Shifting Perspectives: Virginia Tech Student Adam Zelenka and the importance of Hillel

The Tidewater Jewish Foundation recently partnered with Hillel at Virginia Tech for an event at the home of Brenda and Abbey Horwitz. This was an opportunity for local alumni, donors, parents, students and future students to learn more about what’s going on at Tech, the programs that are available through Hillel, and the importance of these programs to the students—and to ensure they are available for the next generation of Jewish students. One of our local Virginia Tech students, Adam Zelenka (sophomore), shared his feelings about Hillel:

“Tidewater Jewish students Austin Sheffer, Adam Zelenka and Whitley Miller with Tech’s Hillel Executive Director, Sue Kurtz

Virginia Tech students Austin Sheffer, Adam Zelenka and Whitley Miller with Tech's Hillel Executive Director, Sue Kurtz

We are living in a world, where according to Jewish scholars, the widespread acceptance of Judaism, Jewish culture and Jewish people is becoming a threat to the Jewish way of life. Because Jews have become secularized, they feel freely mixed in and accepted by others. And while that’s a great thing, it makes people forget their identity and who they are and what that means. In general, today’s Jews are less attached to Judaism and to other Jewish people.

Typically, college is a watershed moment for a student’s identity. Hillel is right there, in college, at a time when students may not know many people, when statistically they are supposed to know more people than they will ever know again in their whole life. They are supposed to build communities and networks, and by the end have some sort of established identity or life path. But where does Judaism fit into that? You come in as a Jewish kid, with any level of Jewish upbringing. College can build upon those experiences, or it can be a complete turnaround. Whether they’ll want to be someone who proudly identifies as Jewish is of course a matter of personal choice, but having a strong community of Jewish people and a center for continued Jewish learning and discovery… it can be an influential factor in that decision. Hence the clear importance of Hillel.”

Hillel at Virginia Tech is an affiliate partner of the Tidewater Jewish Foundation. To learn how you can create a Jewish legacy of your own and protect vital programs at Hillel, contact Scott Kaplan at (757) 965-6109 or skaplan@ujft.org.
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