



In today's paper
SPORTS: The Dolphins escaped with a 15-10 win over the Patriots in a game that felt right out of the 1960s. **11A**

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Florida Gulf Coast preps evacuations as Milton strengthens to a hurricane

BY ALEX HARRIS
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Florida's west coast is preparing for a potentially massive evacuation ahead of a strike from Milton, which rapidly intensified into a hurricane on Sunday afternoon.

The Tampa Bay region, still reeling from heavy

coastal flooding inflicted by Helene — its worst hurricane in a century — remained in the crosshairs of Milton, a small but fast-strengthening storm expected to become a major Category 3 hurricane before it strikes the Gulf Coast.

At 5 p.m. Sunday, the center of the National Hurricane Center's fore-

cast track went through Sarasota, a southern bump in the track, with more shifts — potentially back north or farther south — expected over the next few days.

Nearby communities were already swamped by record storm surge from the passage of Helene just over a week ago. Milton, on its current track, could

bring much worse. The hurricane, packing winds of 85 mph Sunday afternoon, was expected to quickly strengthen into a major hurricane over the hot waters of the Gulf of Mexico.

The latest forecast calls for Milton to hit Category 4 over the open waters of

SEE MILTON, 4A



CARL JOSTE / MIAMIHERALD.COM

Department of Public Works employee Michael Perez assists in the delivery of sandbags as the city of Miami Gardens gives out sandbags (7 per person) on Sunday.



ALIE SKOWRONSKI / MIAMIHERALD.COM

Participants hold candles during a ceremony hosted by the Jewish Federation on Sunday at the David Posnack Jewish Community Center in Davie to mark one year since the Oct. 7 attacks by Hamas inside southern Israel.

South Florida Jews mark a dark anniversary. For many, Oct. 7 sparked a reawakening of faith

BY LAUREN COSTANTINO
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As Jews across South Florida gather this month to celebrate the High Holy Days, the tragedies of a terrorist attack and escalating war in the Middle East loom over the festivities: There are painful memories of a horrific day but also a stronger sense of unity and, for many, a return to faith.

Oct. 7 marks one year since Hamas militants stormed into Israel on brutal raids that left 1,200 peo-

ple dead and another 240 taken into the Gaza Strip as hostages, sparking a war in Gaza with no end in sight. The anniversary of the attack falls right between two major Jewish holidays — Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year, and Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement and the holiest day of the Jewish calendar.

"Since October 7, it's been the most difficult year for most of us to be a Jew," said Rabbi Gayle Pomcrantz, the senior rabbi at Temple Beth Shalom in Miami Beach and president of the Rabbinic Associ-

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- A survivor of the Oct. 7 incursion shares his journey of trauma. 3A
- Israel launches fresh strikes on Beirut on eve of Oct. 7 anniversary. 6A

ation of Greater Miami. "I know it certainly is the most difficult year to be a Jew in my lifetime."

"It's kind of an awareness that's just going to be in the air we breathe," she said. "All of us recognize this moment."

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'A community in crisis.' Florida Haitians feel attacked by Trump, overlooked by Harris

BY MAX GREENWOOD AND JACQUELINE CHARLES
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Over the past month, Donald Trump has amplified a widely debunked rumor that Haitian migrants in Springfield, Ohio, had eaten local pets, and he vowed to revoke a government program that allows many Haitians to temporarily live and work in the U.S. legally.

For Ronald Surin, it has all felt personal.

"It's hurtful and it's outrageous, but it's not the first time we've been used as a scapegoat for political gain," Surin, the president of the Haitian American Democratic Club of Broward County, said. "This country has a history of denigrating Haitians from the beginning."

The onslaught by Trump and his campaign has thrust Haitians in Florida and around the country into the national

political debate over immigration — an issue that Trump has kept at the core of his political brand since he launched his first presidential campaign in 2015 with a speech deriding Mexican immigrants as "rapists" and criminals.

Yet the response from national Democrats — including Trump's rival in the November election, Vice President Kamala Harris — has been relatively muted.

In Florida, which has the largest Haitian population in the U.S., Harris' campaign has yet to invest in advertising or voter-turnout efforts geared toward mobilizing Haitian American voters — and prominent members of Florida's Haitian community have taken notice.

"I've talked to some leaders in the Democratic Party and told them they need to do something. It's not too late," said Laurinus "Larry" Pierre, a

SEE HAITIAN VOTERS, 5A



CARL JOSTE / MIAMIHERALD.COM

Broward resident Audi Sicard at a Sept. 22 rally in North Miami led by the Miami-Dade Democratic Haitian Caucus.

