Chief concerns
Eric Fingerhut, who will be the new President and Chief Executive of Hillel, offers his thoughts about some of the organization’s top priorities.

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Backing down
Columnist Charles Jacobs writes that President Barack Obama doesn’t even seem to have America’s back these days, let alone Israel’s.

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Deathblow?
After the fall of Mohamed Morsi, Ben Cohen ponders the question of whether a mortal blow has been dealt to the global Islamist movement.

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The right notes
Critic Jules Becker says the Reagle Music Theatre of Greater Boston’s current production of the classic “Fiddler on the Roof” is a rewarding experience.

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Middle ground
Being gay can be quite a challenge in the Middle East, but the LGBT lifestyle is generally more accepted in Israel than it is in Arab countries.

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Farm fresh
Israel’s freshest produce, and other offerings, beckon visitors to a popular farmers’ market in Tel Aviv.

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Developer making his mark in Fenway
John Rosenthal is transforming the area in more ways than one used as parking by Fenway Park patrons.

By Alexandra Lapkin
Advocate Staff

A n enormous billboard displayed above the Massachusetts Turnpike in the Fenway area, calling for an end to gun violence, has become almost as prominent a Boston symbol as the nearby Citgo sign.

Gloucester resident John Rosenthal, the founder of the nonprofit organization Stop Handgun Violence, is the man behind the billboard. And in the very near future, the 56-year-old Rosenthal will be transforming the Fenway neighborhood in more ways than one.

In addition to his political activism, Rosenthal is President of the real estate development and management company Meredith Management Corp., which has taken on a project to turn “underutilized parking lots and windswept bridges, and largely tax-exempt, state-owned property next to Fenway Park into a new neighborhood out of thin air,” said Rosenthal.

The first air-rights project in Boston since Copley Place in 1980, the new Fenway Center will cover a 4.5-acre site, with 1.3 million square feet of development. Two buildings are planned for the land portion and three buildings will be built on roughly 100,000 square feet over the Turnpike and the commuter railroad tracks. The $500 million development will feature 550 apartment units, 80,000 square feet of retail space, 1,290 parking spaces and 167,000 square feet of office space.

Rosenthal’s Newton-based development company has coordinated a deal with many players: the Massachusetts Department of Transportation (Mass DOT), for the lease of two acres of air rights over the Turnpike; with Gov. Deval Patrick’s administration and the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA), for the construction of a new commuter rail station at the site; and with the city of Boston, for the necessary building permits.

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The forgotten Holocaust of Soviet cinema
Films offer a very different portrayal than Hollywood’s

By Alexandra Lapkin
Advocate Staff

The story of the Holocaust, as told by Soviet filmmakers, is very different from the Hollywood versions shown on U.S. movie screens.

The Russian films were not about concentration camps, ghettos, and deportations, for that was not the doom that befell Soviet Jews. Rather, in Soviet films that were made about World War II, a viewer had to read between the lines to catch the subtle, almost hidden messages that the screenwriters and film directors managed to get past the censors.

Olga Gershenson, an Associate Professor at University of Massachusetts Amherst, has interviewed these filmmakers and spent many months digging through censors’ documents and film critic’s reviews of their films for her new book “The Phantom Holocaust: Soviet Cinema and Jewish Catastrophe,” which was published this month.

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Pensions posing a problem
Russian-American Jews face snafus with federal benefits

By Alexandra Lapkin
Advocate Staff

Many elderly Jewish immigrants from the Russian Federation who live in the United States and subsist on Supplemental Security Income (SSI) recently began receiving letters from the Social Security Administration (SSA) informing them that they are eligible to apply for a pension from the Russian pension fund.

In other cases, if the immigrants were already receiving a pension from Russia, but were not reporting it to the federal government, they were informed that their SSI benefits would be decreased or even stopped.

The letters came as a result of an audit report done by the Office of the Inspector General (OIG), completed...
Classic Soviet films offer a very different take on horrors of Holocaust

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During her research, Gershenson reviewed films that spanned the decades from the 1930s, when the Nazis rose to power, through 1991, the fall of the Soviet Union. She uncovered many long-lost films, as well as scripts that had never made it into movies.

The Communist's bureaucracy machine became a victim of its own efficiency: Although many films are now long forgotten, they left a paper trail in the archives, granting Gershenson access to information about films that have not been seen in years.

"The screenplay had to pass [multiple stages], to get a stamp of approval in order to have been produced," Gershenson said. "That means that every bureaucratneeds to file some sort of paper—a memo, a report. All these things later are collected and land in archives."

What Gershenson went on to discover about the Communist Party's policy toward the portrayal of Jews and anti-Semitism in screen (or lack thereof) might surprise readers with their political expectations.

