



THE DONOR DIFFERENCE

A Newsletter for the Mandell JCC Community Donor Circle

OUR DONORS **WHY THEY DO IT**

Alisha and Ron Cipriano

For Alisha and Ron Cipriano, Jewish philanthropy has always been a priority for their family. Both serve on several Jewish community boards of directors. Ron recently joined the boards of Chabad of Greater Hartford and the Jewish Community Foundation of Greater Hartford after serving several years on the Jewish Federation Board. In addition to joining the Mandell JCC Board in 2025, Alisha serves as Women's Philanthropy Chair at the Jewish Federation and on the Beth El Temple Board. They serve out of love for the community and a desire to be role models for their children.

For Alisha, the JCC has been part of her family's story for generations—and a place where she has found friendship, community and, now, a way to help shape the future.

Her earliest JCC memories are rooted in the theater program. As a young girl, she watched her mother perform on the Gilman stage in the JCC Galas, and by third grade, Alisha was on that same stage herself. From then through 11th grade, she spent countless hours at the JCC, performing in shows and building friendships. Some of her favorite roles were Roxie Hart in *Chicago*, Sandy in *Grease* and Irene Malloy in *Hello, Dolly*.

"It was all about community," Alisha remembers. "It was such a warm atmosphere. The JCC theater program was the premiere program in the area for years. It was the best place to be."

“ I really think there's a great vision for what the JCC is and can continue to be in the future. ”



Alisha and Ron Cipriano with their children.

The theater program brought talented young people from throughout Greater Hartford together. It gave Alisha an outlet

that was different from school and connected her with a community that valued talent. Looking back, she recognizes how deeply those experiences shaped her.

Years later, after returning to the community in 2005 to start their family, Alisha and Ron found themselves bringing their children to the JCC. They

played on the Playscape, participated in classes, attended pre-school and took part in Karate and the Basketball League, where Ron coached their oldest son. Their youngest daughter followed in Alisha's footsteps and performed on the Gilman stage in *Aladdin* and *Seussical*.

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Left to Right: Alisha performing on the Gilman stage. The Ciprianos' oldest son celebrates his JCC basketball experience. Their youngest daughter performs on the Gilman stage.

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Three generations. One JCC. And a connection that continues to grow.

For Alisha, serving on the JCC Board of Directors is meaningful not simply because of her history with the JCC, but because she believes strongly in its future.

"I think it is the most fulfilling board that I'm a part of," she says.

She describes the Board as exceptionally well-run, with a wide range of perspectives and what she calls "a wonderful meeting of the minds." She values the opportunity to be part of conversations about what the JCC is—and what it can become.

"I really think there's a great vision for what the JCC is and can continue to be in the future," she says.

That future, Alisha believes, must include everyone who walks through the JCC's doors. She is excited about the opportunity to strengthen the JCC for the next generation and sees its role extending beyond the Jewish community. "Bringing that community together," she says, "is an important part of the Greater Hartford community."

Their commitment to the JCC also extends to philanthropy. As initial members of JNext in its founding year in 2021, Alisha and Ron believe strongly in cultivating a new generation of young Jewish donors and leaders. Now five years later they have reached an important milestone in that journey: they are the first JNext Pillars to join the Mandell JCC's Pillars Society, the JCC's

central group of donors who invest in the JCC year after year.

"I think it's important to show people that there are younger donors in the community that are willing to step up," adds Alisha. "That's part of being a leader. And we hope to be a good example for other young couples who have the capacity."

"The recognition that comes with the JNext Pillars program is meaningful because it helps demonstrate that young donors can play an important role in sustaining the JCC."

"It's also important to give recognition because I think it encourages them to continue to give."

"We really need a community of young leaders," Alisha says. "We need those leaders to sustain the Jewish community the way that our parents did."

"JNext was created to inspire the next generation to invest in the future of the JCC through philanthropy, leadership, and community," share Josh Feldman and Amanda Katzman, JNext Co-Founders and fellow JCC Board members. "We're incredibly proud to see Ron and Alisha become the first JNext members to become Pillars. They are both incredible leaders in our community, and their commitment to the JCC reflects the legacy of their families and the generations who came before them."

For Alisha and Ron, philanthropy is one way of taking responsibility for that future. Leadership is another. Both are needed so that the JCC remains a cornerstone of our community.

Finding Family at the JCC

For Madhu Patel, the Mandell JCC has become much more than a place to exercise. It is a place where he feels known, welcomed and connected—a place that, in his words, “feels like it’s mine.”

Madhu has been a JCC member since 2023, but his love of swimming goes back more than 30 years. Nearly every morning, he arrives at the JCC around 6 or 6:30 a.m. and heads to the pool for his favorite form of exercise.

After undergoing surgeries on both knees, swimming has become especially important to his physical well-being. He tried strength training at the JCC at his doctor’s recommendation and enjoyed working with personal trainer Lindsay, and ultimately returned to the pool.

But it is the community around the pool that has made the JCC so meaningful to him.

