



HEATHER TOWNSEND

After a moment of silence for the victims of Bondi Beach shooting, Congregation Beth David's Rabbi Micah Hyman lights the community menorah on the first night of Hanukkah at annual celebration in downtown San Luis Obispo.

SLO's Hanukkah celebration stands strong after Bondi Beach tragedy

BY NACHSHON MARGALIT
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We couldn't be prouder of the Jewish Community of San Luis Obispo County.

As Mission Plaza glowed blue and white last Sunday evening, many of us gathered in a public square to mark the first night of Hanukkah. At a time when the world can feel uncertain, our community chose to come together — to share light, song and connection. It was glorious, especially considering the atmosphere we were tasked to face so boldly. Earlier that morning, as we finalized plans for the JCC-Federation of San Luis Obispo's community menorah lighting and Hanukkah celebration downtown, we awoke to

heartbreaking news of a shooting at a Hanukkah candle lighting in Bondi Beach, Australia.

As co-presidents of the JCC-Federation — and as parents of young children — we paused. The responsibility of inviting families to gather publicly, to bring their children into a visible Jewish space so soon after such violence, weighed heavily. In those hours, we were deliberate and careful. We crafted thoughtful, comforting language that was shared with our collaborative partners and with community members — acknowledging fear without amplifying it, honoring grief while affirming resolve.

We asked people to show up not in spite of the moment, but because of it: to stand together, visibly

and publicly, so that our collective presence — and our light — could shine brightly. Choosing to proceed required care, coordination and courage, not only from organizers, but also from every individual and family who decided to attend. That evening, approximately 350 Jews and non-Jewish allies filled Mission Plaza. Leaders and members from area congregations, Hillel SLO, Stand With Us, along with many unaffiliated Jews and supportive neighbors stood side by side. Together, they reflected the full scope of Jewish life in San Luis Obispo County, diverse, connected and deeply rooted.

Rabbi Micah Hyman of Congregation Beth David led a moment of silence

for the victims in Bondi Beach before the menorah was lit. We were joined by public officials, lay leaders from the community and ended with The Beth David Intergenerational Choir uplifting the plaza with "Light One Candle," reminding us that peace and compassion are strongest when shared: "Don't let the light go out... Let it shine through our love and our tears." The evening was filled with warmth and joy — sufganiyot (the Hanukkah doughnut), hot cocoa, lentil soup, dreidel spinning and a cookie-decorating station for children and families. These simple acts of togetherness mattered. Being present mattered.

In our remarks that evening, we spoke to just how vital it was for us to be together in that moment — to be seen, to be counted, and to remind one another that community itself is a form of protection. Our gathering was not an act of defiance, but of affirmation: that Jewish life here is open, connected and enduring. We are deeply grateful to the San Luis Obispo Police Department for their visible and supportive presence, and for working closely with us to ensure a safe and welcoming gathering. Their partnership allowed us to balance vigilance with openness, and responsibility with joy.

We also thank Mayor Erica Stewart for her enthusiastic support and Father Nisbet of Mission San Luis Obispo for helping create the communal menorah and for embodying the interfaith spirit that defines our county. Hanukkah teaches that light is not passive; it is a choice, renewed night after night. On Sunday, our community made that choice together — parents, children, elders and allies — choosing connection over fear, and warmth over darkness.

Janelle Eagle and Nachshon Margalit are SLO County residents, parents, proud Jews and co-presidents of the JCC-Federation of San Luis Obispo.