

# Announced closure of Mislser Center adult care surprises families

By **Jacqueline Hyman** - February 4, 2020



*The Albert & Helen Mislser Adult Day Center in Rockville. Photo by Jacqueline Hyman.*

The announcement last week that the Jewish Council for the Aging will close its senior adult day center took some families by surprise.

JCA said the Albert & Helen Mislser Adult Day Center, which serves about 35 seniors a day with activities and kosher lunches, will close on March 20.

The announcement came in an email on Jan. 29. The Mislser Center loses \$2,000 a day, said JCA CEO David Gamse.

“The high cost of operating the Center is due, in part, to the significant physical and cognitive challenges of the participants,” Gamse wrote in an email to WJW. “JCA must employ one staff member for every three or four persons in its care. JCA also must provide a highly specialized paratransit transportation service for those participants.”

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According to the email announcing the planned closure, “Over the last nine years, JCA has supported the Misler Center with more than \$5 million of philanthropy — support that many other essential JCA programs needed, too — because participant fees and government support fall far short of need.”

Gamse said the JCA board and staff considered several options to cut costs, such as eliminating the center’s on-site entertainment and field trips, serving non-kosher food, barring people most in need because they are “the most expensive to serve,” raising additional revenue and ending the ElderBus transportation service.

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“We said no to all of those things because it isn’t in our DNA to deliver a program that is anything less than top rate,” Gamse wrote. “We believe that would be a disservice even greater than the closure of our beloved Misler.”

People whose family members attend the Misler Center, which operates on the terrace level of the Ring House in Rockville, said they were surprised to hear of the impending closure.

Kemp Mill resident Courtney Talmoud’s mother, Pearl Schecter, has visited the Misler Center three times a week for six years. Schecter, who has dementia, lives in an assisted living home in Silver Spring. Talmoud said it’s good for her mother to get stimulation outside of her regular environment.

“[The Misler Center provides] so many things. She was safe and she was being cared for and she was having fun,” Talmoud said, “and she was getting Jewish stimulation as well.”

That Jewish component has been especially important to her mother, said Talmoud.

“That’s pretty much the sad part in all of this, because my mom remembers all the Yiddish songs and all the blessings and all the things like that that she’s not going to get at another day care center,” Talmoud said.

Kemp Mill resident Fran Kritz said the Misler Center helped her family when they really needed it.

“My mother-in-law came to live with us the day after her husband died and we were totally unprepared for caring for someone with dementia,” Kritz wrote in an email. “She began Misler two weeks later and [it gave] us a chance to catch our breath and recalibrate, knowing she was able to keep kosher during the day and be safe, happy and active. Caring for someone with dementia is exhausting and the subsidized program at Misler was a lifeline for us.”

Gamse said he is not aware of another facility in the area that offers kosher food and that is structured with Jewish participants in mind.

Talmoud said she isn’t sure where she will send her mother for adult care after the Misler Center closes.

“It has to be a really good match,” she said. “It’s gonna be hell because I have to find someone, one that will take her, and two, that will help with her incontinence, cause that’s a big deal.”

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She’s frustrated that she and other families could have helped JCA prevent it, she said. Your voluntary contribution supports our efforts to deliver content that engages and helps strengthen the Jewish community in the DMV.

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Silver Spring resident Jeannette Sturman also wishes JCA had reached out to the community before making its decision.

“You never know who’s sitting there reading about this, hearing about this, saying, ‘I could help,’” she said.

Sturman’s husband, Norman, has spent two days a week at Mislser Center for eight years. He has multiple sclerosis and needs to be tube-fed.

“It’s been just a very comforting, warm place,” Sturman said. “He’s going to be 84 years old. To make a change is going to be very hard for him and lots of other people who go there.”

Gamse said JCA is working with Mislser families to ease the transition.

He wrote, “The Mislser Center’s director and its two social workers are helping families learn about programs offered by other adult day centers, homecare agencies and other organizations.”

Though there aren’t any other Jewish adult day care programs in the area that offer kosher meals, door-to-door transportation and medical support like the Mislser Center does, Gamse said JCA offers Kensington Clubs, with activities for people in the early stages of diagnosed memory loss.

Still, Kritz said, “Mislser will be missed and life now gets harder for the many families that counted on the program.”

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