“I’ve met so many people at the pool. Everybody is so lovable. We feel like friends,” Madhu says.

He laughs about the mornings when he arrives early and finds himself alone in the pool. “Jaine says to me, ‘Wow, you have your own swimming pool!’” he says.

More than anything, Madhu says, he appreciates what the JCC represents: a welcoming community that serves people of all ages, experiences and abilities.

“I admire what the JCC does for the community,” he says. He notices the children, families, programs and activities throughout the building and appreciates the way people from different backgrounds come together. “The environment is just so nice.”

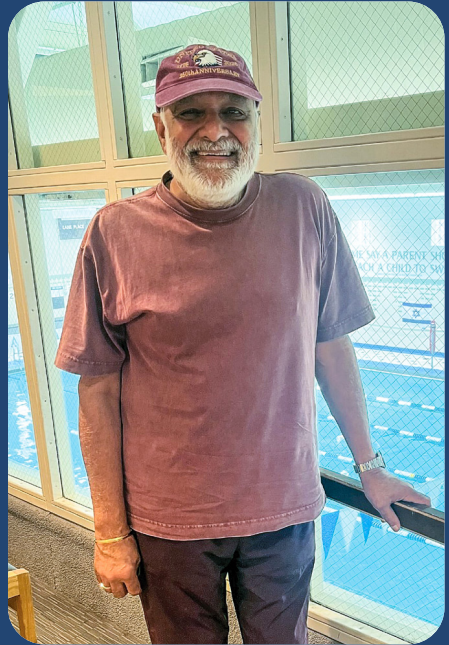
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And when he doesn’t come for a few days, he notices the difference.

“When I come back, everybody will say, ‘Hey, we missed you. Where were you?’” he says. “I feel like family when I come here.”



Madhu Patel at the Mandell JCC.

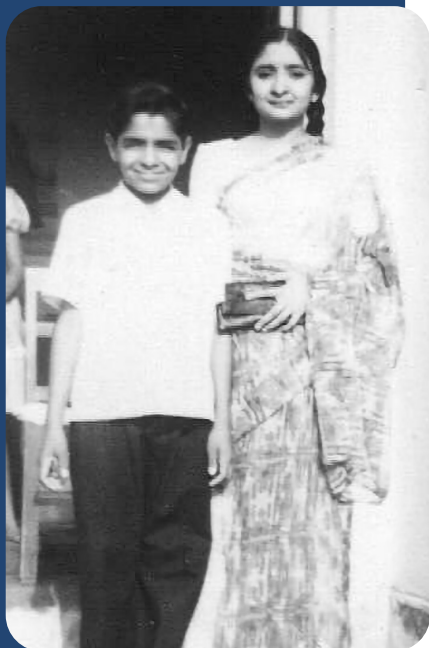
A Bond That Spans a Lifetime

Family has always been at the center of Madhu’s life, particularly his relationship with his sister, Dr. Nima G. Patel.

Nima came to the United States from India in 1969 after completing medical school—a remarkable achievement at a time when higher education was not always encouraged for young Indian women. She went on to become a pediatrician and, in 1995, opened her own medical practice in West Hartford.

When Madhu emigrated to Connecticut in 1999, he and Nima became even closer. He worked alongside her as the business manager of her practice until his retirement in 2020.

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Madhu and his sister, Nima, as children.

Their bond has continued through every chapter of their lives. Madhu is his sister's caregiver. Nima has been living with Parkinson's disease and dementia. She appointed Madhu as her power of attorney, entrusting him not only with her care but also with something deeply important to her: carrying forward her commitment to giving back.

"She has gone through so much in her life," Madhu says. "She always said that she has to give back whatever she can."

Nima has continued to support charitable causes, and Madhu now helps make those gifts on her behalf. Her philanthropic priorities reflect the experiences that shaped her life: supporting girls' education and helping children with disabilities and special needs.

As a pediatrician, Nima saw firsthand the challenges faced by children with disabilities and autism. And as a woman who had overcome cultural expectations to pursue higher education and a career in medicine, she understood the transformative power of education.

Madhu is proud to help honor those values.

"I feel like I have to give back to my sister, after all she did for me in my lifetime. I was always the baby brother," he says.

Giving Back to a Community That Feels Like Family

That same spirit of giving is part of what connects Madhu and Nima to the JCC.

Madhu says that Nima appreciates the JCC's mission and the many ways it serves the community. For Madhu, giving is ultimately about honoring the people and communities that have given something meaningful to his life.

His sister gave him a home when he came to Connecticut. She supported him, encouraged him and helped shape the life they built together. Now, as he cares for her, he is helping carry her values forward.

And at the JCC, Madhu has found another kind of family.

"It's one of my favorite things to do, to come here," he says. "To do my daily exercise, to meet people."

For Madhu, the daily swim is important. The friendships are important. The sense of belonging is important.

And so is the opportunity to give back.

Because sometimes, community becomes family—and when it does, supporting that community becomes another way of saying thank you.



Dr. Nima G. Patel