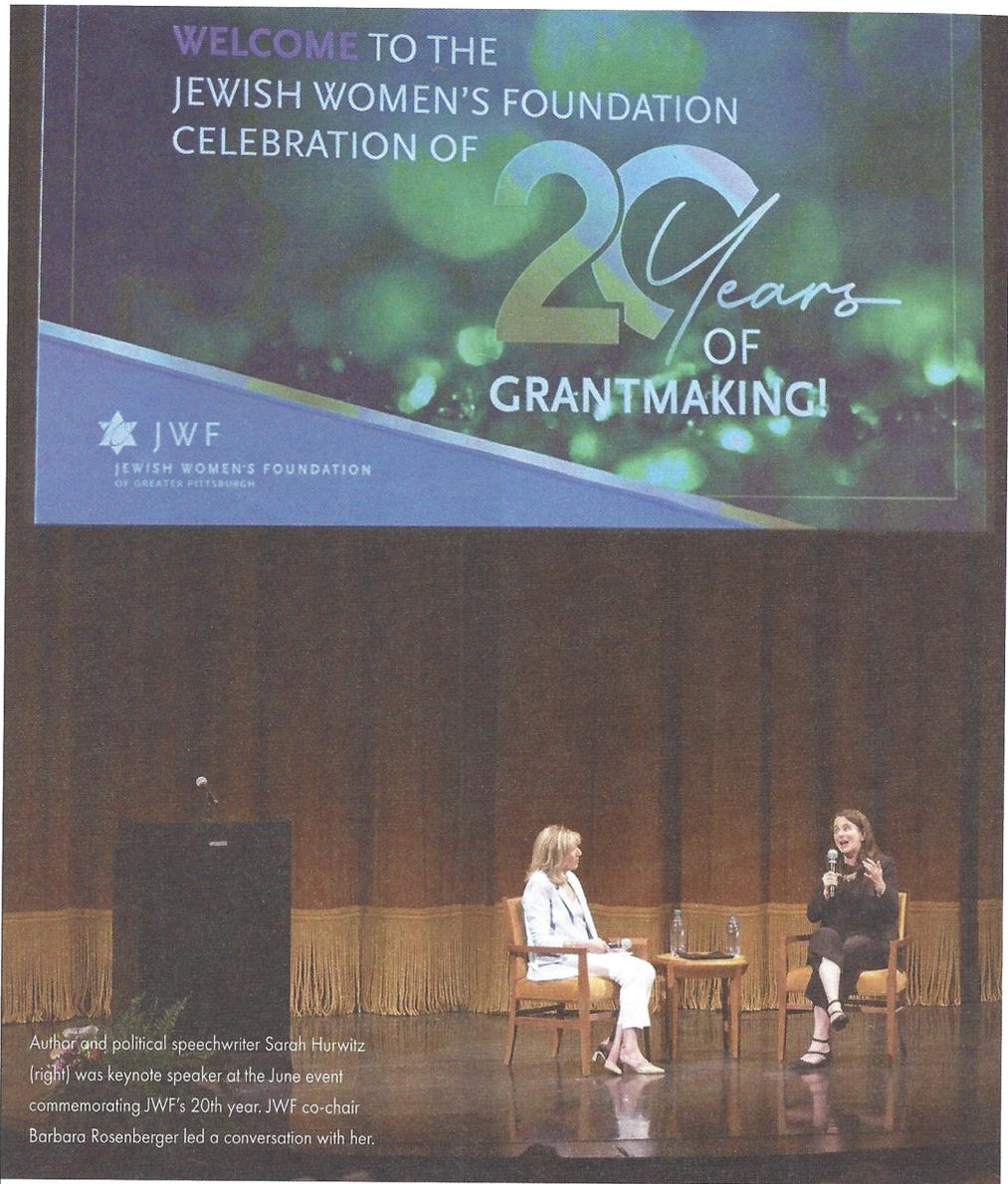


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Author and political speechwriter Sarah Hurwitz (right) was keynote speaker at the June event commemorating JWF's 20th year. JWF co-chair Barbara Rosenberger led a conversation with her.

# All Together Now

After two decades of quiet work, the Jewish Women's Foundation of Greater Pittsburgh continues to grow, its collaborative philanthropy fortifying the mission to improve the lives of women and girls locally.

