I want to thank those who have served with me as leaders of our Executive Board and our dedicated staff ably led by our Executive Director Deborah Adler. Our staff includes our Executive Director assistant and development director, Valerie Sheinker, our JTeen coordinator Michelle Goldberg, our adult J Group programming director Sophie Novinsky, our office manager, Bonnie Hochstein and our community Chaplain, Rabbi Hillel Baron. I want to extend a welcome back to Roberta Greenstein who will be helping to organize and oversee many of our events in the coming year. Let me also thank our Lay Leaders who have demonstrated commitment in time and energy as well as serving to benefit our entire community. They are: Pearl Laufer, Executive VP; Glenn Solomon, Programming VP; Cary Millstein, Campaign VP; Elliot Shefrin, Treasurer; Betsy Bylis, Secretary; Rob Cahn, Campaign Chair; and Ken Goodman, Immediate Past President.

I also want to take this moment to thank our Howard County Rabbis and Cantors. During my tenure as Federation President I witnessed an enhanced appreciation by you of our work and our importance to our Community. Your comments to me have demonstrated your continuing commitment to our common goals - helping each other, supporting Israel and our community and working together to enhance Jewish life in Howard County.
Finally, I want to congratulate Pearl Laufer on her assumption to the Presidency of our Federation. Pearl is bright, articulate, and committed to our community, our congregations, and our sisters and brothers in Israel and around the world. She has served on our Board as an at-Large member and our Executive Board for the last three years as Vice-President and then Executive Vice President. She has proven herself as a team player and I give her my 100% support during her tenure. Pearl, I have come to call you “friend” and I am here for you in any way you feel I can contribute.

Just over three weeks ago at Temple Emanu-el in New York City, my wife Cathie and I, along with other proud and beaming parents, witnessed the Investiture and Ordination of their sons and daughters, as well as our daughter Karen into the rabbinate. The tears we shed were tears of joy as we watched the future leaders of our congregations be blessed and recognized. The pride we felt for our daughter as she begins her rabbinic journey was deep and vivid. This day for us and her signified a point along her Jewish journey that began nearly 25 years ago with the simple lighting of a Shabbat candle and saying her first Shabbat shalom. Although our family has lived in many communities throughout the United States, Karen is a product of Howard County and we as a
county find pride in our own who reach for the mantle of leadership.

Just about three years ago at the Oakland Mills Meeting House, I accepted the call to leadership as President of our Federation. I spoke of the challenges I would face as one unfamiliar with the Jewish organizational world. I spoke of my understanding of the American Jewish experience and how, as a lifetime congregational activist, I would stress the importance of congregational affiliation and commitment. I also spoke of how our Federation was on a new path to become relevant to our community, to our congregations and our clergy. I saw the need to diversify our Executive Board and create a new relationship with our congregations such that they would recognize the Federation as a partner rather than as a competitor. Finally, I explained the need for mutual respect. As a lay leader of our diverse Jewish community, I noted the importance of the words “One People, One Destiny.”

As the remainder of my incumbency is reduced to days and hours, I am sometimes in awe of what we have accomplished over the last 36 months. I hope you noticed that I use the plural “we,” as our successes are the result of many people doing their part to fulfill our holy mission.
We began in the summer of 2007 with the moving of our offices to Century Plaza and creating a professional setting for our employees and those who visit. This new space allowed for numerous gatherings and programs. The furnishing and interior design reflects our community commitment and our connection to our People in Israel, to our history and our future. Our opening celebration brought United States Senator Ben Cardin, our Howard County Executive Ken Ulman, and many other dignitaries we call our friends.

Throughout that year we planned, organized, brought together numerous volunteers, and put together a first class Federation-sponsored Jewish Festival at Howard Community College celebrating Israel’s 60th anniversary as an independent state. A special note of thanks goes to Jacques Fine who spearheaded our volunteers and Sue Bard and the HCC Executive leadership for all their support and assistance.

We brought new faces onto our Board and continued our financial commitment to Jewish education through student scholarships and Israel and leadership adventures for our
children. We took the first baby steps to create a web site to help communicate our programs and mission. In order to bring our message to the community, I spoke at Beth Shalom Congregation, Temple Isaiah, and Oseh Shalom in Laurel to try to express the importance of what we do and to engage our congregational families. We had another successful Women’s event. But it was in the summer of 2008 that we set our goals higher and came to the realization that our future could be so much better than our past. Our hope of having a strong Jewishly-engaged community has always existed and we have always improved, but it took a giant leap for us to appreciate what could be, if we had the right professional leadership. Since we have all read several chapters ahead in the pages of our history, we know that it was the decision by our Board to offer the position of Executive Director to Deborah Adler that has allowed our community to envision possibilities and reach new heights.

So, what happened? In a word, everything!

Deborah has brought her expertise to every aspect of our office and mission. As a former Federation Campaign chair and volunteer, she used her immense phone bank to bring in more volunteers to assist in our programming and events. In
those first nine months since she began, our Federation Annual Campaign rose over 12% inching us ever nearer to a $600,000 campaign. Not that we have forgotten, but this was accomplished during the worst recession since the 1930s. She and her husband Harry continued to convince members of our community that generosity is a Jewish value and creating a more vibrant community was both worthy and achievable. Our Knesset Club has grown to over 250 and our Lions of Judah to over 25. This compares with 61 Knesset Club members and 17 Lions in 2005. With her leadership, Deborah initiated the process of our Federation becoming part of the Combined Federal Campaign and she was singularly responsible for our Federation receiving a grant from the Harry and Jeannette Weinberg Foundation. Deborah truly professionalized our website and created an email list to send out bi-monthly e-newsletters and notices of events and programs as well as urgent requests for help for Israel and to those who have suffered from the unfortunate numerous natural calamities around the world. She engaged our Rabbis, Cantors, and congregations to share their programming with the community at large through our web calendar.

