

Flower biz blooms thanks to JF&CS loan



COURTESY PHOTO

Rebecca Remis

By Jason Fishman

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SWAMPSCOTT – “I didn’t expect to start a business this year,” said Rebecca Remis. “But when the pandemic happened, it was actually the right time to make one of my longer-term dreams a reality.”

After the public health crisis upended her plans to work on a flower farm in Western Massachusetts, Rebecca decided to launch her own sustainable floral design company on the North Shore.

Named after Rebecca’s maternal grandmother, Birdie’s Blooms sources flowers from

nearby farms to create stunning bouquets. With a background in sustainable farming and floral design, Rebecca had the knowledge and connections she needed to start her new venture. The only thing she was lacking was capital to grow her business.

“There are a lot of upfront costs when starting a company,” said Rebecca. “As they say, it takes money to make money – especially during a pandemic.”

As Rebecca searched for funding sources, she remembered that her older sister had received an interest-free loan from JF&CS to help pay for graduate school in 2008. Although her situation was different, Rebecca decided to take a chance and apply for a loan from JF&CS.

Fortunately, Rebecca’s application coincided with a recent expansion of its Hebrew Free Loan program, which is funded by Combined Jewish Philanthropies. In light of the Covid-19 crisis, JF&CS has added flexibility in both the type and amount of interest-free loans available.

Between April and June, it has loaned \$86,000 — nearly four times the amount of money it loaned in the past three years combined. In addition to Birdie’s Blooms, several loans have been

made to assist people with day-to-day expenses to weather the economic storm of Covid-19 — from making mortgage payments to replacing a broken-down car.

While applying for a loan with a bank or a large lender can be intimidating, Rebecca found working with JF&CS to be stress-free.

“Marissa Zwelling, the case manager I worked with, was incredibly helpful,” said Rebecca. “She proactively reached out to me to see if I had any

questions, and she just cared so much.”

Rebecca was ultimately approved for a loan, and she is using the money to pay for hardware and branding expenses for her business.

“This money will make a huge difference for Birdie’s Blooms,” said Rebecca. “Being able to bulk order vases and pay for a professionally designed logo and other marketing materials is definitely a game-changer.”

For Rebecca, receiving a loan from a nonprofit that is guided by Jewish values and traditions

has special meaning. Growing up in Swampscott, Rebecca was immersed in the Jewish community, attending Cohen Hillel Academy and spending her summers at Camp Ramah in Palmer. As an adult, Rebecca combined her passion for agriculture and Jewish education as the farm and program director

of Eden Village Camp West, a farm-to-table Jewish summer camp in Northern California.

Rebecca also views Birdie’s Blooms as an expression of

her Jewish values. She hopes that her flowers bring beauty and joy to Jewish lifecycle events, like weddings and b’nei mitzvah. Birdie’s commitment to sustainably grown flowers is also a reflection of Jewish teachings on communal responsibility and taking care of the Earth.

“It felt empowering to be invested in by the Jewish community,” said Rebecca. “It means a lot to know that they believe in me and in Birdie’s mission of helping to create a more sustainable and beautiful world.”

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