

JEA Annual Meeting
May 26, 2021
Outgoing President Michael Karpf remarks

I've been thinking these last few weeks about what I might say tonight. Some of my predecessors have waxed philosophical, others have echoed words from the Talmud. I suppose I'm not as erudite as they, because the phrase that kept popping into my head is from the Grateful Dead-----What a Long, Strange Trip It's Been. I think that line sums up the last year pretty neatly, without resorting to the endless cliches we've all been hearing. I'll try to give you a brief summary.

It all started with a scam call. You know, your car warranty has expired or your social security account has been cancelled. I never thought I would fall for something like that..... Only this time the caller ID said "Scott Samuels." Some free advice here—if you have been president of the JEA at any time in the last 50 years think twice about taking a call from Scott! Because if you do you will likely wind up like me, serving another term as president. "*It will be easy*" he said; "*you'll have a lot of help*," he said; "*you'll mostly be a figurehead*." he said; "*there's nothing to worry about*," he said; "*there are no problems on the horizon*," he said.

About a week later the country started to shut down and I began to feel like I had signed on to be captain of the Titanic. As you all know, we closed the building shortly thereafter. We remained closed for about eight or ten weeks, and it was with great trepidation on my part that we began to reopen in late May of last year. The annual meeting was by Zoom as were all subsequent meetings during my tenure.

I'm certain I am the only president who never had a meeting in the building, and didn't even set foot in here for the first eleven months of my term. But with the collective wisdom of the Executive Committee, the support of the Board and the leadership of Adam Solender and Cheryl Lansing, we began the process of opening the doors.

We were only able to do this because Adam had the foresight to source the necessary supplies and equipment to sanitize and prepare the building, and the dogged determination by Cheryl, to file THE earliest application for a PPP loan, from which we received \$361,000. This was largely due to her impeccable financial records which not only justified our request, but most importantly led to the loan forgiveness which was granted later in the year! Hooray for that! Without that loan and the unwavering support of the Savannah Jewish Federation, led by Edwin Byck, who also guided us through the loan process, and later by Kenneth Sadler, I doubt we would be here tonight.

As a result, we did not lay off any employees, everyone got paid and kept their benefits, so that when we started back up our work force was intact. And they all rose to the challenge of masking and spraying and cleaning and wiping and separating and managing children and

parents within and without the building---all at a time when none of us knew what to expect from the virus.

With Adam's leadership and that of DJ Horton we instituted a brand new program, catering to families who needed a place for their children to attend school on-line while the parents went to work. It was called All Day at the J—not my choice of names, by the way, because I'm old school, it's always the Alliance to me, but whatever. The staff rose magnificently to the challenge, and ran a very successful program despite the many unknowns we had to face.

Our pre-school program, with the leadership of Jodie Sadler, reopened and began to flourish once again. Summer camp opened last June, albeit with a modified program, and this year both camp and school already have enrollment exceeding the years before the pandemic.

The adult programs switched over to virtual attendance thanks to Jamie Richman who made herself an expert on such things, and our health and wellness department is getting back up to speed under the direction of Jess Whitacre who came to us in the middle of the pandemic--- a real leap of faith.

All the while Ray Adamson our facilities director and his staff were hard at work keeping the building at a hitherto unheard of level of cleanliness, while our office staff led by Vicky Lunick kept our administrative ship afloat.

Of equal importance is the fact that financially we are in very good shape, with Cheryl keeping an eagle eye on our revenue and expenses. Of course, Adam was everywhere as usual, but also keeping up with the latest pronouncements from our local Health Department, the CDC, the school board, the City of Savannah, as well as the other JCC's and Federations across the country, to be sure we were in compliance with all the many guidelines and best practices. It was a Herculean task but he made it look easy.

Although I cannot claim the credit, the highlight of my term as president is this---WE ARE STILL IN BUSINESS and we are getting back to normal and we are here for the long term for the needs of our community. Even before the pandemic other cities our size and even larger have closed their JCC's permanently---Charleston several years ago, and most recently Augusta, for example. But far from closing, we are about to embark on a major renovation of this facility as you will hear more about shortly. I encourage your support of that effort. We in Savannah have a lot to be proud of and I am glad to have played a small part in that success.

Looking forward, or should I say looking Back to the Future, we have the best of both worlds going for us—experienced leadership in Larry Silbermann, who just finished his term as United Way president, and rising young leadership from Allison Konter, who has immersed herself in all phases of the Alliance programs in recent years. And of course Allison will be following in the footsteps of her father Bill Sand and both of Mark's parents, Marcy and Jerry

Konter, all of whom were Alliance presidents. We are in very good hands and the future is bright.

I don't want to end these remarks without thanking Aaron Levy for his support; he has been a sounding board to me throughout. And I also want to remember two Alliance champions we lost this past year— the loveable curmudgeon and guardian of the treasury, Walter Lowe, a past president, who always addressed me as either Your Judgeship or by my middle Hebrew name – Gedalia. And then, of course, we lost the incomparable Charlie Grossman, that great philosopher who practically spent his entire life in the Alliance. You've probably all heard some "Charlie-isms" in the last few months, but a couple of others come to mind. Charlie often referred to the pungent odors of the locker room as "Evening in Alka Seltzer." Also, and you might keep in mind when thinking about your building fund pledge— "Ain't No Pockets in a Shroud!"

Both were great men who will be sorely missed.

One last thing before I sit down---Scott, I've changed my phone number!

Thank you.