

Mazel tov! Museum tracks down rainbow 'sign' of the times

Savvy use of social media nets Philadelphia museum a distinctively Jewish response to historic legal ruling on gay rights

By RENEE GHERT-ZAND | August 10, 2013, 5:31 pm | [5](#)

People joke about playing “Jewish geography,” but Shira Goldstein, the exhibitions coordinator at the [National Museum of American Jewish History](#) in Philadelphia, relied very significantly on connections within the Jewish community to find an important object.

The object was a simple hand-lettered sign done in colored markers on a piece of plain white poster board, but Goldstein and her museum colleagues knew its historic value. They had spotted the sign, held outside the US Supreme Court on June 26, in a photo published by [the New York Times](#). The sign read “Mazel Tov” in rainbow colors, and celebrated the [court’s decision](#) to strike down the federal Defense of Marriage Act, which had legally recognized only heterosexual marriage.



“We immediately recognized that it was a wonderful, purely Jewish response to the court’s decision,” Goldstein told The Times of Israel. “It represents how the term [mazel tov] has reached American culture, that everyone can understand it and relate to it. It was synonymous with the joy and excitement in this country at that moment.”

As the person in the museum's collections and exhibitions department most familiar with social media, Goldstein, 29, took it upon herself to post an online query about the sign. She put it on the NMAJH [Facebook page](#), as well as her own, and made sure to alert her personal circle of Jewish friends who were working or interning as activists in Washington DC.

"I was almost certain that the person holding the sign must have been from the DC area," she said.

Goldstein had never before seen anyone try to track down an artifact this way, but she was confident it would work. "We put the word out on a Wednesday, and I just knew we'd find it before Shabbat. I had a sense, a hunch about it."

The exhibitions coordinator sat back and let the posts and tweets do their work, and — as she had prophesied — in two days, Cody Pomeranz, a summer intern at the [Center for American Progress](#), emailed to say he had the poster and would be happy to donate it to the museum. "There were fewer than 10 connections between the museum and Cody," Goldstein noted.

'It's an artifact now,' Goldstein says of the handcrafted poster

Pomeranz had made the sign spontaneously before heading out to join the crowds at the Supreme Court. A fellow intern had suggested Pomeranz write "Mazel Tov" because he regularly uses the phrase instead of "congratulations."

In particular, Pomeranz associated the phrase with marriage.

"Back in September, I saw my oldest sister get married. It was a Jewish wedding, and when her husband broke the glass and we all jumped up and roared 'mazel tov!', it was an incredible moment of joy, love and family," he told [The Atlantic](#), which first reported on the sign's journey to the museum.

"Everyone deserves that moment, regardless of sexual orientation," the sign maker continued. "So after I finished 'Mazel Tov,' I added, in parentheses, 'to EVERYONE!'"

According to Goldstein, the sign is currently being formally accessioned by the museum. "It's an artifact now," she said.

Still, the museum has no immediate plans for it. "The goal was to find it and get it. Now we'll figure out what its best use will be," Goldstein said.

In the meantime, the sign will take its place in the NMAJH's permanent collection of artifacts, intended to represent the social history and material culture of American Jewry from 1654 to the present. Goldstein pointed out that the sign fits in among the museum's other political ephemera.

"It, like the other pieces, conveys the American Jewish response to the events of the day," she said.



Annette Siegel Gross · Top Commenter · Theodore Roosevelt High School

I am the mother of a gay son and I want to thank you for going to the lengths you did to locate this sign. To some, this sign may be insignificant, but to the thousands of LGBT Jews and their families, it has great meaning. At present, at least 81% of American Jews support Marriage Equality, as well as many Jewish organizations and institutions. We have long been a people who embrace justice, and it makes me so proud that most of my fellow Jews recognize the right for the LGBT community as a whole to be able to legally spend their lives with the person they love.

Reply · 4 · Like · Follow Post · Saturday at 3:00pm
