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CIVIC SPIRIT

June 2023 Newsletter

Executive Director Message

"A Ripple of Hope for Democracy"

It is hard for me to believe a year has passed since I began serving as the Executive Director of Civic Spirit. I was drawn to this organization because of its vital mission of providing training in civic education to teachers and students in faith based day schools.

This year has been filled with one success after another:

· Civic Spirit's 4th **Educators Cohort** concluded just last week, and hearing about how teachers integrated civic values into their classroom and school communities was deeply inspiring. And recruitment for next year has yielded twice as many fellows!

· Our **Student Delegates program**, which also doubled in size, attracted teens from around the country to explore citizenship in the digital age.

· Last month, students from four schools in the tri-state area participated in **Civic Spirit Day**, held in-person for the first time since the pandemic. Over the course of the day, these middle school students formed connections as they wrestled with the question of what public spaces can be created to meet their needs.

· Our fundraising efforts have generated enthusiastic responses. Since July, we have added over 100 new donors this year, and Civic

Spirit has secured more foundational support than ever before!

These successes are due to the efforts of our professional team, partnership of our lay leadership, and your support as our stakeholders. And this is just the beginning!

Fifty-six years ago, American society grappled with similar issues that we face today, namely healing the deep divides in American society, protecting individual liberty, and safeguarding civil rights. On June 6, 1966, New York Senator Robert F. Kennedy gave a talk to the National Union of South African Students at the University of Cape Town, South Africa that has become known as the “Ripple of Hope” speech.

Appealing for moral courage, Kennedy passionately asserted: “Each time a man stands up for an ideal, or acts to improve the lot of others, or strikes out against injustice, he sends forth a tiny ripple of hope, and crossing each other from a million different centers of energy and daring those ripples build a current which can sweep down the mightiest walls of oppression and resistance.”

Civic Spirit’s approach promotes not just content knowledge, but also connections between the students of all ages and backgrounds. While education takes time to create roots, our unequivocal belief is that every lesson, conversation, and collaborative experience constitutes a seed planted for the long-term health of our local communities and shared democracy.

To address the challenges of our day, together we need to create ripples of hope in our schools, local communities, and country. Every success we have in generating civic spirit will become a ripple of hope that RFK imagined and give us confidence in a better and safer tomorrow for ourselves, our children, and our democracy.

Looking Forward to Reaching New Heights Together,
Rabbi Charlie Savenor

If you would like to support our efforts, please consider making a gift.

Donate Today

We the Educators

Ever wondered if the US Presidency is truly an upgrade from a constitutional monarchy? As a loyal subject of King Charles in England, **Clive Lawton** guides us through the significance of monarchy and democracy in contemporary society and offers a European perspective on America's strengths and challenges today. Join us for a royally informative discussion, as we hop "across the pond" to explore modern democracy. This is the second session of a two-part series with Clive. To view the first session, click **here**. The series is co-sponsored by the **Community Scholars Program (CSP)**.

Tonight! Wednesday, June 7th
7:00pm ET / 4:00pm PT

Register Here

Educators Cohort Closing Gathering

Last week, on May 30th, Civic Spirit **Educators Cohort** fellows, school administrators, and civic leaders gathered together to celebrate the work of our fourth cohort. You can watch the Closing Gathering **here**.

Our celebration began with inspirational words from Civic Spirit Founding Director, **Dr. Tamara Tweel**, who shared Alicia Ostriker's poem *Ghazal: America the Beautiful.* Cohort fellows then broke up into small groups where they shared their Civic Spirit projects with each other. Presentations highlighted both the outcome of the projects as well as the process of prioritizing civics in all aspects of their teaching through their participation in the Cohort.