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Commemorations are taking place in synagogues throughout South Florida. On Sunday, the Jewish Federation of Broward County hosted a community-wide event. Two major ones are planned on Monday, one hosted by the Greater Miami Jewish Federation at Pomerantz's synagogue and the other by the city of Miami Beach.

The deadliest attack committed against Jews since the Holocaust has produced profound impacts far beyond the borders of Israel.

The terrorist attack on innocent civilians triggered an ongoing, escalating war in the Middle East that has left tens of thousands of Palestinians in the Hamas-run Gaza Strip dead. It has sparked continuing protests from both sides across the United States and a surge in reports of hate crimes tied to the conflict. It has also had ripple effects on the political landscape, from Miami to Tallahassee and Washington, D.C.

The anger and pain have been keenly felt in South Florida, home to one of the largest Jewish communities in the nation and residents with deep ties to Israel through faith, families and culture.

"The Jewish community is teeny tiny, so we're all one or two degrees of separation from each other," said Audra Berg, the president & CEO of the Jewish Federation of Broward County. "And there's a very large Israeli population in South Florida." Many Jews are feeling a stronger sense of unity

within their own community since the attacks, said Jeffrey Levin, the executive vice president of the Greater Miami Jewish Federation.

"We Jews are a famously cantankerous people, but Hamas has done more to unite us than we were before. That's not to say that there aren't outliers... but by and large, the Jewish community here in the United States stands even more firmly behind Israel than it did on October 6th."

Steven Brodie, who visited Israel before and after the attacks, remembers waking up on Oct. 7 to a red alert — a type of mobile alert that notifies him whenever there's a warning of any kind in Israel.

"I woke up and saw thousands of alerts that morning," said Brodie, a prominent Florida lawyer and vice chair of the board of the Greater Miami Jewish Federation. "I remember a state of disbelief... While I understood there was not peace, I didn't fully understand how evil humanity could be."

Broward Federation president Berg sees the commemorations as an opportunity to look forward.

"This is both a chance to mourn with with the Israeli people, together with our community, but also to feel some inspiration about the future and to look with hope to the future," she said. "It's not very Jewish to just focus on what's bad. We also like to look at what's good."



A rally for Palestinians in Gaza on Saturday on Biscayne Boulevard in Miami. Israel's response to the Oct. 7 attacks has killed tens of thousands of Palestinians in Gaza.

SOUTH FLORIDA SPRINGS INTO ACTION

In the months since, South Florida has seen an surge of support for the Jewish community and Israel from elected officials, businesses and residents.

Jewish and non-Jewish organizations have raised millions of dollars for humanitarian aid for Israelis. Just two days after Oct. 7, 2023, the Greater Miami Jewish Federation organized a rally in Miami Beach with thousands in attendance, kicking off a campaign that raised over \$30 million to support Israelis affected by the war.

"We've been totally blessed by the outpouring of support here in Miami," said Levin.

While antisemitic incidents have increased throughout the nation, according to the Anti-Defamation League and other advocacy groups, Levin says South Florida is fortunate to have had a more positive experience. "American Jews were

stunned at the explosion of antisemitism in the wake of October 7," Levin said. "Jews in South Florida did not have that experience. We were enveloped by support of the community, and that continues to this day. I often say that we live here in Miami on an island of love in a sea of hate."

The majority of state and local lawmakers have been vocal supporters of Israel. Just weeks after the attack, the Miami-Dade County Commission passed resolutions supporting Israel and condemning Hamas. The city of Miami Beach sent city firefighters to fill in for first responders in Israel who had been called to military service. The Florida Legislature called for a special session allowing lawmakers to express their support for Israel, and eventually passed legislation that defines antisemitism.

Gov. Ron DeSantis, who has vowed to be the most "pro-Israel governor in America," awarded thou-

sands of dollars to support Jewish organizations in Florida and sent rescue flights evacuating about 700 Americans from Israel immediately after Oct. 7. His administration has also donated aid and healthcare supplies as well as drones, weapons and ammunition to Israel. The state university system also pursued a controversial crackdown on what it defined as "antisemitic" and "anti-Israel" content in Florida's public universities.

"I think we feel very fortunate that the Jewish community in Florida is supported by the political establishment, by school boards and police. ... All of the elements of the political environment in Florida have been very supportive, especially at the university level," said Broward Federation president Berg.

