

## Weekly Top 10

**WASHINGTON, D.C. April 14, 2022**

**TO: NCSEJ Leadership and Interested Parties**

**FROM: James Schiller, Chairman;  
Mark B. Levin, Executive Vice-Chairman & CEO**

Dear Friend,

As the war in Ukraine rages on, countless citizens continue to lose their lives due to the Russian military's indiscriminate assault. Americans are raising their voices against this incursion and in support of Ukraine.

On Sunday, the Jewish Educational and Cultural Center Makor and the Ukrainian Cultural Center of New England held a "Day of Unity: Fundraiser for the people of Ukraine" campaign in Brookline, Massachusetts, to show support and solidarity with the people of Ukraine and raise funds for medical and tactical support and humanitarian aid. Co-sponsors included Combined Jewish Philanthropies and Congregation Kehillath Israel.

Also, Nancy Kaufman, former CEO of NCJW and the JCRC of Boston wrote a moving article in the Forward about the revival of the Jewish community in Dnipro. She highlights the leadership of Chief Rabbi Shmuel Kaminezki, the Boston Jewish community, and mentions the role of NCSEJ in recommending the community partnership in 1994.

We asked the participants of last week's NCSEJ Officers Mission to Poland to share their reflections of the trip. Below are their excerpts:

Immediate Past NCSEJ Chair Daniel Rubin:

In the world of 24 hour news and pervasive social media, we made no great discoveries about the situation in Ukraine. But what we did find was just as important and a source of optimism in the midst of this tragedy – smart, committed and determined people. At the American Embassy in Warsaw, we found the young political attaché working around the clock with his staff assessing what might the next moves of the Russians be. The humanitarian aid attaché was equally engaged in what our government could do to help the refugees. Israeli Ambassador to Poland Alexander Livne was fully immersed in not only the issue of Jewish refugees from Ukraine but providing the Israeli government with up to the minute needs of the Ukrainian government and humanitarian workers. For Rabbi Michael Schudrich, Chief Rabbi of Poland, his entire agenda has shifted to serving the needs of Jewish refugees and Israeli volunteers on the Ukrainian border.

Our next day was spent flying to the Polish/Ukrainian border where we met with Michael Brodsky, the Israeli Ambassador to Ukraine and Kristina Kvien the Charge d'Affaires of the American Embassy in Ukraine. While each of them painted a grim picture of what lies ahead, they each reaffirmed their and their countries' commitment to doing whatever and wherever to help the people of Ukraine. This trip once again demonstrated the pivotal role NCSEJ plays in coordinating between the local, Israeli, and American governments along with local Jewish leadership to advocate for the safety and security of the Jewish communities in the region.

NCSEJ Vice President Gerald Platt:

Our trip to Poland and its border with Ukraine, provided the mission with a fresh, accurate and realistic perspective of the current crisis. Our dinner meeting with Rabbi Schudrich was particularly informative. He clearly elucidated the circumstances of the Polish Jewish community, in general, and then more particularly with the huge influx of Ukrainian refugees that need to be attended to; compounded by the upcoming Pesach holiday and the two Seders.

In our meeting with Israeli Ambassador to Ukraine Michael Brodsky, we discussed the issue of Israel having to stand on the edge of the knife between Ukraine and Russia. Our time spent at the border was most important for us. There are at least a dozen and a half countries and agencies that are represented at the border, volunteering and assisting the refugees as they cross. Without a doubt, the most prominent presence were the Israelis. Between a triage center makeshift emergency room, mother/child unit, psychological assistance units and other facilities, the Israelis do what they do best: assist people, around the globe, in times of distress.

NCSEJ Vice President Allen Kronstadt:

Our day traveling to the Polish - Ukraine border was most enlightening. First, as we arrived at the airport of the border town Rzeszow, we passed numerous batteries of anti-aircraft missiles. Shortly thereafter, we arrived at the temporary US Embassy, where we learned of the close and strategic relationship that our 82nd airborne plays with protecting and assisting our diplomatic mission. After an hour's drive, we met the Israeli Ambassador at the border crossing town of Mediak. This Polish border crossing was managed by an eclectic group of volunteers and NGO organizations assisting the Ukrainian refugees. Many were Israeli or other Jewish volunteers from around the world.

