

Good afternoon.

I am so pleased to be with all of you today—to be back in the community that truly raised me, that shaped me, and helped me discover my professional passion and purpose: serving the Jewish community.

In just under a month, I will step into the role of CEO of Shalom Austin. Being here with you at this moment of transition feels especially meaningful—personally, and professionally.

This building holds so many memories for me. It's where my mother, of blessed memory, led meetings and inspired important initiatives. It's where my aunt was recognized for her extraordinary volunteer leadership—and continues to serve this community with such dedication. It's where the senior program was named in honor of my grandfather. And most recently, it's where my own son began his professional journey right out of college.

This community is woven into the fabric of my family's story—and it means more to me than I can fully put into words.

There's a moment in our tradition that I think about often—especially when we gather as a community like this.

In the book of Exodus, after the Israelites leave Egypt and begin forming not just a people, but a society, they are given a monumental task: to build the *Mishkan*, the sacred dwelling place.

But what's most striking about that story isn't the structure itself—it's how it came to be.

God doesn't assign the project to a single leader or elite group. Instead, the call goes out to *everyone*.

And the response is extraordinary.

Men and women, artisans and laborers, those with gold and those with skill, those who could give materials and those who could give time—each person offers what they can. Some bring precious metals, others spin yarn, others craft wood, still others design and assemble. The Torah takes care to mention all of it.

It becomes one of the earliest examples in our tradition of a truly collective effort—where everyone has a role, and every role matters.

And perhaps most remarkable: the contributions are so abundant, so heartfelt, that Moses eventually has to tell the people to *stop giving*. Imagine that—an entire community so united in purpose that generosity exceeds the need.

The Mishkan wasn't just built with resources.

It was built with shared responsibility.

With participation.

With a sense that each person mattered to the whole.

I share that story because it feels deeply aligned with this time in San Antonio's Jewish history, or should I say potential future.

Every Jewish community, at some moment, is called to reimagine itself—to respond to change, to growth, to new realities. And in those moments, the question becomes: how do we build something together that reflects who we are now, and who we aspire to be?

That is a question that our staff and leadership have answered as Austin grew and changed.

Many years ago, when the land for the Dell Jewish Community Campus was gifted, our community was given a similar charge: to build not just buildings, but a model of collaboration around shared purpose and shared goals.

That vision became Shalom Austin.

Today, Shalom Austin operates as an integrated community—bringing together the Federation, the JCC, Jewish Family Service, and the Jewish Foundation under one organizational structure. One board. One senior leadership team. And yes—one very complex budget.

But the real goal of integration isn't structural—it's communal.

It's about serving Jewish life holistically.

It's about thinking in terms of *people*, not programs.

And it's about ensuring that individuals and families can access what they need—at every age and every stage—without fragmentation or confusion.

When it works well, people don't have to navigate systems.

They simply find what they're looking for.

When I joined Shalom Austin in 2018, I stepped into a newly created role focused on education and engagement. At the time, even I wasn't entirely sure what that meant.

But what became clear very quickly was this: success depended on whether people saw themselves as part of one team.

Our work spanned early childhood, camps, arts and culture, senior engagement, and community-wide programming. On paper, these areas lived in different legacy organizations. In practice, they had to operate as partners.

And over time, they did.

Professionals began to think beyond their individual programs and toward shared impact. They collaborated around families across life stages. They supported one another, challenged one another, and increasingly saw themselves as builders of something collective—not stewards of something separate.

That mindset made possible truly transformative work.

It allowed early childhood educators, engagement professionals, and social service providers to think together about how best to support families—not just within one program, but across the full ecosystem of Jewish life.

It allowed us to rethink how we support older adults—bringing together fitness, social connection, clinical care, and case management into a more unified and integrated approach.

And most importantly, it allowed the community to experience our work not as a collection of separate offerings—but as a network of care, connection, and opportunity.

That sense of connection inspired greater generosity. Our annual campaign grew in meaningful ways, as more individuals saw the

value of sustaining the whole. At the same time, people were moved to give more deeply to the areas that spoke most personally to them—supporting early childhood, senior services, mental health, Israel and Jewish peoplehood programming, and engagement initiatives with new energy and purpose.

Strategic philanthropy inspires more of the same—and our donors answered the call by investing boldly in our physical campus. The result is a transformed environment that is already renewing and energizing the life of our community.

In many ways, collaboration didn't just strengthen our programs—it strengthened the community's commitment to them. It allowed philanthropy to become both broader and more personal: people could give to the collective vision, while also fueling the work they felt most passionate about.

That said, no model—no matter how strong—is without its challenges.

