

## Jewish sustainability organization Hazon Detroit hires Amit Weitzer to lead

Hannah Davis, special to the WJN

**A**mit Weitzer started as the Hazon Detroit Director in February, taking over for Wren Hack, who had been director for three years. WJN talked to Weitzer about the path that led her to this new role and her future plans.



"Hazon Detroit is a wonderful fit for me," Weitzer says, because Hazon is at the intersection of her interests in outdoor immersive experience, Jewish social justice work, and youth and community development. Hazon is a great place to engage with, support, and inspire the Jewish community through institutional organizing and part-

nerships to engage with environmental and climate stewardship. It is one place where, she says, "we can work to address the climate crisis as a community."

Weitzer hadn't been directly involved with Hazon prior to starting her new position, though she knew about and appreciated the work they did, through her involvement in Jewish communal life in Detroit. She'd been on the job for a month at the time of our interview and has been very impressed with the energizing nature of the conversations she's had so far. "I feel really blessed to get to spend much of the day imagining with community partners how we can ignite more people to integrate their Jewish identity with their sense of responsibility for the environment and the climate. So many meetings are an opportunity to reconnect with people I've known and loved from other spaces, even though I'm new to Hazon's specific programs."

Hazon is a national nonprofit organization "that seeks to 'create new vision' in the Jewish community through outdoor and environmental education." According to their website, "We envision vibrant sustainable Jewish communities, enriched by Jewish wisdom, authentic nature connection, and environmental responsibility, working with our partners to create a better world for all."

When asked what Hazon's mission

means to her, Weitzer said she loves that it isn't seeking to duplicate the work of other extraordinary Jewish institutions, but rather to create partnerships and see how these other organizations can integrate a sense of environmental responsibility into their existing work. She said, "I feel most connected to my Judaism when it reflects relevant content from my life. As a parent of young children, living in this moment and very aware of and concerned about the climate, I'm looking for and excited by a Judaism that wants to engage with that. I'm hungry for a Judaism that reflects that content." Hazon wants people to understand that to be Jewish means to be stewarding the earth, just as it means caring for one another.

Weitzer was born and raised in metro Detroit. She notes the empowering and foundational early experiences in Jewish outdoor education and recreation, most notably at Tamarack's Agree Outpost wilderness leadership program for high school age campers, where she participated as a camper, counselor, supervisor, and eventually as director. She says, "I came into my own as a coach, as a supervisor, as a leader, as a collaborator in that wonderful context," working together in "intimate Jewish community" with others in back country settings.

After college, Weitzer worked as a community organizer on a criminal justice reform campaign, and that work brought her into the city of Detroit and connected her to the Jewish social justice world.

Later she worked as the Detroit Programs Manager for the Student Conservation Association, which is a national youth development and environmental conservation organization working to cultivate the next generation of environmental leaders. The program created employment opportunities for hundreds of young Detroiters to work on environmental conservation and agriculture projects in neighborhood green spaces. "It was one of the primary ways that I came to know and love Detroit, by exploring neighborhood green spaces and city parks, working collaboratively with friend groups and neighborhood associations that were doing extraordinary work and advocacy for green spaces that were often under-resourced, and by working with young people to ignite and support them to take ownership." She wanted to try to bring some of the magic and power of camp community into a workforce

development program, creating opportunities for young people to work on trails and go on hikes in northern Michigan and the upper peninsula.

From there, Weitzer went back to school for her degree in social work from U-M. She says her work during that time helped in "refining some skills and insights around organizational and youth development, the intersections of mental health and wellness, and environmental education and outdoor immersive experiences." Upon graduation she was hired as the Executive Director of Camp Tavor, the Habonim Dror camp in Three Rivers Michigan, where she stayed for five and a half years.

Weitzer has only been in her new position with Hazon for a short time and is focusing on listening and learning from those around her. She wants to set specific goals that are rooted in what she hears from people and the institutional and community leaders around her.

So far, she's heard a lot of "interest and hunger for more Jewish outdoor earth-based experiences." She'd like to empower and support institutions who want to integrate an immersive outdoor element into their school programs. Programs like that provide the strongest foundation for future engagement with environmental stewardship, and she'd like to help scale existing programs and develop new ones. "The Jewish calendar and holidays create so many entrees to thinking about the outdoors, the rhythms of the year, and food."

There are plenty of ways to engage with the work Hazon is doing and to integrate it into existing work. "We want to connect with folks wherever they are on the continuum of engaging with environmental sustainability. If it's doing their own growing for the first time, working with their institution on sustainability initiatives, or doing an energy audit to set emissions goals for the congregation, we want to work with them on what's going to be the right fit for and reflection of their values and identity. And we want to connect them with other people so they can do this work in community with others and feel nourished in it."

Check out what Hazon Detroit is up to: <https://hazon.org/detroit/> ■

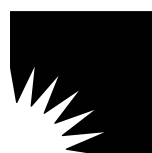
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