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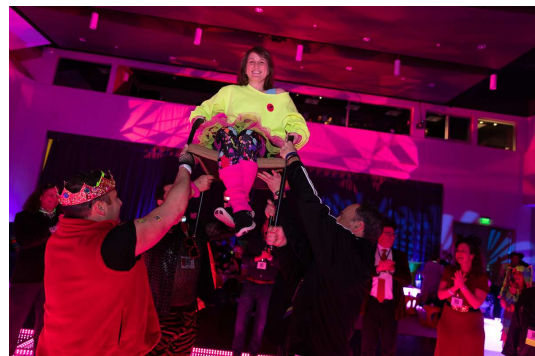


NEWS RELEASE

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

January 25, 2024

## From Fundraising to Belonging: The Oshman Family JCC in Palo Alto Pivots its Annual Gala Post-Pandemic



**PALO ALTO, CA—January 25, 2024—**Someone attending The Annual at the Oshman Family JCC last year might be forgiven for not recognizing it as a

carnival than a traditional gala.

Prior to 2021, the **OFJCC's Annual Benefit followed the standard gala formula of cocktails, sit-down dinner, formal program and a fundraising moment followed by entertainment.** The event was consistently successful, raising over \$1 million in one night for the Oshman Family JCC scholarship fund.

But in the wake of the pandemic, the OFJCC made a dramatic decision: to concentrate not on raised paddles but on **bringing people back together for a moment of sheer communal delight** in a radically reimagined, newly-rebranded experience that the OFJCC now simply calls [The Annual](#). Total attendance at the event went from 400 guests in the traditional format to 650 at the most recent event in March 2023, and an even higher projected attendance for March 16, 2024.

[The Annual, a Benefit of Belonging at the Oshman Family JCC](#), was designed by Chief Development Officer Seth Leslie and his team to incorporate [elements from the Ten Principles of Burning Man](#) and the [Culture of Belonging toolkit](#) from the San Francisco-based Jewish Community Federation and Endowment Fund to better align with the organization's values and priorities.

As a result, the first two years of the new Annual were the **best-attended and most diverse in the history of the event.** Of those surveyed in 2023, **98% said they would return the following year.** And despite the absence of public, high-pressure live fundraising, the **OFJCC continues to hit its aggressive annual fundraising goals**, ensuring that the OFJCC's community-building programs and services remains affordable to all.

In 2013, Seth Leslie traveled to Black Rock City, Nevada for the first time to attend Burning Man, the week-long large scale desert event. Surrounded by art, creativity, innovation and friendship, Seth knew immediately that his week in the desert would become an annual pilgrimage. One year later, he joined the Oshman Family JCC as Chief Development Officer.



*Above: Seth Leslie (R) his wife Sharon (L) and son Zach (center) at Burning Man 2023.*

The Oshman Family JCC continued to hold its traditional Annual Benefit every year until 2020, when COVID halted the event in its tracks. The JCC took it as an opportunity to evaluate whether there was a better way to bring people together, create an inspiring evening, better align with its values and reflect its stated purpose of enriching lives, building community and inspiring Jewish journeys.

In 2021, the OFJCC pivoted to the first-ever virtual Annual Benefit. "We learned that we did not need to optimize 'the room,' for fundraising," says Leslie. "Our donors stayed with us. We deepened our understanding of the extraordinary gift of time."

The following year, the OFJCC leaned into the [Burning Man-inspired principles](#) of co-creation and belonging, and encouraged participation, gifting and radical self-expression. Ticketing for the event had traditionally relied on a higher-priced entry model whose proceeds benefited the OFJCC.

The event's organizers then reinvigorated attendance with the concept of "**co-creation.**" Co-creation invited community members to give the gift of their time in exchange for entry to the event. Co-creators were asked to generate a

embroidery, poems written on the spot, roller skating and roasting s'mores.

Says Rachel Guedelhofer, OFJCC Senior Director of Development Operations, "We continue to talk with our community, staff and supporters to share our vision around the new Annual format. Change is hard. We gave up something that we knew we could do well for something totally unknown. We are building something intangible, but essential to the strength of our community."

Adds Leslie, "We were able to do what we did because we had built a loyal following and our leadership had faith in us."

Ultimately, the OFJCC designed an event that would incorporate principles from the Culture of Belonging Toolkit such as encouraging sharing and inviting ownership.

"At first, we thought he was off his rocker," says OFJCC President and CEO Zack Bodner. "But it was the pandemic, so what could we do? He had an idea that was different. In the end, it has been a blessing."

The theme of [The Annual](#) on **Saturday, 3/16** is "**Going Global.**" The OFJCC will honor the diverse cultures that drive the beauty, richness and vitality of the community. To purchase tickets, [click here](#). To co-create, [click here](#).



**What:** The Oshman Family JCC's radically reinvented benefit of belonging, called The Annual, will take place on campus.

**Where:** Oshman Family JCC, Taube Koret Campus for Jewish Life, 3921 Fabian Way, Palo Alto, CA 94303

**When:** Saturday, March 16 | 6:00 PM

**How:** Tickets are available at [paloaltojcc.org/theannual](https://paloaltojcc.org/theannual).

## About the Oshman Family JCC

The Oshman Family Jewish Community Center (OFJCC) on the Taube Koret Campus for Jewish Life serves the South Peninsula through educational, social, cultural, fitness, sports and other programs. The OFJCC is a multi-generational Jewish neighborhood where all are welcome, and which seeks to enrich lives, build community and inspire Jewish journeys. The OFJCC provides a common ground for individuals, Jewish institutions and other local groups, organizations and individuals to work, learn, play and celebrate together for the betterment of the whole community. The OFJCC's registered trademarks are Live Fully®, J-Pass® and Architects of the Jewish Future®. For more information, visit [www.paloaltojcc.org](http://www.paloaltojcc.org) or call (650) 223-8700.

## Contacts

To arrange interviews, please contact:

Andrea Longini

Communications Manager

[alongini@paloaltojcc.org](mailto:alongini@paloaltojcc.org)



The Oshman Family JCC is proud to be a part of the Koret Initiative on Jewish Peoplehood.

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