



Fall 2014

Parent & Alumni Newsletter

RPI+Sage HILLEL

The High Holidays

Yosef Treitman '16 Ph.D.—Religious and Cultural VP

In many Jewish households, the High Holidays are a time for uniting the entire family. However, many RPI students are either too far away, unable to miss classes, unable to afford the trip back home, or can't make it back for the holidays for some other reason. It is for this reason that we held on-campus events for the holidays. This was the first year that we decided to hold a service on campus for Rosh Hashanah, rather than directing people to the local synagogues. Speaking only for myself, I felt a bit odd, having High Holiday services in a room that didn't look or feel like a synagogue. The experience reminded me that the religious services of Judaism are structured such that communities can pray without a designated temple building.

At dinner, we had the best possible complication: we had trouble fitting enough chairs in the room to accommodate everyone who attended the service. People enjoyed the food, and several of us hung out afterward, even after we had to vacate the room so that another student group could convene. The night ended with our standing on the Union balcony, blowing the shofar, prompting passersby to ask "What the heck are you doing?"

There was plenty to do for the rest of the holiday, as well. The local synagogues had services, I hosted lunch on both days, the orthodox synagogue hosted dinner for the second night of Rosh Hashanah, we served Shabbat dinner as scheduled, and the Conservative Synagogue organized tashlich and hosted Shabbat lunch.

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Challah Baking

Jason Veytsman '15—Fundraising Chair

In the spirit of mid-week cultural bonding a Challah Baking event was incorporated this semester. During the event, religious leaders from the local Chabad joined the club at the Hillel house to share their knowledge of proper procedure for the most successful Challah outcome.

The event was enthusiastically attended by Hillel members who seemed to be in favor of a break from their competitive studies. Social interactions actively took place as peers became friends, and the room filled with talks of politics (it also happened to be election day), the scent of freshly baked goods, and a rejuvenated energy ready for conquering the week's continuation.

President's Remarks

Ethan Illfelder '15—President

It's that time of year again. Shabbat dinners are over, finals are finished, and all the kiddies are coming home! This semester marks the end of my presidency at Hillel, and a strong beginning for what will be an even larger and more accessible Hillel.

I am happy to say that I am leaving the RPI-Sage Jewish community with a proud legacy. Today Hillel has its own on campus housing, over forty active members- several from Sage College, an active mitzvah program and a long list of events and activities that have reached out and engaged the RPI community. These events include an overnight retreat and an organized Birthright trip. Not only that, but after months of hard work, Hillel can now officially declare itself a 501(c)3 nonprofit! Because of the remarkable support we have received last spring, I, along with the rest of the board, have put in countless hours to build our small club into something more formidable.

Our Hillel is proud to be among the few nationwide that is completely student managed. Our financial support is almost completely driven through donations from people who read this letter and individual grants that we source and apply for. Our club facilitates the many services that students need to develop their Jewish identities away from home. The donations we received have supported the club, allowing us to continually offer Shabbat dinners and services each Friday night, some Saturday brunches, numerous socials and events which create an inclusive environment that serves a range of non-observant to Orthodox students. All food we serve is prepared at a high Orthodox standard, and new this semester is our Kosher Hillel House which we use to host socials and religious receptions.

New this year is the support from the Jewish Federation of the greater New York area. Because of their help, we coordinated two phenomenal Rosh Hashanah dinners, serving over seventy people for the New Year! We are thankful to Rob Kovach, the CEO of the federation who volunteered his own family to help deliver subsidized food from a local congregation caterer, resulting in an absolutely wonderful meal. We look forward to extending our partnership in the future, including more Shabbat dinners and additional support.

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For Yom Kippur, students went to whichever of the synagogues they felt most comfortable attending. At Kol Nidre, Rabbi Kasman of the Conservative Synagogue mentioned that the term "ivri," or "Hebrew," meant "passerby," and that many of us, (including most RPI students,) are "just passing through" our current communities. This sermon reminded me of the experience of holding Rosh Hashanah services in a room that had a different function the rest of the year.

For several years, we've joked about how civil engineering students should design the RPI sukkah. This year, Caren Irgang took such a task upon herself. There were times when it seemed like the structure wouldn't hold, but this sukkah lasted the entire length of the holiday. Additionally, the Hillel house had its own sukkah, which the rest of Hillel was welcome to use.

To end the holiday rush, we decided to host a service for Simchat Torah. As we all came from different backgrounds, we didn't all know the same songs and dances, but we took the time to teach each other. Subsequently, many of us joined the Orthodox synagogue for dinner and more dancing. In all, no one can argue that the RPI Hillel holiday experience was missing anything, and hopefully first-year students walked away with a hint of what to expect next semester, for Passover.