Other volunteers we met included an anti-Communist group from China, a reggae DJ from Australia, "Olas Boss," and an Indian Sikh by way of Seattle. The final meeting at the border visit was with the unofficial coordinator of the international volunteers' group, Nicolas Kusiak. Nicolas is a young man from Warsaw, who arrived as a volunteer at the chaotic border crossing, at the beginning of the war. He told us he quit his job, contributed his personal savings to organize the various volunteers and NGO organizations, to supply heat, electricity, medical and housing supplies, all while raising funds along the way. As of last week, it was reported that 630,000 refugees crossed through the Mediak border. His heroic efforts highlight how one person can truly make a difference.

NCSEJ Treasurer Harry Blumenthal:

During our visit we met with United States and Israeli government officials with whom we had wide ranging, direct and productive discussions. We also met with representatives of several Jewish relief organizations in Poland including the Taube Center for Jewish Life & Learning, the JDC, the JCC, and the Israeli Rescuers Without Borders. To me, the most meaningful aspect of the trip was the visit to the border crossing near Medyka. We were able to observe firsthand the refugees, mostly elderly citizens, women and children. My emotion at the border crossing and in the Refugee Relief/Medical tents was an overwhelming sadness. The plight of the refugees, their trauma, and fear for their future was palpable. However, I also felt uplifted and inspired by the generosity of spirit and willingness of volunteers and professionals from many countries who quickly dropped their everyday lives and flocked to the border to help.

Let me add a few poignant memories of our trip. I felt an intense pride in the Jewish relief organizations that rushed to assist the refugees. Each organization emphasized that they came to help

every person in need, regardless of religion or background. We had coffee the last day with a young lady who had fled her small Ukrainian village with a friend two days after the invasion. They had to endure 36 hours in line to be allowed to cross into Poland. Her parents would not leave. They said they were “like old trees with long roots and couldn’t move.”

As we prepare to celebrate the holiday of Passover, let us pray and support our fellow Jews around the world, especially in Ukraine.

Wishing you and your family a Chag Pesach Sameach.

James Schiller  
Chairman

Mark B. Levin  
CEO

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## **NCSEJ WEEKLY TOP 10**

### **Washington, D.C. April 14, 2022**

#### **I watched Dnipro’s Jews rebuild and thrive. I know they will triumph once again**

**Nancy K. Kaufman**

**The Forward | April 12, 2022**

Dnipro, one of the largest cities in Ukraine, is surrounded by Russian fighting. As Putin’s invasion intensifies, the city is urging people to flee, and things are looking grim. But I know the resilience of this city firsthand: I watched as Jewish life was rebuilt after decades of suppression, and I know that they will rebuild once more.

As the Iron Curtain was coming down in the late 1980s, tens of thousands of Soviet Jews immigrated to Israel and the United States. But thousands of Jews in Ukraine chose to stay put and begin to rekindle their connection to Judaism for the first time in a generation. Under Soviet rule it was illegal to practice religion, so most Jews went ‘underground’ or ceased any practice at all.

Beginning in 1991, many Jewish organizations partnered with rabbis and local community leaders to rebuild Jewish life in the former Soviet Union. The National Conference of Soviet Jewry organized “Kehillah Projects,” matching Jewish communities in the United States with emerging Jewish communities in the Former Soviet Union.

Boston’s Jewish community chose to partner with the city of Dnepropetrovsk (now Dnipro) after a group of local leaders met with its young charismatic 25 year-old Chabad rabbi named Shmuel Kaminezki. Rabbi Kaminezki is one of the best community organizers I have ever seen in action, and his skills are proving invaluable now as he organizes his community now to welcome refugees fleeing from the south and east in Ukraine.

[Read the Full Article Here](#)

**Here is how the leaders of the Moldova Jewish**

## **community are bracing for a Passover full of Jewish Ukrainian refugees.**

**Zvika Klein**

**The Jerusalem Post | April 11, 2022**

Moldova's 4,000-strong Jewish community has purchased 10 tons of matzot from Israel to distribute to Ukrainian Jews.

"We usually get all of our kosher food from the Jewish community of Odesa, since they are a much larger and established community," Moldovan Chief Rabbi Zushe Abelsky told *The Jerusalem Post*. "Yet because of the Russian-Ukrainian war, there isn't enough kosher food in Ukraine."