BY **HILARY DANINHIRSCH**

For 20 years, the Jewish Women's Foundation of Greater Pittsburgh (JWF) has been supporting, via strategic grantmaking, Pittsburgh-based organizations serving women and girls. Compared with many other philanthropies, JWF has kept an understated public profile. But its impact cannot be overstated. JWF has funded hundreds of worthy projects, helping improve the lives of countless women and girls.

At a luncheon in June — only the second public event in the nonprofit's 20-year history — JWF announced it has made \$1.7 million in grants since its inception. It's a significant milestone for a small organization. At a pivotal point in its existence, JWF is looking toward the future with the goal of getting more women involved.

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## All Together Now



The founding co-chairs of JWF: Patricia Siger (left) and Judith Roscow.



JWF Executive Director Judith Cohen

An underlying principle of JWF is the concept of tikkun olam, the Hebrew phrase for “repairing the world,” an inherent tenet of Judaism and a cornerstone of Jewish identity.

“We operate under Jewish values. Fifty percent of funds go to Jewish community organizations, but 50 percent go to the general community, which we care very much about impacting as well,” says Executive Director Judy Greenwald Cohen, who has served in this role since the organization’s inception. “We feel it’s really important to be part of improving the lives of all women and girls in the community.”

Currently, JWF has more than 170 members, also known as trustees, who range in

age from mid-40s through 80-plus. There is a financial commitment of \$2,000 a year for five years to become a voting trustee. “After that, we offer opportunities to stay engaged with an annual financial commitment of \$1,000,” Cohen says. “Many continue to give and stay engaged, which is a very gratifying and wonderful thing.”

In addition to its focus on women and girls and Jewish organizations, what sets JWF apart from other grantmaking agencies is the notion of collective philanthropy. It’s a philosophy that people can make a bigger impact together than individually.

“Women want to be more hands-on and



Representatives of organizations that received JWF grants gathered at the June event. Included here are people from Yeshiva Schools of Pittsburgh Girls, Jewish Fertility Foundation, Open Field, Sacred Spaces, Hillel Jewish University Center of Pittsburgh, Ruth’s Way, Classrooms Without Borders, Community Day School, Crossroads Foundation, JCC Pittsburgh, When She Thrives, Women’s Center & Shelter of Greater Pittsburgh, JFCS Pittsburgh, South Hills Interfaith Movement, and Planned Parenthood of Western Pennsylvania.

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directive in their philanthropy. It was part of the unique model we were offering to members," says Cohen. "There is something lovely about sitting in a room with women who feel the same way you do: women who want to make a difference in the community."

Both to ensure the future of the organization and to introduce younger women to the concept of philanthropy, JWF has established an offshoot organization for women ages 25-45, appropriately called The Young Women's Giving Society, which requires less of a financial commitment. The 56-member group models everything that the trustees do in terms of values and process. "We hope that they will become trustees at some point in their life," says Cohen. And a bonus: JWF matches their contributions so that the young women's branch has a larger pool of money to donate.

