

Greetings and welcome to the 54th Annual Dinner of the Young Israel of New Rochelle!

The past fourteen months have been unlike any other our community ever has experienced. With vaccine distribution proceeding at a rapid pace, and the accompanying hope that a fuller resumption of our pre-pandemic rituals is on the horizon, we have a unique opportunity at this time to reflect on, and celebrate, the strength of our community which powered us through these challenging times.

In March 2020, the attention of the entire world was directed toward 1149 North Avenue as the focal point for one of the first known community outbreaks of the COVID-19 pandemic in the United States. Yet as the world started turning its attention away from the North End of New Rochelle and toward the spread of the virus throughout the entire metropolitan New York area and the balance of the United States, the real story of the YINR community was just beginning to unfold. While we immediately closed our building and many of us took shelter under a mandated quarantine, we very much have remained “open for business” this entire time.

Our Rabbinic team, led by our Mara Da'atra Rabbi Reuven Fink, who is marking his fortieth year as the Rav of our community, and Rabbi Chaim Axelrod, as our Assistant (soon-to-be Associate) Rabbi, together with Rebbetzin Abby Fink and Rebbetzin Yael Axelrod, have steadily provided religious guidance and pastoral counseling, often in response to circumstances we could never have imagined. Our beloved former youth directors Malki and Ilan Scher, and our equally beloved new youth directors, Hannah and Ben Book, with creativity and enthusiasm, have enabled us to carry-on a consistent mix of virtual and in-person youth events. And our office staff, Amy Stein and Isio Jacobovitz, and our custodial staff, Mire and Anton Tuci, have exhibited incredible service and dedication to our community in the most difficult of environments.

This year has marked incredible growth for our community in so many ways. We have welcomed a record twenty-five new families into our neighborhood; our terrace/social hall expansion project, which adds nearly 2,100 square feet of programming space, has been completed and is beautiful; we have upgraded our WiFi and audio/visual systems to enhance semachot and other events in our building and our ability to livestream anything which takes place at YINR; and we welcomed a branch of the Orthodox Union's Semichas Chaver Program into our shiurim roster. At the same time, we have sustained and, as necessary, adapted many of our pre-COVID offerings. Our daily minyan schedule, which includes the same number of indoor Shacharit minyanim as pre-pandemic, and an additional Mincha/Maariv minyan, has been supplemented by daily outdoor minyanim at a member's home, and on Shabbat at several members' homes. Our classes schedule, which includes presentations by our rabbinic team, outside speakers and members, has been a constant on Zoom and in several instances has resumed in person attendance. Our Women's League has continued to offer support for new members, new mothers and those suffering a loss in their family, while expanding its portfolio to assist families in quarantine and in other challenging situations.

None of this could have been possible without the beneficence of our members. So many of you, without hesitation, in the areas of medical guidance, chessed, logistics coordination, space planning, education, youth and cultural programming, tefilah and more, have donated your time, skills, resources and driveways and lawns in support of the tzibbur! We look forward to showcasing many of those contributions during the dinner program. Tonight we celebrate one another, and the strength of our community in being together while apart.

Leading all of our efforts at the beginning of the pandemic—as our quarterback and field general—was the inimitable Michael Raskas. With only several months remaining to his term, Michael was thrust (with the rest of us) into a novel crisis. Michael more than rose to the occasion, guiding and representing our community with great dignity, tireless commitment and unwavering championship. The final months of Michael’s presidency are just emblematic of his dedication to the YINR community during his time in New Rochelle. And he has continued to assist us in many respects until today. We pay tribute tonight to him for all he has done and continues to do for us. As was once famously said, “He leaves big shoes to fill but they’re pointed in the right direction.”

We also express gratitude to the team principally responsible for organizing this entire dinner—Tamar Croog, Ayala Helft, Dinner Chairs Adina Garbuz and Diane Lent, Journal Chairs Ellie Goldenberg and Teri Rosengarten, and the entertainment/cinematography team of Gary Berger, Shmueli Kerstein and Stan Weiss.

We are excited and confident about the future for our shul and community, and look forward to seeing all of you in person on a more regular basis. Enjoy tonight’s program!

Andrew Wurzburger, President
David Blumenthal, Executive Board Chair