

## Grass Campus Celebrates and Welcomes Community at Open House

BY ADAM GROBMAN



Community members gathered at the Grass Campus Community Open House to hear from dignitaries, participate in activities, and celebrate the new centralized hub for Jewish life in Harrisburg.

On Sunday, September 29, The Alexander Grass Campus for Jewish Life flung open its doors in celebration of its Community Open House.

More than 300 community members, neighbors, and friends, braved the soggy weather to attend the festivities – and the Campus was readied to greet them. Bounce houses and activities peppered the lawn and breezeway; fresh signage provided direction and acknowledged donors; and an array of food and banquet resources showcased the capabilities of the campus as a meeting, event, and celebration venue.

The Open House celebrated the completion of the transition to the Grass Campus. Five of the campus' six buildings are now occupied by organizations and programs making an impact in the community.

The event was co-hosted by the Jewish Federation of Greater Harrisburg and the other agencies on campus, including The Silver Academy, Brenner Family Early Learning Center, Symons Family Fitness Center, Jewish Family Service, JCC Senior Adult Club, and PJ Library. Jewish Community Foundation of Central PA will join these agencies and programs on campus when it takes residence at McCormick House later this month.

The campus was purchased by the Jewish Federation in 2021 following a founding gift by the Alexander Grass Foundation. The campus was named in honor of Alex Grass z"l, a longtime philanthropist who supported Jewish life and community in the area throughout his life.

"It is such an awesome feeling to be able to make this gift to the community and to see my father's name behind me, knowing how proud and excited he would be to know the community and greater community is involved - and that his legacy is going to live on for many generations," said Elizabeth Grass Weese, daughter of Alex Grass and president of the Alexander Grass Foundation. "This is a very important time in the history of Judaism and it's nice to have a place to come to that is supported by the entire community."

Abby Smith, Jewish Federation Board Chair, said that this milestone event is just the beginning of generations of impact that the campus will have in the community.

"I hope that this is one of many times that you set foot here, eat a meal here, hear beautiful songs sung and the sounds of children laughing and playing here," Abby said. "Know that you can experience these moments and milestones on this campus together with one another."

The event also featured an exhibit by the Historic Harrisburg Association featuring dresses and archival documents highlighting the legacy of community benefactor Mary Sachs. The exhibit was held in Richards Hall, where the Mary Sachs Charitable Trust has made a generous gift to name the Mary Sachs Memorial Hall.

"Today, we recognize not just the past achievements of this community, but the bright future that lies ahead," said Joel Burcat, a trustee of the Charitable Trust.

Newly appointed Jewish Federation President/CEO Zach Benjamin said that the opportunity presented by the Grass Campus was a key driver in bringing his family to Harrisburg.

"One factor that sealed my decision was the vision, boldness, creativity, and forward thinking in choosing to adopt the Grass Campus as the central address for Jewish life in Central PA," Zach said. "The campus provides us with a canvas uniquely designed to evolve and adapt with the shifting needs of our Jewish and broader communities."

To learn more about the Grass Campus and the many ways to engage with Jewish life on the campus, visit [www.grasscampus.org](http://www.grasscampus.org).

# PHOTOS: Community Celebrates Grass Campus' Open House

Photo credit: Carly Abbott Photography



A welcome ceremony kept community members dry and introduced key Grass Campus figures ahead of tours across the campus.



Children created craft projects and had their faces painted; Historic Harrisburg Association hosted an exhibit featuring vintage Mary Sachs dresses



Community members mingled throughout campus and Kol Haneshama performed during Welcome Ceremony



Children enjoyed the bounce houses while community members toured The Silver Academy, Jewish Family Service's Libby Urie Food Pantry, and Susan Leviton's art studio.

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