

**History of the Riderwood Jewish Community**  
**Prepared for the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of**  
**Riderwood Village**  
**Spring 2025**

**Early Days**

From the earliest days of Riderwood, the Jewish community has been an integral part of its history. As Riderwood opened in May 2000, a group of about 60 Jewish residents came together that first year to create the beginnings of our community.

The first holiday observance occurred in September 2000 with a Rosh HaShanah dinner followed by services in the Music Room of Village Square, the first community center. In late 2000, Sid Levine, an experienced teacher, started a Saturday morning Torah discussion, with many non-Jews participating. The first Passover seder was held in the Potomac Café in Village Square in April 2001.

By summer, the first official meeting of Jewish residents took place on August 13, 2001. The meeting, attended by 23 people, chose the name “Jewish Council” for the purposes of registering as an official Riderwood group. Joan Barch was selected as the first president, and annual dues were set at \$5 per person.

Monthly Shabbat services began in November 2002. A second service was added in May 2004. Over time, Shabbat services moved from individual apartments to the Village Square Music Room to the Renaissance Gardens (now Arbor Ridge) Garden Room, and then to the Chapel, upon its completion in 2004. While early holiday events were held in the Potomac Café, Fireside and the Windsor dining rooms, Maryland Hall became the favored venue for large-scale holiday dinners and other events upon its completion in 2003.

**Interfaith Focus**

John Erickson envisioned an interfaith focus for his senior living communities. As such, he recruited Reverend Dennis Jones, then working at Greenspring Village, to become Riderwood’s first Pastoral Ministries coordinator. Rev. Jones pursued this interfaith focus with enthusiasm and skill. He fostered the evolution and provided structure to the Jewish Council for several years, paving the way for its early success, until his return to Greenspring in 2005. His dedication to encouraging interfaith activities set the tone for creating a culture of civility and inclusion at Riderwood. This was reflected in the cross participation of Jews and non-Jews attending each other’s educational and cultural events. John Erickson recognized the value of Jewish activities in enhancing diversity in Riderwood, and our activities were noted in the community’s marketing brochures.

**Evolution of Jewish Council Activities**

From its earliest days, the Council sponsored events designed to educate and engage Jewish residents. Meeting minutes reflect social events, an annual Book of Remembrance, film showings and discussions, field trips, a monthly entertainment program (now RJC Presents), and the RJC Bulletin. A formal Constitution and Bylaws was approved in May 2003, clarifying responsibilities and specifying standing committees, elections and term limits. At a general

membership meeting held in March 2004, a vote was taken to officially change our name from the “Jewish Council” to “Riderwood Jewish Community” (RJC), to make clear that our “activities are religious, cultural, educational and social,” thus embracing all aspects of being a community.

### **Role of Local Synagogues**

Temple Emanuel in Kensington provided significant support to Riderwood’s early Jewish Council. This Reform congregation donated prayer books, a Torah, and the services of Rabbinic Fellow Eileen Rogers, who conducted monthly Friday night services. However, she resigned from her relationship with our community in 2005 due to failing health. She was succeeded by another Rabbinic Fellow, Stan Levin. Upon his ordination in 2008, he became RJC’s primary religious leader until 2021.

In 2005, members of the Reconstructionist congregation Oseh Shalom in Laurel, arranged for Val Kaplan and Allen Shapiro to conduct regular Shabbat morning services in the Garden Room at (now) Arbor Ridge. A small, donated Torah was used. Services, which were open to independent living residents as well, continued until the time of Covid and ceased in 2020.

### **The Clergy, Torah Study and Other Ritual Events**

Over the years, Riderwood’s Jewish community has been led by a variety of rabbis and lay leaders. Following Rabbi Eileen Rogers, Rabbi Stan Levin served our community from 2008 until January 2021, when he retired due to health concerns. During Covid times, when in-person events were cancelled, he recorded Shabbat and High Holy Day services from his home, which was broadcast over Riderwood TV. Applying his technical knowledge, he was able to record and edit in the participation of many residents. Over the years, others who served as interim rabbis include: Rabbi Diane Perry, Rabbi Saul Oresky, Cantor Yael Fishman, Rabbi Yaffa-Shira Sultan, Rabbah Arlene Berger and Reb Lisa Levine.

In 2021, as the Covid pandemic continued, Rabbi Robert Goldstein was selected as our new rabbi, following a thirty-year career as rabbi of Temple Emanuel in Andover, MA. He auditioned at Riderwood with opera student Shari Feldman (now Doctor of Musical Arts as of May 2023) as cantorial soloist, and the two of them were hired as a team. Rabbi Goldstein and Cantorial Soloist Feldman requested that pianist Anthony Bock be engaged as accompanist for Friday evening and High Holy Day services. Because of Covid, their initial services were pre-recorded and presented on Riderwood TV. Regular in-person services did not return to the Chapel until the latter half of 2021.

Torah study was an early and on-going part of RJC-sponsored events. Through the years, it has been led by Sid Levine, Joan Barch, Sigi Rowe and Rabbi Stan Levin. Today, Torah study continues twice a month with Rabbi Goldstein. Residents who led services for High Holy Days, Passover seders, shiva minyans, and other ritual functions included Erwin Shalowitz, Phil Weiner, David Weisbrod, Amoz Chernoff, Rabbi Bob Saks, Loretta Vitale, Etarae Weinstein, and Sidney Kirschner.

