



Texas Jewish Historical Society
2026 Winter Board Meeting
January 16 – 18, 2026, Corpus Christi, TX

Schedule of Events

Friday, January 16, 2025

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| 3:00–4:30 pm | Welcome & Registration, Springhill Suites, 4331 South Padre Dr., Corpus Christi, Texas |
| 5:00 PM | Meet in hotel lobby to carpool to Congregation Beth Israel, 4402 Saratoga Blvd |
| 5:30–6:30 pm | Shabbat Dinner, Congregation Beth Israel |
| 6:30–7:30 pm | Shabbat Services and Oneg, Congregation Beth Israel |
| 8:45 PM | Carpool returns to Springhill Suites |

Saturday, January 17, 2025

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| 9:15 am | Meet in hotel lobby to carpool to Hebrew Rest Cemetery, 313 S. Brownlee Blvd |
| 9:30–10:30 am | Tour of Hebrew Rest Cemetery with Elizabeth Susser and David Loeb |
| 10:30 AM | Carpool to Seaside Cemetery, 4357 Ocean Drive |
| 10:45–11:30 am | Tour of Seaside Cemetery with Dr. Gary Blum |
| 11:30 am | Carpool to Jewish Community Center (JCC), 750 Everhart Road |
| 11:45–12:30 pm | JCC Tour and Discussion on current activities with Jewish Federation of Corpus Christi with Norma Levens |
| 12:30–1:15 pm | Box Lunch at JCC |
| 1:15–3:00 pm | Panel Discussion at JCC on Congregation Mergers in Corpus Christi with Davie Lou Solka, Dr. Gary Blum, Dr. Bryan Stone |
| 3:15 pm | Carpool returns to Springhill Suites |
| 3:30–4:45 pm | Free time |
| 4:45 pm | Meet in hotel lobby to carpool to USS Lexington Museum on the Bay, 2914 N. Shoreline Blvd |
| 5:30–9:15 pm | Aboard the USS Lexington (<i>see Safety Note below</i>) <ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Tours</i>• <i>Film on history in the Joe Jessel 3D Mega Theatre</i>• <i>Plated dinner onboard in Hanger Bay #2</i>• <i>Presentations: Chris Adler, Lynda Furgatch, and special guests with ties to the USS Lexington who will share memories of Joe Jessel, the guiding force that brought the USS Lexington to Corpus Christi as a learning museum</i> |
| 9:15 pm | Carpool returns to Springhill Suites |

Safety Note regarding USS Lexington Museum

- The Museum is a 30-minute drive from the hotel.
- Two vans accommodating up to 30 people will be available for those who would like transportation.
- Golf carts will be available to transport guests from the parking area to the ship.
- Wear comfortable footwear (tennis shoes or flat shoes; women may prefer to wear slacks) as walkways are uneven aboard the USS Lexington.
- If using stairs aboard USS Lexington are a problem, elevators are available.

Sunday, January 18, 2025

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| 9:00 – 11:00 am | TJHS Board Meeting in Springhill Suites Meeting Room |
| 11:00 am | Meeting Adjourned |

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Sessions and Presenters

Graveside Tour of Hebrew Rest Cemetery
with Elizabeth Susser and David Loeb

Elizabeth Susser lives in Corpus Christi and has been married to Jerry Susser for 51 years. They have two children and four grandchildren. They are members of Congregation Beth Israel where she is a board member. She was born in Brownsville and moved to Corpus Christi at age 5. Her degree is in Spanish from the University of Illinois. She taught Spanish and was a librarian at a bilingual school. Elizabeth also served as the director of the JCC Pre-School. Volunteer activities include being associated with the Brandeis University Booksales in CC for many years. She has been part of the Texas Historical Foundation for 41 years. She has served as president and then as Grants Chairman for 33 years. She is Involved in local civic boards and is currently Chairman of the Friends of the Corpus Christi Museum of Science and History. She is the family historian for the Weil Family, who came to CC from Alsace in 1869. Interest in the family history led her to research Weil ancestors and early Jewish families in town. Elizabeth is a longtime member of TJHS.