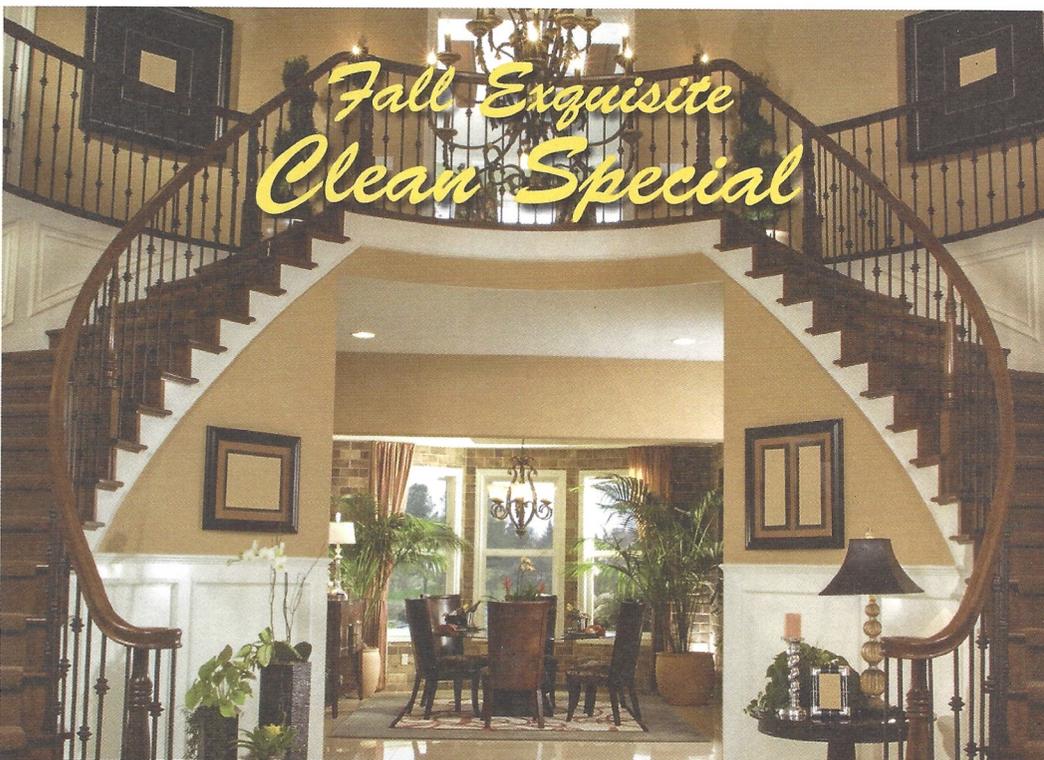
As they see so many compelling needs, Cohen says, the trustees have difficult decisions to make with the resources at hand.

Last year, 22 nonprofits received grants from JWF. Among them were Tzohar Arts, a Jewish-based nonprofit that empowers women through creativity and the arts, and the Pittsburgh chapter of the Jewish Fertility Foundation. Groups serving the general community included Ruth's Way, whose mission is to empower at-risk girls; the Women's Law Project, an advocacy group that fights for women and girls; and Planned Parenthood.

Other beneficiaries throughout the years have included the Jewish Community Center, when it sought to establish a girls basketball program in 2022. "The impact of sports on girls regarding leadership, education, self-esteem, and physical health is well documented," says Cohen, "so we were happy to support that program." In 2013, JWF granted Yeshiva Girls School \$10,000 to help implement a STEM program, which included revamping the school's lab with high-quality materials.

JWF considers grant applications from any 501(c) nonprofit, as long as it is under a gender-and-social-change lens.

That does not mean JWF will not support organizations for men and boys. One such program it sponsored focused on teen dating awareness, because that ultimately impacts girls. "If you don't fund the boys, you won't move the needle for the girls," says Cohen.



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In addition to operational and programming grants, JWF also awarded a signature grant to the National Council of Jewish Women (NCJW), Pittsburgh Section, a 125-year-old organization that supports women and families. The \$450,000 grant, which was payable over a six-year period and designed to have a long-term impact, helped fund the MomsWork initiative (formerly known as the Center for Women).

"The goal of this program [MomsWork] is empowering women who seek financial well-being through a strength and focus on moms," says Marissa Fogel, NCJW Pittsburgh's executive director. "In 2012, when the Jewish Women's Foundation initially supported this program with a signature grant, we were able to grow and expand this program and offer this support through a group educational experience as well as one-on-one coaching."

Cohen adds, "That is a long-term relationship that has been incredibly wonderful and impactful." Indeed, Fogel confirms that some 500 women have been touched by this program.

Even a small amount of money can go a long way toward changing a life. "We funded a small group of young girls of color to underwrite their SAT prep. We may take that for granted, but these students did not have the resources," says Patricia Siger, who co-founded JWF in 2003 with Judith Roscow. "One specific young woman is [now] a dentist. Think of what a little bit of money can do if you take an interest — that resonates with me. Some things we've done are much bigger and broader, but I always remember this one woman. We changed the trajectory of her life."

When Siger and Roscow founded JWF, Siger says, less than 1 percent of foundation money in the United States was being awarded to women and girls. Today, she notes, that percentage is still less than 2 percent. "I think there's enormous opportunity for growth because the needs are going to outpace the resources forever and forever. I feel like we are going to be on a big growth trajectory."

Cohen also envisions the Jewish Women's Foundation making an even greater impact as time goes on.

"I see us being around for the duration," she says. JWF is "a force for change in the community." SA

*More information about the Jewish Women's Foundation of Greater Pittsburgh is on [jwfpgh.org](http://jwfpgh.org).*