Many local groups have also organized several missions to Israel to show their support.

"People come back with renewed strength, with more information, with a

better sense of what's actually happening in Israel and with a deeper commitment," said Levin, who went with the Miami Federation on various trips to visit the site of the Nova Music Festival, which suffered a devastating Hamas attack; and meet with hostage families, IDF soldiers and Israeli leaders.

Seth Wise, the annual campaign chair for the Jewish Federation of Broward County, went on a trip to Israel post Oct. 7 to help organize a mobile kitchen for IDF soldiers.

"For me, I wanted to do something where I could really go and feel like I was helping, not just shaking hands, but actually lending a hand," he said.

Wise was a part of a group that sponsored barbecues for soldiers across Israel and on the Gaza border. He said it was important for him and others to show gratitude for troops protecting Israeli citizens.

"Look, we're a small group, we're 10 people. We're making you hamburgers and just want to show you some gratitude, but we represent millions of people, Jews and non-Jews around the world who are grateful for what you're doing. It was incredibly rewarding."

PROTESTS IN THE WAKE OF WAR

Israel's retaliation to the attack, however, has since become a source of counter-protests and ongoing friction in Florida. An initial wave of pro-Palestinian protests on college campuses in Florida were met with hostility and anger from lawmakers, who took a "law and order" approach to shut-

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ting them down, said Ray Rodrigues, the chancellor of the State University System in a news conference earlier this year.

The DeSantis administration ordered local law enforcement and the Florida Highway Patrol to intervene in the protests and called for state universities to disband campus groups with ties to the national organization Students for Justice in Palestine.

Dozens of student protesters have been arrested, and the protests have sparked a national conversation about the balance of free speech and safety on campuses.

In Miami Beach, home to a large Jewish pop-

ulation, city officials passed protest restrictions. In the city of Doral, Mayor Christi Fraga faced immediate backlash for advocating for a resolution that called for a cease-fire between Israel and Hamas. Fraga later walked back the largely symbolic measure.

Supporters of a Palestinian state, even those who condemned the Hamas attack, say there's been a double standard when it comes to protests and attacks on civilians.

"The history of this conflict does not start on Oct. 7," said Lana Shehadeh, who was born and raised in Parkland but was living in the West Bank during the attack.

Shehadeh, an assistant

professor of political science at the Arab American University in the West Bank, said that since the war broke out, the majority of Palestinians have lost all hope for any sort of resolution or even a cease-fire. She described the difficulty of living in a years-long occupation, where she says spontaneous raids, interrogations and beatings by Israeli soldiers are common.

"I heard people say, 'I just wanna die and 'We're over.' It's over. Students, half of them aren't registered. Nobody cares to finish their degrees. The amount of pessimism is just so sad, so sad."

And the loss of life, she said, has "been unimaginable." An estimated 41,000-plus Palestinians have been killed in the Gaza Strip, most of them not Hamas militants.

"If you were to tell me a number like that in October or November, I would be laughing, because I would think that there's no way the international community would be comfortable with that amount of people being killed in response to any kind of attack," she said. "Nobody's condoning what happened on October 7, but by no means has the response been proportional."

Echoing Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, many South Florida Jews say a terrorized nation has a right and duty to defend its citizens. Wise said he feels that many Jews feel frustration over the amount of backlash against the response.

"No country, no army, no leaders are infallible. But the perception is, at least from my standpoint, that there's a general

effort to try and, as ugly as these things can be, to do as good a job as you can to protect civilians, and somehow that piece has gotten lost," he said.

Despite the controversy, many Jewish leaders who spoke to the Miami Herald said they are heartened by an unexpected wave of commitment to the Jewish faith.

"There has been this phenomenon called 'the surge'.... where Jews who have in the past been disaffiliated or unaffiliated have said, 'I want to step up and be a part of this community and learn more and participate,'" said Rabbi Pomerantz. That also shows, she said, in a higher rate of applications to Jewish classes, schools and universities.

"We have an Introduction to Judaism class in Miami for people wanting to learn more about Ju-

daism or convert — it's the largest enrollment we've ever had," she said.

At Rosh Hashanah service this year, Pomerantz opened the service with a prayer to reflect this year's sentiment about the war:

"May the curses of the past year be finished. May the blessings of the new year begin." And I think that's really the sentiment with which we enter the holidays."

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