The **Honorable Judge Lewis J. Liman**, United States federal district judge sitting in the Southern District of New York, honored the work of our Cohort by sharing words of wisdom at our Closing Gathering. Judge Liman shared a quote from John Dewey that reflects the importance of fostering a sense of civic belonging in our students. Dewey, in *Democracy and Education*, argues that, "Democracy has to be born anew every generation, and education is its midwife." Judge Liman echoed Dewey's thoughts with his own remarks, "The

comments all speak to the responsibility of the citizenry to imbibe and carry forward the values of democracy and tolerance and participation and the critical role of educators in giving the citizenry the tools necessary for them to discharge that responsibility. Democracy thrives only if the people understand it and want it to thrive."

Judge Liman highlighted the sense of civic responsibility that our educators fostered in their classrooms. We know that in the coming years, their students will continue to benefit from the civic learning our Cohort engaged in this year, and that teachers will continue to imbue their schools with a sense of civic spirit.

Read Our Educators Cohort "Yearbook" Here

Civic Spirit Clubs - Launching This Year

We are excited to launch a new version of our Student Delegate Program in the 2023-2024 school year with the creation of **Civic Spirit Clubs!** These co-curricular clubs will be school-based, providing students with opportunities to meet regularly in-person and address local issues that are important to their community. Working with an advisor to develop a capstone project that they will present at the end of the year, students develop leadership skills, practice problem-

solving, and build bonds as a group. They will also have the chance to connect with other students across our network, and learn from civic change makers across the country.

Thanks to a generous grant, Civic Spirit will pay the advisor of a school's Civic Spirit Club $2,026 to facilitate the group for the year.

To learn more about Civic Spirit Clubs or if you are interested in bringing a Civic Spirit Club to your school, please contact Hillary Gardenswartz, our Director of Student Experiences, at hillary@civicspirit.org

Student Delegates

On Tuesday, May 16th, we celebrated our Student Delegates who participated in Civic Spirit's **Student Delegates** program. Nineteen students representing eight schools across the country took part in this year's program. Exploring the question, "What does it mean to be a citizen in the digital age?," students met twice a month over Zoom to examine how social media shapes the way we communicate and how we understand information.

A special feature of the Student Delegate Program is that students turn their learning into action. Given that this year's topic explored social media, students decided that their action project should be to promote issues about which they are passionate over social media platforms in

a positive, effective manner.

Each Student Delegate researched and created an infographic about an issue that was important to them and promoted it on their own platforms. As one student reflected, “One highlight for me was being able to explore different issues that are important and present in my life. I was given the opportunity to research and learn more about a topic of my choice, and learn from others about issues and topics that are important to them.” You can check out some of our Delegates’ infographics on Civic Spirit’s **social media platforms**, so look out for and support their work! **Here** is an example of one of our Delegate's, Isabella from Bishop Loughlin Memorial High School, infographic.

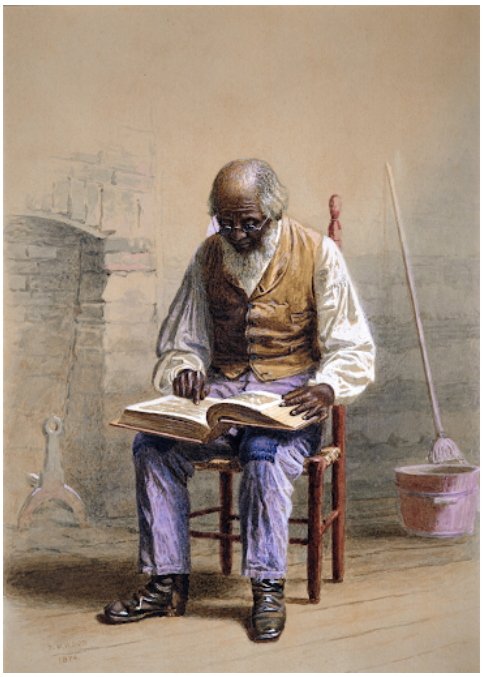
Even more than the amazing research, projects, and presentations that the Student Delegates accomplished through this Program, was the understanding and trust that they built amongst each other. Reflecting on their experience, students shared:

· “I learned that there are things I can’t see that people experience and try to be open about. I have learned to become more optimistic about different cultures and faiths by working with students from different faith based schools.”