Complexity requires constant prioritization.

Not everything can move forward at once.

And like any family, sometimes the areas that need the most attention receive it—while others have to wait.

The work is ongoing. It requires humility, communication, and trust.

But at its best, it is deeply worth it.

As I step into this next chapter of leadership, I've been reflecting on a set of principles that guide how I think about building strong, resilient communities.

I often describe them as my 4Cs—but they are not unique to Austin. They are values and practices that can strengthen any community working toward shared purpose.

Clarity, collaboration, cultivation of staff and leaders, commitment to excellence

Clarity

At its core, clarity is about understanding who we are and what we are trying to achieve.

That can come from data, from listening, from community conversations—but without clarity, it's very difficult to align resources or make meaningful progress.

Clarity helps communities answer essential questions:

Where do we invest?

Who are we trying to reach?

What does success look like?

It also shapes how we tell our story—how we communicate our value, our impact, and our vision in a way that resonates across generations.

Collaboration

Collaboration goes beyond working side by side.

It's about shared ownership of outcomes.

It means bringing the right people to the table—not just to participate, but to shape priorities together. It means building trust across institutions, leaders, and stakeholders. And it means recognizing that no single entity can meet the full scope of community needs alone.

Strong communities create cultures where collaboration is not optional—but expected.

Cultivation of People

Every community's greatest asset is its people—its professionals, its volunteers, its leaders.

Investing in their growth is not optional; it's essential.

When people feel supported, developed, and valued, they lead more effectively, they stay more deeply engaged, and they become ambassadors for the community itself.

But true cultivation is not just about strengthening what already exists—it's also about preparing people for what comes next.

As communities evolve, roles evolve. Staff are often asked to learn new skills, to think beyond traditional boundaries, and to step into more collaborative, cross-functional ways of working. That requires intentional retraining, continued learning, and the support to stretch into new areas with confidence.

And the same is true for lay leaders.

If we are asking our communities to think and act more collectively—across organizations, across missions, across lines that may have existed for decades—then we must equip our volunteer leaders with the tools, the language, and the mindset to lead in that kind of environment.

Cultivation, then, is about building a pipeline—not just for today, but for the future. It's about ensuring that both professionals and lay leaders are prepared not only to sustain what is, but to help build what could be.

And when we invest in that kind of growth, we strengthen not just individuals—but the entire community.

Commitment to Excellence

Finally, there is a commitment to doing our work with intention and care.

Excellence doesn't mean doing everything—it means doing the right things well.

It requires focus, discipline, and sometimes the courage to say no. It means continually evaluating what we do and ensuring that our efforts are meaningful, sustainable, and aligned with our values.

Because the work of Jewish community is not just operational—it is sacred. And it deserves our very best.

And while not part of those four areas, there is one more value that underpins all of them: a deep commitment to belonging.

Belonging is what allows a community to function as a community.

It is what makes people feel seen, welcomed, and valued.

It is what enables trust.

And it is what allows us to navigate difference while staying connected to one another.

When people feel that they belong, they are far more likely to engage, to give, to lead, and to listen.

And in a time when so much can feel fragmented, belonging becomes not just aspirational—but essential.

Which brings me back to the Mishkan.

The Mishkan was not built by perfect people.

It was not built by people who agreed on everything.

And it was not built by people protecting turf or titles.

It was built by a community that, for a moment, chose something bigger than themselves.

They stepped forward not as individuals protecting their role, but as contributors to a shared purpose.

They gave what they had.

They made space for one another.

They trusted that the whole would be stronger than any one part.

And because of that, they created something sacred.

I think that is the question in front of every Jewish community today—including this one:

What would it look like to build your version of the Mishkan—together?

What would it require to step back from ego...

from titles...

from the instinct to protect separate missions...

And instead ask:

- Where can we align?
- Where can we share responsibility?
- Where can we build something collectively that no one organization could build alone?

Because the truth is—you already have the pieces.

You have the talent.

You have the leadership.

You have the passion and the commitment.

The question is not whether this community *can* build something extraordinary.

The question is:

Will you choose to build it together?

So my charge to you is this:

Be like those builders of the Mishkan.

Look at what you have to offer—and bring it forward.

Look at the person or organization next to you—and link arms.

And be willing, in whatever way you can, to shift from *my piece...* to *our whole*.

Because if you do—if you truly embrace that kind of shared purpose—

What you build will not only serve this moment...

It will shape the future of Jewish life in this community for generations to come.

And just imagine—

If everyone here brought what they could,
in the spirit of that first collective effort in our tradition,

What might you build together?

Thank you.