



Minnesota Hillel Offers New Jewish Experiences with Brand New Building

Engaging students of all Jewish backgrounds

The ribbon-cutting on September 9 for the \$7 million renovation of the University of Minnesota Hillel kicked off new opportunities for Jewish life on campus. The fully updated 19,000 square-foot building offers a more welcoming environment for the 700 students that Minnesota Hillel, a Federation partner, engages each year. Not only is the building equipped with WIFI, air conditioning and handicap accessibility, but it is also designed in a way for students to grow as Jews.



"We want to create a space that allows students to connect with Judaism in any way they want whether they come with a strong Jewish identity and come to Shabbat services in the chapel or if they come to the building to study, play basketball, hang out on the roof deck, and socialize so that they can meet other Jewish students," said Benjie Kaplan, executive director at Minnesota Hillel.

The new renovation offers a more welcoming space, especially in the front entrance, as a place students would want to spend time. It also has a variety of multi-purpose spaces for Jewish programs and for spending time hanging out, studying, and gathering.

The building provides a safe space for Jewish students during the pandemic. "As students are returning to campus in such uncertain times with the COVID-19 pandemic, we are lucky to have a physical space that gives us a place to safely express and learn about our Judaism," said student vice president at Minnesota Hillel, Sophie Shapiro. Health screening at the front desk, mask requirements, sanitizing stations, and lowering capacity to below half to maintain social distancing are all precautions to ensure students' safety during the pandemic. Students can also reserve study rooms on the Hillel website. "Beyond COVID-19, it will be an amazing communal space where our main student groups and leaders can take advantage of and share their own personal thoughts about being Jewish," Shapiro said.



Minnesota Hillel is grateful for all the community volunteers and donors who are dedicated to ensuring Jewish communal leaders have a safe, engaging and educational space. "Our hope is that over the course of four years on campus or more that we're helping students move from an introductory to Jewish life to a strong Jewish identity and a connection to Israel," Kaplan said. "We also want to help students who already have a strong Jewish connection find deeper meaning and explore how they want to carry that into their adult life."

– Michael Stiefel Alperin