· “By working with diverse students, I learned to be more tolerant of people who have different values and beliefs than me and thereby be more adaptable to different situations.”

Congratulations to our Student Delegates! We are so proud of you and can’t wait to see what you do next.

Juneteenth Holiday Resources



This year Civic Spirit started featuring resources every month connected to civic holidays. These texts provide students with a rich understanding of the civic holidays that bind us together as Americans. This month, in honor of **Juneteenth**, we feature sources that discuss the ways in which African Americans exercised their freedom at the end of the Civil War.

Check Out Our Juneteenth Resource Here

Development Update

We reached our goal! Thanks to our community of donors and supporters, we achieved our matching gift campaign goal through the **UpStart's Venture Accelerator**. We were able to successfully raise $15,000 and will receive a $15,000 match. Funds raised will contribute to the growth and expansion of our upcoming 2023-2024 **Educators Cohort**, which has already doubled in size!

We could not have done it without the faith and motivation instilled in us by the students and educators we serve every day. Special thanks to our founders, Rabbi Robert S. Hirt and Virginia Bayer. To all those who contributed to our campaign, you are a part of the impact Civic Spirit strives to make on the civic education landscape and ensure that our democracy's future will be bright for our students, for our faith communities, and for you.

“Hear ye, hear ye!” Announcements

"Faith-based communities have a role to play in strengthening democracy" - Civic Spirit's work in the field of civic engagement is recognized in this article by Sofi Hersher Andorsky, Vice President for Strategy and Communications of A More Perfect Union: The Jewish Partnership for Democracy. To read the article, click **here**.

Civic Season is upon us! - Between Juneteenth and July 4th, you have the opportunity to "discover your story and your role in history." In partnership with hundreds of civic organizations, programs and activities ranging from 10 minute exercises to full 90 minute conversations will be offered. Check out the **full list of resources here** connecting people to history, to their roots, and to each other.

CIVIC SEASON

Happy Pride Month! - We wish the LGBTQIA+ community a **Happy Pride Month** this June!

The Weitzman National Museum of American Jewish History's Annual Educators Institute: the Art and Science of Teaching Jewish History in America - The National Educators Institute connects Jewish educators with leading history and education experts, experiential learning, and innovative instructional methods. Dates: August 21-23. 12-4pm EST (Virtual). **Register here.**

Combat AntiSemitism - Rabbi Savenor represented Civic Spirit at the **Combat AntiSemitism** Movement conference in NYC. He met with Natan Sharansky, former Soviet Refusenik and Deputy Prime Minister of Israel, who opened with an assessment of the challenges and opportunities of our time. Mayor Eric Adams spoke about how we need to address this current situation of hate with new thinking and new tools.

Sesame Workshop Annual Dinner - Civic Spirit's Executive Director joined the Cookie Monster, Alan from Hooper's Store, and Martha Stewart at the Sesame Workshop's Annual Benefit Dinner this past May! Just as the Sesame Workshop is committed to helping kids everywhere grow smarter, stronger, and kinder, Civic Spirit works to inspire and empower our future generations.

Congratulations to The Bronfman Fellowship's 37th Cohort! - Rivka Tamir, Civic Spirit Student Delegates participant and junior at **The Abraham Joshua Heschel**

School, joins the The Bronfman Fellowship's upcoming cohort alongside 25 other students. These high school students will participate in a yearlong experience beginning with a summer in the U.S. and Israel where they will study Jewish texts, traditions, history, and culture with a faculty team of leading rabbis, educators, and artists.

We want to thank **Tiphanie Shoemaker**, who has served as our Pedagogy Advisor over the past year and our Director of Education before that. Next year Tiphanie will become the Director of Teaching and Learning at Luria Academy. We wish you great success in this upcoming role!

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