

# Area's Jewish leaders in solidarity with protesters

BY JEFF WILKIN  
Staff Writer

David Posner believes Jewish tradition means Jewish involvement.

That's why Posner — chief executive officer of the Jewish Community Centers in both Schenectady and Albany — and leaders of other Jewish organizations in the Capital District are pledging solidarity with people vocally campaigning for social change after the May 25 death of George Floyd at the hands of a Minneapolis police officer.

A letter from the JCCs, the Capital District Board of Rabbis, Jewish Family Services of North-



Posner

eastern New York and Jewish Federation of Northeastern New York appears in today's "Letters to the Editor" section of the Opinion pages. The letter reads in part: "We stand in solidarity with our black brothers and sisters in the Jewish community and beyond, as we all mourn the violent death of George Floyd. The Jewish community rejects racism and bigotry in all its forms in our society."

"It's important because our tradition teaches us a number of things," Posner said of the stand for solidarity. "First, there's an



Ginsburg

expression about pursuing justice and that's an important element of our tradition — 'You shall pursue justice throughout the world.'

"It's an important element of Jewish teaching," Posner added, "and the feeling it's upon us to correct the wrongs of this earth, wherever we may find that."

Posner said there is a history of Jewish groups involved in social justice.

"That is not only about correcting injustices directed against the Jewish community but to all faiths, and to all eth-



Spitzer

nicities, and to all races," Posner added, "to not be tolerant of racism wherever it may be found or bigotry wherever it may be found."

He also said there is a Jewish commitment to repair the world. Actions are part of that commitment — synagogues providing shelter and food for the homeless, conducting joint services with churches and mosques and working with elected officials.

There is also a personal angle. Posner said Jews historically

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have faced discrimination.

"We know what injustice feels like, and if we're not part of the reaction force to this then [there] might also come a time in which we're the targets and are looking for support and hope it would be reciprocal," he said.

Jewish organizations will help, Posner also said, because it's the right thing to do.

"Right now, the young people of all races and religions feel it's incumbent on them to go out to the streets and protest," he said. "It's for us to lend them support in the

way that we can — emotional support, psychological support, as required financial support to help them keep up those efforts, to keep this in the public eye."

Posner knows sometimes, movements can lose momentum over time.

"It can fade away and has faded away," he said. "If you look at reactions to school shootings, there's outrage in the beginning and then it fades away. I'm hopeful this will not be just one of those."

Jane Berger Ginsburg, president and chief executive officer of Jewish Family Services of Northeastern New York in Albany, also believes now is a time to offer help.

"We cannot be silent when anyone is being marginalized or oppressed," she said.

"What we do at Jewish Family Services is to help people, help people who are more vulnerable, and right now in this society we are facing some serious challenges and acknowledging that the black community has been made vulnerable for too long.

"We have been trying to really dig deep and figure out what it is our community needs us to be," Ginsburg added.

Conversations will be part of the process.

"A lot of what we've been doing is starting internally," Ginsburg said. "My staff and I have met twice in the last two weeks to talk amongst ourselves," she said. "I think that's where a lot of the action has to start, it has to start internally whether it's with your own family, within your own organization, to start having those conversations ... we call them the uncomfortable conversations."

Ginsburg said people do not want to talk about their innate biases ... there may be preconceived notions about people of different religions, races, sexual orientations or even a different neighborhood. "I think that's part of it, being honest about what people are feeling, if they're having any kinds of anxiety," she said.

Offering help will be a key component.

"We're about helping people, the entire community," Ginsburg said. "We don't just serve the Jewish community. I think that's one of the challenges, to understand

we do it guided by Jewish values, but we help everyone equally and offer our services equally."

Rabbi Rafi Spitzer of Congregation Agudat Achim in Schenectady — secretary to the board for the Capital District Board of Rabbis — also believes in tradition.

"Our Jewish tradition teaches that at a time when the community is suffering no one should say, 'I'll go home and eat and drink and be at peace with myself,'" Spitzer said.

Spitzer said the board of rabbis believes members of the community, people of other colors and faiths, are "truly hurting and suffering due to systemic racism and systems of oppression in this country. It is our responsibility not to stay home and drink and be at peace with yourself."

Leaders, Spitzer also said, must stand up and lend power and privilege to help transform the world, and make it a better place.

Spitzer said Jewish people love to talk. "But we need to listen this round," he said.

"The actions we have to take are becoming familiar with the literature and individual voices of this 400-year struggle against racism in America," Spitzer said. "We have to learn to really see the extent of racism ... we have to choose not to ignore it."

Contact Gazette reporter Jeff Wilkin at 518-641-8400 or at wilkin@dailygazette.com.

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## Jewish community stands in solidarity

The Capital Region's Jewish community is grief stricken.

We stand in solidarity with our black brothers and sisters in the Jewish community and beyond, as we all mourn the violent death of George Floyd. The Jewish community rejects racism and bigotry in all its forms in our society.

Along with civil rights leaders, local officials, and other religious leaders, we express our respect and empathy for every human being as we are taught that each person is created B'Tzelem Elohim (in the sacred image of God). We renew our commitment to pursue justice and to work together for meaningful and lasting systemic change.

Our tradition teaches: "Do not stand idly by while your neighbor bleeds" (Leviticus 19:16). Therefore, we will uphold our responsibility to work alongside our neighbors to build a more equitable, caring and just world.

**ROBERT R. KOVACH**

Albany

The writer is president and CEO of the Jewish Federation of Northeastern New York.

The letter was also signed on behalf of the following organizations.

- Capital District Board of Rabbis
- Jewish Family Services of Northeastern New York
- Albany Jewish Community Center
- Schenectady Jewish Community Center
- Jewish Federation of Northeastern New York