Sukkot @ RPI

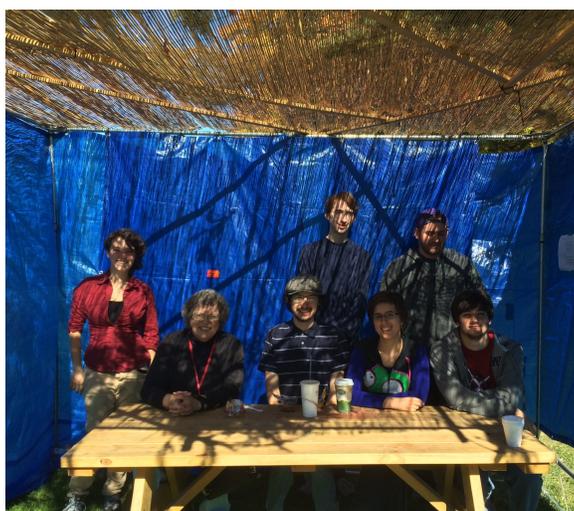
Caren Irgang '15—Fmr. President, Current Programming VP

Designing, shopping and building the sukkah gave me valuable structural engineering lessons. To start designing, I wrote down my customer requirements, which came from living through the failed designs of the past few years, and then I converted them into engineering specifications: durable (lasts two weeks a year for 20 years without falling apart), almost all students should comfortably stand in it (at least 6.5 feet tall) and fast deconstruction so that it can be put together and taken apart in less than two hours without a car.

I came up with 10 designs based on available parts and costs. After researching the properties of three steel pipe sizes and five different wood types from the steel bible, aka my Saba's AISC Steel Construction Manual, I calculated the values needed for the loads and moments of the interactivity equation. Using my extensive excel spreadsheet, I got the maximum length of tree branches that the sukkah would be able to hold. These calculations appeared to be easy and straight forward, but for three weeks, the sukkah took over my life. Every hour I had a new design idea, or I suddenly recognized a new calculation error and immediately went to test it out.

It was finally construction day, I was nervous because this was my first time since kindergarten building something taller than me. A lot of people showed up to help, but it was my nightmare- no one could attach the couplings to the pipe. It turned out I was so stressed the hour before Yom Kippur, it didn't occur to me to test the pipe threads. At the Latham Home Depot, I was introduced to my new best friend in the plumbing department, William! Within hours, every single pipe was rethreaded perfectly and tested.

We restarted construction the next day. According to the calculations, any bending should have been barely noticeable, but the pipes resembled the highly exaggerated deflections we drew in my Introduction to Structures class. Even worse, when I was drawing some free-body diagrams to figure it out, the impatient boys helping with construction insisted ON TIPPING OVER A BARELY STABLE 10-FOOT TALL STRUCTURE. I screamed that the pipes were too slender to withstand that kind of force, but whole thing came apart as some of the threads were ripped from the pipe fittings. Barely conforming a stubborn 10-foot pole to the passenger leg space and the corner of the trunk in my SUV, William saved me again by cutting it up into 2-foot sections. Meanwhile, sunset was approaching and we still didn't have any semblance of a sukkah before sukkot. Just as darkness was falling, we attached our last zip tie and stood back to admire our work. Even though my calculations suggested that my sukkah design would have no problem, it was through this real world experience that I learned a structure is only as strong as its connections.



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Our Isabella Freedman Retreat

Sarah Notis '16—Publicity

On November 21st, eight members of Hillel traveled to Isabella Freedman Jewish Retreat Center for our first-ever Hillel Retreat. While there, we participated in yoga, musical services, a night hike around a lake, and a tisch (a late-night song session). We got to milk goats, eat farm-to-table food, and volunteer with food preparation. We also attended sessions on the topic of Intentional Communities, run by another retreat happening at the same time. We met many interesting people, including a yoga instructor who we've invited to

facilitate a yoga session here at RPI next semester. We also enjoyed the experience of being away from the city and in a beautiful place; a frozen lake, bare trees, and too many stars to count.

We learned about each others' backgrounds and identities in a program I facilitated for us called Jewish Journeys. We got to know each other much better and bonded as a community. Each member got something a little different out of the experience; for instance, one learned that true pluralism is possible, one explored her Jewish and religious identities more than she ever had before, one rejuvenated her connection to services and Judaism, and one got to spend some long-awaited time with goats (and drank a breakfast *goataccino* fresh from the teat!).



