

HUDSON

Jersey City celebrates first night of Hanukkah; honors victims, police at menorah lighting

Alexis Shanes NorthJersey.com

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JERSEY CITY — *Baruch atah Adonoi, Eloiheinu Melech haolam, shehecheyanu, v'kiymanu, vihigiyanu, lizman hazeh.*

Blessed are You, Lord our God, King of the Universe, who has granted us life, sustained us and enabled us to reach this occasion.

On Sunday, Cantor Yoely Greenfeld, whose sister Leah Minda Ferencz was killed in the Dec. 10 shooting that targeted the Jersey City Jewish community, stood outside the JC Kosher Supermarket and uttered the Jewish Shehecheyanu prayer.

Shehecheyanu is recited during special occasions, including the first of eight candle lightings during the annual Hanukkah festival.

The word Hanukkah, in Hebrew, means dedication. Hanukkah commemorates the rededication of the Second Temple in Jerusalem in the second century B.C., which came after a small group of Jews defeated an army of oppressors who sought to annihilate Jewish culture.

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Outside the market, where the shootout ended just 12 days earlier, Greenfeld lit two candles: first, with a lighter, the *shamash*, the “servant” candle in the center of the menorah; then, the farthest-right candle on the menorah, the first of eight.

“My sister, Mindy, was someone who lit up the world with her smile,” Greenfeld said before reciting the blessings. “May the light of our candles shine away the darkness, easing the pains of all those who have suffered.”

Chabad-Lubavitch of Jersey City Rabbi Moshe Schapiro led the menorah lighting. Such public lightings are part of Chabad’s global Hanukkah campaign, an initiative launched in 1973 by the Chabad Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson. Even at-home Hanukkah celebrations are shared; Jews often place lighted menorahs in windows for all to see.

“It’s awesome and powerful and special, back then and today,” Schapiro said of reciting Shehecheyanu at the site of the attack. He had just handed the final sufganiyot — traditional jelly doughnuts — to passersby who happened upon the celebration.

“We’re so grateful for the holiday,” he said. “We want to share the message with the world. We thought, ‘What better place to bring light and positivity to the world?’ ”

The Jersey City menorah was displayed outside the boarded-up market Ferencz, 32, and her husband, Moshe Ferencz, owned. The market is on a street named for Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., who famously said, “Darkness cannot drive out darkness. Only light can do that.”

Ferencz’s cousin Moshe Hersch Deutsch also died in the attack, along with Douglas Miguel Rodriguez Barzola, an Ecuadorian immigrant who worked at the market; Jersey City Detective Joseph Seals, who was killed in a confrontation at nearby Bayview Cemetery; and both suspects.

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The lighting also honored a host of local law enforcement and elected officials, including Raymond Sanchez and Mariela Fernandez, Jersey City police officers injured while responding to the shooting.

Sanchez, who attended the ceremony, appeared to have tears in his eyes as he accepted an award from the young boys — students at the yeshiva next door — whose lives he saved.

Attorney General Gurbir Grewal, who also was present at the candle lighting, said an investigation is ongoing.

The shooting brought out “at once the best of humanity and the worst of humanity,” he said. Responding to questions about whether the state is doing enough to address hate crimes, Grewal said his office has worked to prevent bias incidents for the past few years, particularly stepping up efforts in schools.

Police presence was heavy Sunday as people packed the closed street to take part in the festivities.

“People try hard to divide this community,” Grewal added. “The response has shown that’s not going to happen.”

Alexis Shanes is a local reporter for NorthJersey.com. For unlimited access to the most important news from your local community, please subscribe or activate your digital account today.

Email: shanesa@northjersey.com Twitter: @alexisjshanes

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