

Media Contact: Peggy Hinz
818.757.4407
Peggy.Hinz@lajhealth.org

Los Angeles Jewish Health Celebrates Largest Bar and Bat Mitzvah of Skilled Nursing Residents In Its History

Ceremony enables 10 elderly residents to explore their Jewish tradition

(RESEDA, CA – September 19, 2025) This September, 10 Los Angeles Jewish Health (LAJH) residents celebrated their bar and bat mitzvah, the largest cohort of skilled nursing residents in LAJH history to do so. The seniors, ranging in age from 76 to 98, participated in the centuries-old tradition, which is typically celebrated by 12- or 13-year-olds.

Held at LAJH's Grancell Village campus, the event drew a capacity crowd of several hundred people—friends, relatives, loved ones, and staff who came to support the seniors as they chanted in Hebrew and reflected on their Jewish roots. In addition to reading from the Torah, the residents spoke about their Jewish journeys and about the meaning of their lives over the decades.

"I was born into a family that had very conservative Jewish ideas, and girls could not be bat mitzvahed," said Cherie Goodman, one of the participants. "I am proud of who I am and glad today I could enjoy that experience."

Phyllis Gottlieb, another participant, concurred. "My grandfather was a rabbi in Russia, and my father was quite religious, too," she said. "Judaism has always been central to my upbringing and family identity. My children were bar and bat mitzvahed, and I thought, 'Why shouldn't I do it, too?' They're all proud of me, and being a bat mitzvah feels very special."

For Robert Orgen, having a bar mitzvah required overcoming significant obstacles. "Judaism means the world to me, but after my stroke, nobody had the time or patience to try to teach me Hebrew until I met with LAJH Chief Mission Officer Rabbi Bender," he said. "I've wanted this more and more every day, and it has fulfilled my dream."

The residents studied with Rabbi Bender for a full year to prepare for the bar and bat mitzvah ceremony. Under her tutelage, they learned to read sacred text, lead prayers, and gain a deeper understanding regarding the significance of the day.

“For most of these residents, this was their first time being called to the Torah,” Rabbi Bender said. “At LAJH, not only do we cultivate physical health, we also inspire residents to pursue their dreams and lives filled with purpose and meaning.”

Once the residents had read from the Torah and completed their remarks, Ilana Springer, LAJH’s senior vice president of in-residence services, commended them on their extraordinary achievement.

“Thank you for inspiring us, and for showing us that there are goals and dreams we all can reach for in our own lives,” she said. “Mazel tov, and we wish you luck in fulfilling your next dream!”

Also on hand at the event was LAJH Board Chair Judy Friedman-Rudzki, who presented the new bar and bat mitzvahs with an engraved kiddush cup. The residents received photographs of themselves and a special certificate to commemorate the day, as well.

Following the ceremony, residents and guests were treated to a festive reception. But before they broke bread, LAJH CEO and President Dale Surowitz expressed his admiration of the bar and bat mitzvahs’ resilience, strength, and positivity.

“What you have accomplished is absolutely amazing and demonstrates to all of us that age is only a number,” he said. “You are an inspiration to all of us.”

###

About Los Angeles Jewish Health: Founded in 1912, non-profit Los Angeles Jewish Health (LAJHealth) is the largest single-source provider of comprehensive senior healthcare services in the Los Angeles area, serving nearly 4,000 people each year. Thousands of seniors benefit from our community-based and in-residence care and services. Programs include: Independent Living; Assisted Living; Senior Behavioral Health; Short-Term Rehabilitation; Skilled Nursing; PACE; Hospice & Palliative Care; Geriatric Health; Memory Care. In addition, LAJHealth is home to the Annenberg School of Nursing.