Cooking Shabbat Dinners

Jonathan Holmes '16 Ph.D.—Chef d'Cuisine

Thanks to the dedication of student officers and members and the generosity of parents and alumni, we have now been providing weekly Shabbat dinners and services to RPI and Sage students free of charge for five years. While most of our food is still prepared by student volunteers and paid for by Hillel, we have in the past year secured the assistance of outside Jewish organizations to support individual Shabbats, such as the Jewish Federation and Ramah. We have also invited other student groups to our Shabbats, such as Alpha Omega Epsilon and Sigma Phi Epsilon, as well as members of the larger Troy Jewish community. In November, for the first time, we donated food from one of our Shabbats to a Meals on Wheels program.

We aim to provide a varied menu including both meat and dairy meals while catering to all students with special dietary needs. Our meals this semester have included classic favorites like roast chicken, kugel, fancy gefilte fish, matzo

ball soup, and brisket, comfort foods like loaded baked potatoes and mac and cheese, and no shortage of lovely Italian, with lasagna, eggplant parmesan, chicken marsala, and chicken cacciatore. We also held a Thanksgiving-style Shabbat with maple-glazed turkey breast, from-scratch cranberry sauce, and classic Thanksgiving sides. We regularly have

had over 30 students per meal, representing over 10% of the Jewish student population of RPI, and we are continuing to grow as we reach out to more Jews on campus. We now have three positions on the culinary committee to keep up with the work of providing high-quality kosher food to our growing membership both for Shabbat and for other events, such as our fondue night in September that attracted over 50 people. Looking forward, the club's work on securing a permanent Hillel house on campus may soon provide us with our very own commercial kitchen and a kosher meal plan with assistance from the school. As we go through our week-to-week labor in making Shabbat happen at RPI, we are also working toward the day when every student and every applicant who wants to participate in a thriving pluralistic Jewish community on Shabbat and throughout the week knows that we are here for them.



Looking Forward Together

Josh Rosenfeld '16—President Elect

Everyone has likely heard the quip “Ask two Jews, get three opinions.” Hillel for me, and many of those at RPI is a second family, a group of people connected by thousands of years of history, but with diverse likes, ideas, interests, and more. We are engineers, scientists, mathematicians, and writers; we are young, we are old, and we are everywhere in between; and yes, we do have many opinions, and no, they do not always fit nicely together, but we work to ensure that everyone can feel connected to our Hillel family week in and week out.

To help make this happen, the Hillel board, comprised of over 10 elected students, meets weekly to discuss and decide everything from what is for dinner on Friday, to long term financial projections and planning. On the board,

everyone has their role, from financial to recruitment, culinary to programming. One position on the board, however, does not fit into a nice category like those listed above. That position is President. Our bylaws provide a lengthy description of the powers and duties, but what exactly does the President of Hillel do? The President provides leadership and direction to the club, works to ensure that each member of the board has what they

need to fulfill their role, and of course presides over the meetings.

Since arriving at RPI over 2 years ago, Hillel has grown tremendously. More people are attending events and more people have an opinion on what Hillel should be doing. As President, I want to hear those opinions, and I want to give everyone a chance to be involved in what we do. This year, the board will be creating committees, which will be responsible for different aspects of the club, from culinary to programming to financial. I urge students to get involved with these committees, and to voice your opinions on what we, Hillel, can do for you. I am honored to serve as your President, and I look forward to hearing from you often, my door is always open.



President's Remarks Continued from page 1.

We pride ourselves on being pluralistic so that every Jew may find their own place among friends. Hillel house has proudly represented that by being open to the entire community. This semester we hosted a challah baking event and ten days of lunches and dinners in houses' sukkah. We also had Friday night mixers, movie nights and cooked some Shabbat dinners.

Outside of our new home, Hillel has done some amazing things. We started a new Mitzvah program and cooked food that

was delivered through *Chessed* to needy homes in the capital region. The program has found funding and will continue twice a month, starting next semester. Eight of us took a weekend long trip to the Isabella freedman Jewish retreat center in CT. We also reached out to the local Jewish community and had a honey cake baking event with the Leibers, a local family in Troy.

I am excited by what is left to come. Hillel is exploring a new, bigger home to move into, and with our newly acquired non-profit status, we will be more cost efficient

and better able to direct the resources we do have towards our community. I am mostly excited by our fantastic, newly elected board! It is comprised of dedicated and thoughtful students who I am confident will reach out and attract even greater numbers. I am thrilled to see plans for better social and Greek events, more diverse religious service programs, and a new administrative structure.

It was my honor to serve this wonderful group of people. I wish the board, our members and our friends a Happy Hanukkah and an awesome new year!

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- Hillel House Equipment (Kitchen Supplies and housewares)**
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