



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Pete Harckham

## Harckham Honors Three SD40 Residents During a Jewish American Heritage Month Commemoration

PETE HARCKHAM June 2, 2025

| ISSUE: **SENATOR HARCKHAM. SD40, JEWISH AMERICAN HERITAGE MONTH, JEWISH HISTORY**



State Sen. Pete Harckham with (l-r) Rabbi Jennifer Jaech, Rabbi Sara Freidson and Orit Daly

*Croton-on-Hudson, NY* – In recognition of Jewish American Heritage Month, New York State Senator Pete Harckham honored three distinguished residents from the 40th Senate District—Orit Daly, Rabbi Sarah Freidson, and Rabbi Jennifer Jaech—for their exceptional leadership, compassion, and commitment to strengthening their communities while preserving and celebrating Jewish heritage.

“New York is home to the largest Jewish population outside of Israel, so the Jewish American story is very much the New York story,” said Harckham. “As we face a troubling rise in antisemitism, it’s more important than ever to celebrate those who contribute to the rich, diverse tapestry of our state and the Hudson Valley specifically. These three individuals are exemplary figures in our state’s Jewish-American population, and I am proud to honor and congratulate them for their tireless efforts to educate, connect, and uplift others.”

The commemorative ceremony was held on Thursday, May 29 at Temple Israel of Northern Westchester and featured the presentation of official New York State Senate proclamations. Senator Harckham was joined by Croton-on-Hudson Mayor Brian Pugh, Deputy Mayor Len Simon, and the honorees’ friends and families. The ceremony aired live on Facebook; click [here](#) to see a video of the event.

A history teacher turned ceramic artist, Orit Daly brings creativity and compassion to everything she does. Originally from Los Angeles, she earned degrees in history and political science from UC Berkeley, followed by a master’s degree in history and education from Syracuse University. After moving to Westchester and retiring from teaching, she pursued ceramics full-time, showcasing her work in juried exhibitions nationwide.

Orit is a member of Hudson River Potters and co-owner of Croton River Artisans Gallery. She also teaches at the Katonah Arts Center, inspiring new artists of all ages. A dedicated mental health advocate and lifelong Jewish educator, Daly has taught in synagogues, Jewish schools, and camps, and volunteers with the National Alliance on Mental Illness.

“Thank you for this honor,” said Orit. “I was surprised to learn that I was being honored because I don’t view myself as a leader but as a toiler, working in the Jewish community at a grassroots level wherever I was needed. My parents are both from Israel, and my grandparents are all Holocaust survivors, so I was brought up in a world where you couldn’t

turn away from your Judaism. I was brought up with a very strong feeling of ‘we have to pass this on’.”

Since 2014, Rabbi Freidson has led Temple Beth Shalom in Mahopac, where she has cultivated a warm, inclusive congregation focused on spiritual growth, social justice, and interfaith dialogue. She previously served as Associate Rabbi at Temple Beth El in Rochester.

A graduate of Brandeis University and ordained by the Jewish Theological Seminary, Rabbi Freidson was an early advocate for LGBTQ+ inclusion in religious life. Under her leadership, Temple Beth Shalom actively engages in community service, from hosting public forums and Shabbat dinners to organizing blood drives and Holocaust remembrance events.

“I am so grateful to be recognized and stand with colleagues and new friends who are committed to building strong and inclusive Jewish communities and community in general,” said Rabbi Freidson. “I believe that Judaism doesn’t live only within synagogue walls; in fact, if it does, we’re doing it wrong. Judaism lives in our neighborhoods, our relationships, how we show up for work, in conversation. Our work is about connection and that is what Temple Beth Shalom is really all about. Over the past decade, and even before I arrived, we have been working to make Judaism more accessible and relevant to people wherever they are. Our goal isn’t just to be a synagogue but a hub of Jewish living in the Hudson Valley.”

For nearly two decades, Rabbi Jennifer Jaech has served as Senior Rabbi at Temple Israel of Northern Westchester, leading with vision, empathy, and a passion for social justice. A graduate of Evergreen State College and the Hebrew Union College–Jewish Institute of Religion, she brought her experience in higher education and government to her rabbinical work.

Rabbi Jaech has been a vocal advocate on issues such as marriage equality, reproductive rights, and civil liberties. She has served on national Jewish advocacy committees and co-authored two books, including *He's All I Have*, a resource for families navigating grief.

As she prepares to retire this June and return to the Pacific Northwest with her husband, Rabbi Jaech reflected on the legacy she leaves behind.

"I am keenly aware that public service at its best is conducted through a partnership with an active and engaged citizenry," said Rabbi Jaech. "One of the things I have tried to do at Temple Israel is involve people here in legislation. We have made several trips up to Albany and down to Washington, D.C. with young people and spoke about issues that needed a progressive religious voice, like marriage equality and reproductive rights. Although I'm leaving my role here at Temple Israel, I know there is still plenty of work for me to do in my native northwest, and I hope to continue making a difference."

Jewish American Heritage Month, observed each May, celebrates the enduring contributions of Jewish Americans to the history, culture, and progress of the United States.