David Loeb is a fifth generation Corpus Christian. He currently serves as an elected Regent for Del Mar College, Vice President of the JCC, and Treasurer of Congregation Beth Israel. In the past he has served as an At Large Corpus Christi City Councilman, Planning Commissioner, and Chair of the Downtown Management District. He owns Landlord Resources, a local commercial property investment and management company that focuses on neighborhood retail centers and small office buildings. The company is a well-known local leader in adaptive reuse of historic buildings and the movement to revitalize existing neighborhoods. He is married to Heather Loeb and they have two children Isla(11) and Eli(9).

Graveside Tour of Seaside Cemetery
with Gary Blum

Dr. Gary Blum was not born in Texas but “got here as soon as he could”. He moved to Corpus Christi in 1950 at the age of six, from New York City. After attending Del Mar College, he transferred to The University of Texas at Austin, graduating in 1966. Accepted at the University of Texas Dental Branch at Houston, he graduated with a Doctor of Dental Surgery degree in 1970. Upon entering the United States Air Force, he served at Norton Air Force Base California as a Captain in the Dental Corps for two years, returning to Texas to residency in Houston. Returning home to Corpus Christi in 1974, he started his dental practice, limited to periodontics. Doctor Blum was and remains an active member of professional organizations, Southside Rotary Club (board member) and the Corpus Christi Chamber Music Society (board member) and other local groups. He has served in various capacities in the professional societies and as President of the Southwest Society of Periodontists in 1990-1991. He was an Adjunct Instructor in the Del Mar Dental Hygiene program for over 20 years. Always active within the Jewish community, He was a board member and past president of B'nai Israel Synagogue, chair of the Cemetery committee and member of several other committees, including the merger committee. As a member of the Jewish Community Council of the Corpus Christi, he has been a board member and past president. In addition, he was past president and board member of the Combined Jewish Appeal of Corpus Christi. He has been a board member of Congregation Beth Israel for many years and has been a member of many committees, being a longtime chair of the cemetery committee. On the community level, he has been the unofficial chair of the Chevra Kaddisha since its inception about 28 years ago. Since retiring from the practice of Periodontics approximately three years ago, he has continued his community activities in addition to photographing many charity and non-profit events, including for the public radio/tv station, Texas Jazz Festival, Piano Week at TAMU-CC and the J.C.C.

Facility Tour and Discussion on Current Activities with Jewish Federation of Corpus Christi with Norma Levens

Norma Levens is the Executive Director of the Jewish Community Council of Corpus Christi. Corpus Christi is where Norma was born, reared and educated. She joined the Jewish Community Council and Congregation Beth Israel in 1987. Since then, she has worked/volunteered for the Jewish Community Council and Congregation Beth Israel in a number of capacities. She served as member/secretary of the Board of Directors for the Jewish Community Council. She has also served as a member of the Board of Directors for Congregation Beth Israel. After her son completed middle school, Norma made the decision to go back to work after being a stay-at-home mom for 14 years. She was fortunate that the Jewish Community Council had the perfect opening for her skills and she never looked back. She has spent the last eleven and a half-years working at the Jewish Community Council as Executive Director. Her meticulous eye for detail has helped transform the overall look of the Jewish Community Council. In 2023 Norma helped, developed and over saw the construction of a state of the art 13,000 square foot school facility. The Jewish Community Council currently serves 185 students and 50 staff members. As the saying goes, "The JCC is the Place to be".

