2016 proved to be an exciting and eventful year for Young Judaea, with remarkable program growth and new opportunities for our chanichim (participants), combined with an inaugural gala and the 60th anniversary of Year Course. It was a year of both looking forward and recognizing the alumni and leadership that has made Young Judaea the life changing movement it is today.

In September, more than 300 alumni and friends joined Young Judaea for the First Forward Together Benefit for Young Judaea in New York City’s Lower East Side. The event was an inspiring opportunity for alumni and friends – recent and not-so-recent – to reunite, show their support, and recognize the extraordinary contributions made by Judaean Educator Mel Reisfeld, and the philanthropic efforts made by Seth Merrin, Anne Heyman & the Merrin Family. Gala attendees and sponsors helped Young Judaea raise more than half a million dollars, which allowed us to considerably expand our programming, as well as offer scholarships and stipends to hundreds of chanichim who would have otherwise been unable to participate.

In November, 350 alumni joined us in Tel Aviv for a reunion celebrating 60 years of Year Course. Alumni from every decade bonded over their shared experience and how the program enhanced their lives, honoring Mel Reisfeld who inspired the audience with his continued passion for Young Judaea.

2016 also laid the groundwork for the future of Young Judaea, with the opening of a second day camp in Westchester, NY, impressive facilities expansion at our summer camps throughout the country, and new Israel programs added to an already rich array of offerings. We can’t wait to carry the success of this year into the next!
The Young Judaea community in Los Angeles saw remarkable growth in 2016, as the budding community of teens worked with groups such as Heal the Bay to help protect the ocean and watershed in Los Angeles County, volunteered at Alexandria House, a women and children’s shelter, and spent time with residents at the Israel Levin Senior Center. In addition, Alternative Winter Break – Young Judaea’s premier service trip program – came to Los Angeles for the first time, spurred by teen leadership learned at Tel Yehudah, Young Judaea’s teen leadership camp.

As in the past ten years, New Orleans was also host to an Alternative Winter Break trip, continuing Young Judaea’s volunteer presence in the city, which has been ongoing since Hurricane Katrina. Students volunteered with Greenlight New Orleans and the St. Bernard Project, working closely with locals to help a community still rebuilding.

Several local communities had the opportunity to work with local Federations, including DC Young Judaea who participated in Good Deeds Day with the Federation of Greater Washington, Southeast Young Judaea who worked with the Miami Dade and Broward County Federations, and Pittsburgh Young Judaea (a new and rapidly-growing community) who collaborated with their local JCC as well as Family House Pittsburgh.

Significant growth was also evident in convention attendance. With the return (after an eight-year absence) of the Southeast Convention, the largest conventions in recent years in both the Midwest and nationally, and a 50% attendance increase at Northeast convention, Young Judaea’s regional and national programming continued to offer an engaging and meaningful opportunity for our chanichim to come together.

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The Young Judaea camp experience exemplifies our mission of creating a life-long connection to Israel and the Jewish people. Through our five Young Judaea overnight and two day camps, chanichim gain connections to fellow participants, to Israel, and to Jewish values that last a lifetime.

Camp Judaea
Camp Judaea underwent impressive growth in 2016, serving 621 campers, more than 35% of whom received some form of financial aid based on need. To accommodate a rapidly-growing camp population, CJ broke ground on a new and expanded chadar ochel (dining hall) at the end of the summer.

Camp Young Judaea – Texas
In 2016, CYJ-Texas unveiled its new Experiential Learning Center building. The 7,000-square-foot multi-use activity building was built for campers to learn about Jewish and Israeli values and culture during camp season, as well as engage in a variety of arts classes. Best of all, the building was designed to demonstrate wide-reaching sustainable design ideas, engaging the site and helping to pave the way for more improvements at camps.

CYJ-Midwest
2016 signaled a new beginning at CYJ-Midwest, as Robin Anderson was announced as incoming Camp Director. In addition, a new playground was built, creating engaging opportunities for campers to play in the outdoors and building skills and memories that will last a lifetime.

Sprout Lake Camps
In 2016, Sprout Lake opened its second day camp in Westchester, bringing the Sprout spirit to the Westchester Jewish community. Sprout Brooklyn, in its second year, doubled in growth from 2015 with over 100 campers each session and an average of 150 chanichim per week. In addition, CYJ Sprout Lake opened a brand new aquatic center featuring a water slide, and has already begun planning for a renovated basketball court.