The first Soviet film that touched upon the subject of the persecution of German Jews by the Nazis was made as early as 1934. The film, which is set in Germany, featured a Jewish character who was abused by the new government. "It's what you'd expect, concerned about the Jews themselves as much as it was part of critique of capitalism," Gershenson said.

By 1938, as anti-Semitism in Germany escalated, Soviet filmmakers made three more films on the topic. "What strikes you, they are way ahead of the curve," Gershenson said, "because Hol- land is not paying any attention at all in the 1930s. She claimed that the exam- iners approved the films, despite Stalin's own anti-Semitic policies, due to Ger- many and the Soviet Union's hostile relationship. In fact, the Communist Party encouraged a critique of Nazism and fascism on screen.

The film "Professor Mannloch," which came out in 1934, was created by an Austrian Jew- ish director, together with a Soviet Jew- ish filmmaker, and was based on a play by a German Jewish author, also an ex- ile to the USSR. "So these people know firsthand what they're talking about," Gershenson said. "The film felt very authentic, even though it couldn't have been filmed in Berlin, it was filmed in Leningrad.

After Hitler and Stalin signed the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact in 1939, the relationship between Germany and the Soviet Union improved and film criticizing Germany were no longer permitted in movie theaters, only to be allowed again once Germany besieged the agreement and invaded the USSR in 1941.

Contrary to popular belief, very few Soviet films from the 1930s were actually banned. "Soviets were incredibly careful about using the official bun," Gershenson said. "Only one film, the famous 'Commissar,' was officially banned— everything else was silenced in various indirect ways. So they were banned de facto, but de jure, never. They would premiere in a little cinema and never show up again.

The film, based on a short story by a Soviet writer, Vasily Grossman, is actually about events that precede the Holocaust. Set during the Russian Civil War, when there was no public criticism of the Nazis, it was released in 1922 and brought on a wave of po- groms, a scene in the film predicts what is to come: In a flash-forward, a Jewish woman is attacked by a mob of Russians. "David on their clothing, being led by a mass of other Jews, to their death.

The film, which was directed by the famous Russian Jew, Elia Kazan, while film- ing Khuchshev's Thaw, a time period in the mid-1950s through the early 1960s, which allowed for greater free- dom of expression in the arts, spurred by de-Stalinization policies. "This means that there was a window of opportunity for the filmmakers to bring up, directly or indirectly, two things that are, in Soviet films, very much interconnected: the theme of the HolocaustHolocaust, or the Jewish fate, during World War II; and the theme of Sta- lin's anti-Semitic policies," Gershenson said.

Although the film was conceived during the early 1960s, since the pro- cess of making a movie was so lengthy, it was released again only once Germany besieged the agreement and invaded the USSR in 1941.

"This is the generation of boys who were still Russian citizens, much interconnected: the theme of the Holocaust, Gershenson said, "the blame and the repercussions of Stalin's anti-Semitic policies."

The issue becomes more compli- cated when one considers the target- ing and mass extermination of Jews by the Nazis. Rather than people dealing with the human and the repercussions of the Holocaust, Gershenson said, "the Jews were written out of the story!" If some films managed to include a Jewish character, it was usually to comment on the war. "In the film, the words "Holocaust" and "Jew" are never actually mentioned."

Even when Soviet cinema would have potential to become a Holocaust film, Gershenson said, "they include a Holocaust story, but in the process of making a movie, they changed the story into one that is completely edited out.

Some Russian-American Jews face major problems with their pensions

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on Dec. 10, 2012, which stated, "Our audit focused on SSI recipients born in Russia who receive SSA-sourced OIG to a high incidence of individuals who were receiving, or eligible for Russian pensions."

The OIG report went on to say, "Our audit is not suggesting that SSA insti- tutes a policy that targets recipients with a specific foreign-born status. Further, determination of sources of income and resources is consistent with SSA's treatment of other current or prospective SSI recipients in that they are subject to restrictions on income and resources to qualify for SSI benefits, and related de- termination verifies an income and resource of information provided."

The report concluded that the SSA will take "corrective action," meaning that Russian American SSI recipients who are eligible to receive a pension from Russia would be encouraged to apply for one, while those who have been receiving the pension will be required to pay a monthly amount to the SSA until their overpayment is reimbursed and SSA has a budgetary net of $50. The specific amount will be limited to have limited income and resources. When this SSA program was first cre- ated and intended to be a program of last resort."

Medina added that in order to be eligible for SSI recipients need to exhaust all other avenues of potential benefits and this applies to everyone and that means that no one should be unresponsive, he or she is then re- cipient actually establishes contact with the Russian Federation is a procedure that they are trying to enforce the law against, and also the international complications associated with applying for their pension from Russia."