Panel Discussion on Mergers of with Davie Lou Solka, Dr. Gary Blum, and moderated by Dr Bryan Stone

Davie Lou Solka is a grandchild of Russian immigrants who were part of the Galveston movement. She was President of TJHS 2017-2019. She and her husband, Jack, z'l moved to Austin in 2007 from Corpus Christi. Davie Lou was involved in the community in Corpus Christi and was elected President of several Jewish organizations, PTAs, and service clubs, including the first woman president of Temple Beth El. After her children left home, she began and taught a Jewish Holiday Program called L'dor Vador in the JCC Pre-school, which continues to this day. She retired from teaching after fourteen years just before moving to Austin. She was involved in activities in Austin pre-COVID and is a born and bred Texan. She graduated from the University of Texas before you had to add Austin. She loves keeping up with her children, six grandchildren and spouses, and three great-grandchildren. Davie Lou is editor of THE TJHS MAGAZINE and the liaison for the Dolph Briscoe Center for American History.

Dr. Bryan Edward Stone is an award-winning community college professor at Del Mar College in Corpus Christi, Texas, where he teaches courses in U.S. History. He was named a **2024 Piper Professor** by the Minnie Stevens Piper Foundation, which recognizes ten Texas college and university faculty annually. He also received the 2024 Western Regional Faculty Member Award from the Association of Community College Trustees and the 2019 Aileen Creighton Award for Teaching Excellence and 2021 Teacher of the Year Award from Del Mar College. Bryan is the author of *The Chosen Folks: Jews on the Frontiers of Texas* (University of Texas Press, 2010), which won the Southern Jewish Historical Society Book Prize in 2011. He is also the editor of *Neither Fish nor Fowl: A Mercantile Jewish Family on the Rio Grande*, the memoir of Morris S. Riskind, a Jewish retailer and lay religious leader in the border community of Eagle Pass, Texas, and of Alexander Gurwitz's *Memories of Two Generations: A Yiddish Life in Russia and Texas* (University of Alabama Press, 2016), which recounts the life of a Jewish teacher and Talmud scholar who migrated to San Antonio in 1910. Bryan is the managing editor of the annual peer-reviewed journal *Southern Jewish History*, and his current research focuses on Jewish immigrants who arrived in the United States through the port of Galveston in the early twentieth century. Bryan is a Dallas native. He earned a Ph.D. in American Studies and a bachelor's in English from the University of Texas as well as a master's in English from the University of Virginia. He lives in Corpus Christi with his wife, Shannon, and a houseful of rescue cats

Dr Gary Blum – refer to BIO above

Saturday Evening Speakers:

Chris Adler began her professional life after college with the simple realization that everyone has to go “somewhere,” so she headed to Corpus Christi and spent ten years teaching school. She and Robert Adler have shared an incredible 52-year marriage, raising two outstanding sons, Troy and Matt (both still in Corpus Christi), and delighting in two brilliant grandchildren.

Chris later moved into public service, serving 8 years on the CCISD Board, 13 years on the Del Mar College Board, and 4 years on the City Council. She continues to work in the family business and remains involved in a variety of community volunteer efforts. One of her favorites was serving as an original member of Clowns Who Care, where she was fondly known as *Miss Goody 2 Shoes* for 24 years.

At home, Chris is happily “owned” by Chula and Levi, her pups, and Pico (de Gallo), her lively 35-year-old macaw who truly runs the household.

Lynda Furgatch is a lifelong Texan, raised in Abilene and now a 50-year member of Temple Beth El in Brownsville. She and her husband, Michael, have two children: Alysia, a doctor in The Woodlands; and Jason, who works in technology contracting in Hutto. They are also the proud grandparents of three very active and creative grandchildren. Outside of her many community roles, Lynda enjoys an active lifestyle that includes daily workouts, biking, and walking, along with caring for her beloved indoor and porch cats. She is an enthusiastic UT football fan, an avid reader, and a dedicated gardener.

