



On the Table initiative will get the conversation started Oct. 4.

Can We Talk?

JACKIE HEADAPHOHL MANAGING EDITOR

JOIN THE CONVERSATION

The *Jewish News* is hosting its own On the Table lunch noon Wednesday, Oct. 4, at our Southfield office (29200 Northwestern, Suite 110). Come join us for some nosh and an engaging conversation. The first 12 people to RSVP to jheadapohl@renmedia.us are welcome to join us at no charge.

Can't make it? Consider hosting your own event. Everyone interested in hosting or participating in a table is encouraged to visit www.onthetable.cfsem.org for more information and to register.

A series of small conversations can lead to big change. That's the theory behind "On the Table," an effort spearheaded by the Community Foundation of Southeast Michigan, a day when a series of small conversations will be taking place across the region focused on building communities where young people can thrive.

"We are encouraging On the Table participants to discuss our region's youth," said Mariam Noland, the president of the Community Foundation for Southeast Michigan. "Our tagline is 'Your Voice Matters,' which illustrates the spirit of the initiative. We believe it's important for everyone to

have a voice in creating strong, vibrant communities across the region in which all young people can succeed."

Funding comes from the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation. "To make Detroit more successful, we need to connect across backgrounds and income levels and discuss both the opportunities and the challenges facing our city and our region," said Katy Locker, Knight Foundation program director for Detroit. "On the Table moves us toward that goal, while connecting us to a national network of cities looking to share lessons and grow."

THE JEWISH CONVERSATION
On the Table takes place Oct.

4, and to help stimulate Jewish community participation, the *Jewish News* is serving as an "umbrella convener" — hosting its own conversation and providing information so that small groups across the Jewish community can be involved in the conversation.

"The *JN* has partnered in recent years with the Knight Foundation and Community Foundation for Southeast Michigan through our involvement with New Michigan Media, a consortium of Metro Detroit's largest ethnic newspapers, to make sure our voices are heard," said *JN*

Publisher and Executive Editor Arthur Horwitz. "It was only natural for the *JN* to step forward to provide a convening umbrella within the Jewish community."



Arthur Horwitz

The *JN* is partnering with The Well on this endeavor. To celebrate Sukkot, The Well has loaned out six sukkahs to young adults throughout Metro Detroit. These young adults are committing to hosting events in their homes over the course of Sukkot, empowering them to participate in a holiday which they might not have otherwise. "Oct. 4, the night of On the Table, happens to also be erev

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Sukkot, and so we have several young folks in our community who will be sitting down together for a meal in the sukkah,” The Well’s Assistant Director Matt Weiner said. “When the *Detroit Jewish News* approached us about this initiative, it was clear that taking these conversations and infusing them with our communities and programs was a natural fit.”

The Well’s sukkah recipients will be asked to include a conversation about building a vibrant community where youth can thrive and prosper. They’ll also ask a second question: What needs do they see in the Jewish community in the coming years for our younger generations?

Weiner said that every one of the sukkah recipients is excited about the event. “Many said that those would have been the topics of conversation anyway and were happy to know that these conversations would be part of a community-wide discussion.”

Avery Drongowski of Madison Heights is the program and engagement associate at The Well since graduating from University of Michigan School of Social Work and Jewish Communal Leadership Program in April. She is one of the people borrowing a sukkah. It’s her very first one, she said.

“I’m excited to host this conversation as someone who is excited about engaging with regional issues and civic health,” she said. “Sometimes the number of challenges in a community can seem overwhelming, and the barrier feels high for folks to join the conversation.”

“The On the Table platform reminded me that bettering our region begins with a basic question around need. What opportunities do young people in our community need to succeed? As a social worker, doing a needs assessment and analyzing what needs are already being met or where a community has room for improvement really guides the next steps in making the necessary changes.”

“It’s important to have these kinds of conversations so that we can consider the motivations behind implementing change, including who is making the decisions about what people need,” she added. “Framing this conversation inside of a sukkah provides the opportunity to layer on Jewish themes that we discuss around the holiday of Sukkot, which

can range from welcoming the stranger to physical permanence.”

Weiner added that sukkah conversations would be going on throughout the entire holiday of Sukkot. “We also plan to put the questions to participants who come to other Well-hosted events, where we give young professionals a chance to engage and have meaningful conversations with peers in a Jewish setting,” he said.

Horwitz said, “It’s important to make sure the voices in the Jewish community are heard as part of the revitalization of Detroit and the region. And, as the *JN* moves through its 75th anniversary year, we’re being asked by more and more people and organizations to help convene and engage conversations of significant importance to the Jewish community. We’re excited to partner with The Well, the Community Foundation of Southeast Michigan and the Knight Foundation on behalf of our community.”

FOLLOW UP

After their conversations, all On the Table participants will receive a simple survey compiled by the University of Illinois at Chicago Institute for Policy and Civic Engagement, to learn more about their participation in

this project, the interesting ideas they discussed and how this experience may impact their civic engagement moving forward. The Community Foundation will publicly share these outcomes by early 2018. “It is our hope that these conversations, and the resulting report, will inspire additional civic engagement and generate new ideas that support the next generation,” Noland added.

In addition, the *Jewish News* will ask participants to complete a survey relating to the needs of young people in the Jewish community in the coming years. Survey results will be reported in the *JN*.

Weiner said he is particularly excited about On the Table’s follow-up plans. “The Well has learned from past events, like our event at the Holocaust Memorial Center, that there is a need to continue the conversation,” Weiner said. “We see On the Table and its follow up as a way to launch these follow-up discussions and bring folks together from different backgrounds and areas to come together and help revitalize Detroit.”



Matt Weiner



Avery Drongowski