"Before Passover, the Ohr Avner Foundation sent us matzot and kosher-for-Passover food," he said. "The head of the foundation, Shlomi Peles, organized all our needs for Passover in conjunction with the Diaspora Affairs Ministry."

"We have become one of the main kosher food distributors to Ukraine for Passover," he added. "We have received a huge delivery of 10 tons of machine matzot that arrived from Israel. We have also received a few tons of kosher poultry, meat, preserves and all the other basic food for Passover."

The war in Ukraine broke "when we were in the midst of renovating our synagogue," Abelsky said. "So even though it was very difficult, we were able to [run] a kitchen that served 1,200 kosher servings a day for the Jewish refugees."

[\*\*Read the Full Article Here\*\*](#)

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## **A Jewish-Ukrainian rally for peace in Brookline**

**Andrew Brinker**

**Boston Globe | April 10, 2022**

BROOKLINE — Center Makor was draped in blue and yellow as hundreds gathered at the Jewish cultural center Sunday to celebrate Ukrainian culture and call for peace as Russia's invasion continues to batter the country and its people.

Sunday's events, organizers said, were a demonstration of solidarity between two groups that have been historically intertwined. Ukraine has long been home to a significant population of Jewish people.

President Volodymyr Zelensky of Ukraine, who is Jewish, has appealed to the Jewish community worldwide for support since Russia invaded Ukraine more than six weeks ago.

The "Day of Unity" at Center Makor on Sunday included cultural activities, food, and culminated in a late-afternoon rally that drew close to 100 people in a show of support for Ukraine.

[\*\*Read the Full Article Here\*\*](#)

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## **'Why Do You Want To Go To Ukraine?': Life In Russian-Occupied Berdyansk**

**Viktoria Roshchyna**

**Radio Free Europe | April 12, 2022**

BERDYANSK, Ukraine -- Russian military patrols prowl the streets, Russian channels fill the airwaves, and the Russian-imposed authorities take a cut of the fishermen's catch. The mayor has disappeared, phone service is dead, and protests are rare after occupying forces fired into the air at rallies against them in March.

West of devastated Mariupol and east of the isthmus that connects

Russian-held Crimea to mainland Ukraine, Berdyansk was seized by Russian forces four days after Moscow launched a large-scale invasion of Ukraine on February 24. Viktoria Roshchyna, a contributor to RFERL's Ukrainian Service, traveled last month to the city of more than 100,000 on the Sea of Azov.

After a lengthy journey through Russian checkpoints -- and a week in the custody of the Russian Federal Security Service (FSB), part of the occupying force, which accused her of working for its Ukrainian equivalent, the SBU -- this is what she saw.

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## **Jewish man shelters refugees to honor those who saved his own family from the Holocaust**

**Kyung Lah, Sarah Boxer and Rachel Clarke**  
**CNN | April 12, 2022**

Warsaw, Poland (CNN) - Jan Gebert handed his apartment keys to the family he had just met. The Ukrainian mother wanted to pay. No, insisted Gebert, this is free.

It was days after Russia invaded Ukraine and one of the countless acts of kindness being shown to those fleeing danger and reaching safety in Poland. But for Gebert, 42, it was very, very personal.

"My family survived the war because someone helped them. They were refugees. That's the reason why I'm here," he said. "Thanks to that time, I can help other people."

Gebert is descended from Holocaust survivors, some of the few who lived through Hitler's obliteration of Warsaw's Jewish community, which was then the largest in Europe.

To not help others now is unthinkable to him, so he and his girlfriend repeatedly invite refugees to stay until they have somewhere more permanent. As a third family arrives, Gebert and his girlfriend inflate a mattress for themselves and give the bedroom of their 400-square-foot Warsaw apartment to their new guests.

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## **For Jews fleeing Ukraine, Passover takes on new meaning**

**Deepa Bharath**  
**Associate Press | April 12, 2022**

"Good morning! Happy morning!" Rabbi Avraham Wolff exclaimed, with a big smile, as he walked into the Chabad synagogue in Odesa on a recent morning.

Russian missiles had just struck an oil refinery in the Ukrainian city, turning the sky charcoal gray. Hundreds were lining up outside his synagogue hoping to receive a kilo of matzah each for their Passover dinner tables. The unleavened flatbread, imperative at the ritual meal known as a Seder, is now hard to find in war-torn Ukraine amid the war and a crippling food shortage. But the rabbi wanted no challenge to get him down — be it the lack of matzah or that he was missing his wife and children who had fled the Black Sea port for Berlin days ago.