Lynda brings a unique and colorful professional background. She has worked in retail, customer relations, and corporate spokesperson roles, and spent many years in commercial and voice-over work in both English and Spanish. She has appeared in television, radio, print, film, and corporate media productions, and even co-hosted the national Jerry Lewis Telethon in the Rio Grande Valley for 30 years. Within the Jewish community, she has long been known for her leadership and hospitality, having coordinated High Holiday celebrations and cooked Passover meals for large congregational gatherings for decades. She has served as Sisterhood President, participated in Hadassah, read Haftarah during holidays, and currently organizes the annual multi-congregational “Reverse Tashlich” event in the Rio Grande Valley. Lynda also volunteers at Valley Baptist Medical Center, where she leads a team of volunteers, organizes fundraising events for nursing scholarships, and supports patients throughout their hospital visits. She is known for stepping in whenever something needs to get done, and does so with humor, enthusiasm, and a deep commitment to community.

David P. Engel is currently Chairman of the Port of Corpus Christi and a past Chairman of the Lexington Museum, giving him a meaningful connection to the USS Lexington. He is the principal of Engel and Associates, LLC, a management consulting firm he founded in 2000 that provides services to both public and private companies, and he brings 51 years of experience in all areas of business management, including operations, acquisitions, divestitures, and financial performance improvement. Prior to forming his consulting practice, David served as President of Airgas Southwest, Inc., with branches in Texas, New Mexico, and Northern Mexico; Airgas Southwest was a wholly owned subsidiary of Airgas, Inc. (NYSE: ARG), which was later sold to Air Liquide. Previously, he was CEO and President of Welders Equipment Company, a business in which he was also a principal owner. In addition to his current role with the Port of Corpus Christi, David serves on the Board of Susser Bank in Dallas, Texas, and has previously served as a Board Member of Susser Holdings/Stripes (NYSE: SUSS) and Susser Petroleum Partners (NYSE: SUSP), as well as a Director of First Victoria Bank, Corpus Christi National Bank, MBank Corpus Christi, and as a “de novo” Director of MBank Corpus Christi South. He is also a past Chairman of the Corpus Christi Regional Economic Development Commission and the CHRISTUS Spohn Health System. David earned a Bachelor of Business Administration degree from Southern Methodist University in 1973 and is a graduate of the Harvard University Owner President Management Program in 1988.

Sue Williams is currently President of Congregation Beth Israel in Corpus Christi, where she has served on the Board for the past nine years in a variety of leadership roles. Originally from San Antonio, she moved to Corpus Christi after retiring from the U.S. Navy in 1993, drawn back to a city where she spent much of her childhood. Commander Williams earned a BA in English from Southwest Texas State University and a Master of Science in Computer Science from the Naval Postgraduate School.

Her distinguished Navy career spanned more than two decades and included senior command, academic, and technology-focused assignments worldwide. She served as an Associate Professor of Computer Science at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, as Commanding Officer of the U.S. Naval Radio Receiving Facility in Kami Seya, Japan, and later as Commanding Officer of the U.S. Navy's forward-deployed Fleet Ballistic Submarine Refit Facility in Holy Loch, Scotland. She completed her Navy service as Director of Information Resources at the Naval War College, where she led the development of a campus-wide information systems network. Her military honors include the Legion of Merit and multiple Meritorious Service and Commendation Medals.

Following her military service, she spent 19 years as an instructor and Executive Director of the Real Estate Institute of Corpus Christi and later chaired the Nueces County Appraisal Review Board for six years. Now retired, Sue enjoys fishing and remains deeply engaged in her synagogue and the Corpus Christi community.

Capt. Steve Banta, USN (Ret) is Executive Director of the USS Lexington Museum. He is a 1991 graduate of the U.S. Naval Academy and began his flight training at Naval Air Station Corpus Christi. During his 26-year Navy career, he was a helicopter pilot flying on multiple ships deployed around the world and served as a flight instructor and on the staff of the Secretary of Defense. He served as Commanding Officer of the World Famous HSL-48 Vipers in Mayport, FL, and of NAS Corpus Christi.

Steve began his current job as Executive Director of the USS Lexington Museum in January 2018. "It's an honor to be part of the great crew on the LEX, preserving this amazing ship, and sharing her rich history with our guests." Steve's wife Sarah is from Corpus Christi. Their extended family includes their son, daughter-in-law, and two-year old grandson!