### **Prayer Books, Torah and The Ark**

In 2004, a poll was taken to guide the Ritual Committee in organizing services. People favored a traditional service but with a lot of song, responsive readings, and English, along with a brief Torah service. Because Jewish residents come from all branches of Judaism, there was some early tension about various aspects of ritual observance, including which prayer book to adopt. But since the originally donated prayer books were from the Reform movement, this tradition continued. However, since those prayer books were in poor condition, a fund to purchase books for Shabbat and the High Holy Days was created in 2005. The Shabbat prayer books were replaced with newer copies of the 1994 version of the Reform “Gates of Prayer.” Additional prayer books have been acquired over the years from various congregations that were updating their own inventories.

The original donated Torah was dedicated by the community on November 14, 2001. Even then, it, too, was in poor condition, extremely heavy and in need of repair. By 2008, a fund was established to raise money for the purchase of a new Torah scroll. With the generous contributions of many residents, it was dedicated on May 4, 2009.

The first ark was made by George Comley, active in the Riderwood Woodshop, and the Ner Tamid (Eternal Light) by Morris Wolin, both unveiled in December 2004. An ark for Renaissance Gardens (Arbor Ridge) was built by Sherman Krasney, Stanley Haft and Kurt Simenauer.

A new Israeli-made ark replaced the initial one in the Chapel in 2022, donated by Annette Graubart, Shirley Kahan and others with funds from their Judaic Enhancement Fund, created in memory of their beloved husbands. They were also able to fund a Torah crown, breastplate and rimonim. A new Ner Tamid was installed in 2024, donated by Lew Priven, in memory of Annette. A hand-woven runner to cover the Torah reading table and another small piece were donated by Renate Chernoff, who had created them for her final Master’s project many years earlier. Also in 2022, Etrae Weinstein donated an embellished white velvet Torah cover and bimah table cover which she made to elevate and beautify our High Holy Day services.

### **The Spirit of Volunteering**

Volunteer leadership and member participation have always been at the heart of RJC’s endeavors. Through the efforts of our outstanding volunteers, the RJC continues to create and support a rich, exciting and vibrant life for Jewish residents. Current committees include: Arbor Ridge Liaison, Archivist, Art, Audio-Visual, Book Club, Book of Remembrance, Bulletin, Calendar, Chavurot, Communications, Education Forum, Good & Welfare, Hadassah Liaison, Holiday Meals, Membership Records, New Member Welcoming, Oneg Shabbat, Posters, RJC Presents and Ritual.

### **Updating with the Times**

In 2015, RJC re-joined the Jewish Funeral Practices Committee (to which we had once belonged), allowing residents to obtain a reduced-cost Jewish funeral package. In 2016, RJC was incorporated as a tax-exempt non-profit 501© 3 organization, enabling donors interested in supporting RJC’s work to make tax-deductible donations. In 2019, RJCFlash was created as an in-house list serve to provide a more immediate means of communication with RJC members.

In 2022, the RJC web page, hosted on the RiderwoodLife.com website, became available to the general public. Having a presence on the web means the RJC can now communicate with the outside world, providing access and information, and fostering communication with potential residents interested in learning more about Jewish life at Riderwood. Long-term leadership, planning and updated financial procedures have been adopted making the Board even more effective.

Much of the organization and programming established in the early years has stood the test of time and remains with us today. In addition to regular Shabbat services followed by an oneg, and annual holiday celebrations with services, dinners and art displays, bedrock activities include the monthly RJC Presents program, the twice-monthly Education Forum, and the maintenance of a strong link with Ramon Hadassah. A Welcoming Committee continues to greet new residents with personal home visits, and now also arranges group dinners and holds an annual special Shabbat service. Other regularly scheduled activities include publication of an annual Book of Remembrance, the annual construction of a sukkah, the printing and distribution of eye-catching posters, and the publication of a monthly Bulletin distributed via paper and email to residents, family members and Riderwood staff.

In more recent years, activities have expanded to include a twice-monthly lay-led Conservative-oriented Shabbat morning service, the Book Club, the RJC Choir, chavurot encompassing conversational Hebrew, Israel studies, the Mussar movement, Tikkun Olam, and Jewish Thought. Exploring Judaism with Rabbi Helen Plotkin is offered via a Zoom link, and regular, quality programming is offered weekly at Arbor Ridge with Reb Lisa Levine.

As of Spring 2025, the RJC has grown to over 500 members. With key administrative changes and enhanced programming, creating and fostering community remains our core value. With a focus on religious life through worship services, Torah study and holiday observances; and emphasis on social, cultural and educational events, we look forward to remaining a vital part of Jewish life at Riderwood for decades to come.

### **Presidents of the RJC**

2000: Joan Barch	2010: Phil Weiner & Mimi August
2001: Lucy Schram	2011: Mimi August
2002-2003: Erwin Shalowitz	2011-2013: Roz Fleisher
2004: Joe Sumner	2014-2015: Roy Stern
2005: Mildred Hauser & Willy Bergman	2016-2018: Bert Kaplan
2006: Joe Sumner & Phil Weiner	2019-2020: Howard Ledder
2007: Phil Weiner	2021-2022: Amy Greenwood & Suzan Wynne
2008: Mildred Hauser & Morton Beroza	2022-2023: Elaine Mondschein & Ann Joseloff
2009: Joe Sumner & Ed Gregerman	2024-present: Nicki Stenzler

*Written by Leslie S. Montroll, in conjunction with the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Riderwood Village.  
Based on RJC histories prepared by Irving Slott (2015) and Suzan Wynne (2022 and 2025)  
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