"I need to smile for my community," Wolff said. "We need humor. We need hope."

Tens of thousands of Ukrainian Jews have fled while about 80% remain in Ukraine, according to estimates from Chabad, one of the

largest Hasidic Jewish organizations in the world. Inside and outside Ukraine, a nation steeped in Jewish history and heritage, people are preparing to celebrate Passover, which begins sundown on April 15. It's been a challenge, to say the least.

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## **Refugees with Jacuzzis: The surreal life of 200 Jews at a 4-star resort in wartime Ukraine**

**Cnaan Liphshiz**

**Jewish Telegraphic Agency | April 11, 2022**

IRSHAVA, Ukraine (JTA) — Like dozens of displaced persons camps that now dot Eastern Europe, the one in this Ukrainian town near the Hungarian border has inhabitants whose lives were turned upside down by Russia's war.

But the refugee camp at Irshava is different.

For one thing, it's equipped with a kosher kitchen and accommodates about 200 Jews from across Ukraine.

For another, it's a four-star riverside resort featuring tennis courts, three swimming pools with saunas, a fishing park, rooms with individual Jacuzzis, a fitness center and an indoor jungle gym complete with a ball pit for children to play in.

"We're refugees, yeah, but over here being refugees has its perks," said one of the inhabitants, Stanislav Gluzman, a 39-year-old Jewish father and finance professional from Kharkiv who's been living in one room with his wife and son for the past month amid uncertainty — and relative luxury.

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## **The Holocaust Memorial Undone by Another War**

**Marsha Gessen**

**The New Yorker | April 11, 2022**

In late September, 1941, after months of bombing and weeks of siege, German troops entered the Ukrainian capital, Kyiv. The brass seized the most desirable offices and apartments and began their occupation. Rank-and-file Germans took over the poorer areas, robbing the residents of what little they had left after the siege.

On the afternoon of September 24th, there were explosions along Khreschatyk, Kyiv's central avenue, which continued for four days and set off a massive fire. Before retreating, the Soviets had mined the city. An area the size of Manhattan's financial district was decimated; the rubble of destroyed buildings rendered streets unrecognizable and impassable. The ruins smoldered for weeks. The number of victims of the blasts and fires is unknown, but likely included more Ukrainian civilians than German troops.

On September 28th, the Germans papered the city with flyers instructing "all Jews of the city of Kyiv and its environs" to report to the corner of Melnikova and Dehtiarivska Streets, on the outskirts of town, by eight the following morning. They were to bring "documents, money, valuables, warm clothing, linens, etc." The notices were unambiguous: "Those Jews who do not carry out this order and are found elsewhere will be shot dead." The gathering place was near two cemeteries—one Russian, the other Jewish—and a railroad station. Many people assumed that the Jews of Kyiv were being deported, probably in retribution for the mining of the city.

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**It's time to make Passover different - opinion**

**Micah Halpern**  
**The Jerusalem Post | April 13, 2022**

For the first time in two years, COVID is no longer the most spoken about agenda item in either my personal or professional circles. It is a welcome change. Now, we talk about Passover and Ukraine. And while I wish the world did not need to talk about, think about and take action for Ukraine, there is no denying its immediacy and urgency.

The crisis in Ukraine and the byproducts of the Russian invasion into Ukraine are rightfully and assuredly front-burner items. Real risks and real tragedy are unraveling before our eyes. The spillover into Poland, Moldova, Hungary and Romania is significant. Among the millions of refugees are thousands of Jews who need help our help.

Thousands of Jews who, unlike us, will be celebrating Passover in new and different ways this year. For them, this Passover will certainly be different from all others.

However different our past two COVID-era Passover celebrations were, they pale in comparison to the Passover experience these Ukrainians and now-former Ukrainians will commemorate.

Two years ago we bemoaned the restricted Passover celebrations we had due to COVID. Passover preparations were private and very modest. People who had never made Passover at home were forced to clean and cook and make Pesach. Preparations were more modest than in previous years. The rabbis even eased the rules of koshering to accommodate for COVID. And most Seder tables were less populated than in the good old pre-pandemic holidays.

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