I recall a saying that was given to a prior boss of mine in the Army that is certainly applicable to Deborah: “Everything she touches turns to gold!”
The 2008-2009 Federation year was a year of change and improvement. My memories include attending the UJC General Assembly in Jerusalem with my wife Cathie, and joining on a mission to Israel with Federation Network communities; our bus ride to join with nearly 100 other Howard County Federation Knesset Club members to see Mitch Albom at the Associated Kick-off event; lighting our community Chanukiah at Century Plaza; speaking at Bet Aviv Congregation; attending the Federation sponsored Yom Hadash concert; saying hello to over 1000 Jews attending our Purim carnival; welcoming a full crowd at our annual Yom HaShoah service; and finally, representing our community and my synagogue at our Visionary event, attended by nearly 450, which set a new standard for excellence.

We took numerous steps to establish a firm leadership model for our Federation. I initiated the creation of additional Vice-presidents, one with overall responsibility for programming and one for overseeing our Annual Campaign. This allowed our present Vice President, Pearl Laufer, to fill the role of Executive VP and prepare to take over the Presidency when my term would end. We expanded our at-large Board positions to allow for more involvement by many previously unable to
serve and increased participation by the unaffiliated. We also became more fiscally savvy by seeking local businesses to contribute services that were previously paid for through a budget line.

Our programming expanded in ways heretofore unimaginable. Our Red Tent Club, in its second year, has regularly brought over 100 Jewish women together four times a year to socialize and hear great speakers talk on subjects that connect with their lives. Our Federation-sponsored events drew large attendances and provided for entertainment, like the Rebbe Soul concert, learning opportunities such as senior programming, and social gatherings such as our Knesset Club events. Our middle school get-togethers three times a year are a hit and bring together 125-150 of our kids in a safe, social, and Jewish environment. Finally, and as a testament to our ability to bring community together, nearly 70 people signed up for a Howard County Israel trip scheduled in October 2010. As we all know, this is a first for our Federation, and is a statement of commitment and connection with our People in Eretz Yisrael.
As our Annual Campaign continued to grow and our events brought in revenue instead of expending it, we have been able to enhance our commitment to our community. Our 2009-2010 budget included an increase in religious school scholarships and our Executive Board voted to provide a one-time distribution of @ $7,000 in additional funding. Because of our community generosity to our Annual Campaign, we are able to add more resources for our community Chaplain services, recognized and appreciated by our clergy. Our commitment to our community through our Jewish Community Services is strong and focused. The JCS has been our facilitator to help provide emergency financial resources to individuals and families in our Jewish community through the Jewish Emergency Network. This process has created an avenue for our Clergy to funnel those in need through a process that can get them the help they need quickly and anonymously. We are nearing the establishment of a Jewish Hospice program for our county, again supported by our county Board of Rabbis.

While community programming and resourcing has been our primary focus, our Federation leaders have spent hundreds of hours of discussions over the past several years concerning our relationship with the Associated, the Jewish Community
Federation of Baltimore. As most of you know, we have a financial and historical connection with the Associated. We have met with their leaders to determine how our future relationship will unveil, given tight budgets and our own desire to focus on the Howard County Jewish community. I am pleased to inform you that our discussions have led to an agreement that allows us to continue our close ties with the Associated and remain an independent Federation focused on the needs of our own Howard County Jewish community and doing so in the most fiscally prudent way. We continue to view the Associated and its leaders as friends and “mishpuchah.” Further, to solidify our future, we have initiated long-term strategic planning sessions to help us to see more clearly over the horizon. Finally, we have joined with the Associated to fund a population study of our Howard County community to provide us with the raw information necessary to help us understand what our community looks like and determine their needs and how they view their relationship with our Jewish institutions.

In a week we will gather again at The Event to recognize several Howard County couples who have excelled in their commitment to our Jewish community. They give of their time
and resources because they care about perpetuating our own link in the chain of our American Jewish community. They deserve our recognition and our appreciation. I congratulate them all. Thank you for all you have done and your continued commitment to our community.

We just celebrated our harvest holiday of Shavuot when we remember and thank God for giving us the Torah, perhaps the most important event of our collective history. Our Torah provides us with the lessons of life as a community. As a community we gather, we celebrate, we pray, we care for the needy, we help those who have stumbled, we kvell in the growth of our children, and we grieve the loss of our loved ones. Our Torah and our prophets gave us the clues on how to live our lives. Do justly, love mercy, and humbly walk with God as our partner. In everything our Federation has done and everything we will do, it is these words by which we draw our strength and direction.
I end with a quote from the poet, Marge Piercy from her piece, “Amidah, On our Feet We Speak to You,” in her collection entitled The Art of Blessing the Day.

Holy is the hand that works for peace and for justice, holy is the mouth that speaks for goodness, holy is that foot that walks toward mercy...Let us lift each other on our shoulder and carry each other along, let holiness move in us. Let us pay attention to its small voice. Let us see the light in others and honor that light...Praise the light that shines before us, through us, after us. Amen.

It has been an honor to serve as your President and it is with humility that I thank you all.