Tel Yehudah
This year at Tel Yehudah, 515 chanichim took part in an incredibly diverse international Jewish community. More global than ever, TY had chanichim from across the United States, Italy and Germany, and tzevet (staff) from Russia, Poland, Argentina, Canada, and Ukraine. The TY partnership with Camp Kimama brought Israeli participants to TY and gave the community an opportunity to live with Israeli peers. The brand new Havurah Plus initiative designed for graduates of the TY program for Russian-speaking teens brought participants back as staff in a junior role. Camp Gesher, TY’s partnership program on the West Coast for Jewish children from Russian-speaking families, had 99 chanichim aged 6-9 in 2016.

At Tel Yehudah, we want everyone to appreciate themselves for who they are, and everyone to appreciate each other for their differences, for their new ideas and new perspectives.

Summer Camps by the Numbers

>2500 campers at YJ camps in 2016
Young Judaea’s Israel programming continues to inspire participants by helping them discover Judaism and Israel for themselves. Living and learning in Israel gives participants the opportunity to gain first-hand exposure to different ideas, cultures, and viewpoints, many of which are often quite different from those they bring from home.

2016 marked 60 years of Year Course, and 350 alumni, many of whom live in Israel, joined chanichim in Tel Aviv to celebrate both the incredible milestone as well as Judaean educator and leader Mel Reisfield. Attendees from every single Year Course in the past six decades came together in celebration of a program that, in many of their own words, led them to establish themselves as leaders and change-makers in Israel.

Participants in the WUJS Internship program took advantage of their Tel Aviv location to engage in a diverse array of immersive professional experiences and internships in 2016, including one participant who left New York City to try her luck as a stand-up comedian and is currently emerging as a popular video blogger, a lawyer who came to intern in a legal office and was hired as a legal assistant, and set design intern at the Israeli Opera who started her own production company.

Short Term Programs participation saw tremendous growth in 2016, with nearly 115 participants in Onward Israel (double from the previous year). In addition, Young Judaea led programming and logistics on a new trip for AUJS, the Australasian Union of Jewish Students, in which nearly 100 students took part in volunteering, experiencing the IDF, and exploring Israeli politics.

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In addition to creating exciting new opportunities for future chanichim, Young Judaea stays firmly connected to the alumni that make this growth possible. On Sunday, September 18, 2016 over 300 Young Judaean alumni, family and friends took part in Young Judaea’s inaugural fundraising event. The event title, Forward Together: A Benefit for Young Judaea is taken from a beloved movement song, “... Forward together we’re building Young Judaea!”

This perfectly outlined the goal of the evening – expanding Young Judaea’s projects and programs for the next generation, while celebrating Young Judaea’s storied history and amazing alumni.

The evening’s honorees, Seth Merrin, Anne Heyman and the Merrin Family were celebrated for their outstanding efforts on behalf of YJ and their eternal commitment to tikkun olam (repairing the world). During the event, a very special “Im Tirzu” award was presented to legendary Judaean educator, Mel Reisfield, beloved by generations of Judaean and credited with inspiring thousands of alumni to connect with Israel and the Jewish people during his decades as Merakez at Camp Tel Yehudah and educator on Year Course.

Held at Angel Orensanz Foundation, a beautiful event space which is also the location of the oldest and longest-continuously operating synagogue in New York City. To have our first such event on the Lowest East Side was made more meaningful as it is the location in which the very first Young Judaean club meeting took place in 1904. Judaean were elated to reconnect with each other, celebrate, sing, and dance just as they’ve always done!

The festivities continued in Tel Aviv, where on November 17, 2016 over 350 Year Course alumni came together at the Israel Music Conservatory in Tel Aviv Yafo to celebrate 60 years of Year Course. Year Course participants from every decade shared their Year Course stories and reminisced. The evening was profoundly moving – it was remarkable see just how many lives were so positively impacted by Young Judaea and Year Course over the past 60 years, and we look forward to doing the same for decades to come!
Young Judaea Mission Statement: To inspire American Jews’ life-long engagement with Israel and the Jewish People.

Through immersive informal and experiential education, Young Judaea fosters a sense of value and love for Jewish tradition and ritual, as well as pride in the Jewish people, Israel and being Jewish. Our life-changing camp, year-round and Israel experiences provide an open and pluralistic environment that encourages mutual respect and understanding between diverse groups of Jews, and empowers our chanichim by imbuing them with the self-confidence, independence, problem-solving skills, knowledge, and other tools they need to make informed choices for themselves and the communities they will help to shape.

- Young Judaea is a Zionist youth movement that embraces the diversity of the Jewish people.
- We inspire Jews to connect with their Jewish identity and to the Jewish people – past, present and future.
- We are committed to supporting the centrality of Israel in Jewish life.
- We empower our participants to imagine and bring about positive change in Israel and the world at large.
- We grow insightful, educated and creative leaders through powerful and life-changing experiences.
- We plant the seeds for a lifetime of commitment to Young Judaea’s values, vision and work.