

## **Lori Levi: Fit to Be Herself**

Lori Levi never set out to become a trailblazer.

Yet across decades and careers—spanning police work, professional kitchens, and now personal training—she’s done just that, paving her own way with quiet courage and a relentless sense of purpose.

A proud member of the LGBTQIA+ community, Lori serves as Fitness + Personal Training Supervisor at Sid Jacobson JCC, where she’s found more than just a job. She’s found home.

“I get to help people. I get to be creative. I get to be in an environment that’s accepting to me as a Jew and as a member of the LGBTQ community,” Lori says. “It’s the complete package.”

Lori’s path to the JCC was anything but linear. Raised in a modern Orthodox home in Brooklyn, she spent 12 years in yeshiva and married at 19 years old. Early adulthood brought questions, realizations, and difficult decisions—including leaving her marriage and coming out to her parents.

“It was really hard,” she recalls. “My parents did not take it very well.”

Still, Lori pressed forward. She followed her instincts to EMT school—drawn to work that could help others, and she hoped, make her family proud. “I just wanted to be out there helping people and doing something honorable.”

A chance encounter with a police officer at a hospital would change everything. “He told me I’d make a good cop,” Lori reminisces.

She soon entered the [NYPD] Police Academy and ascended to the top of her class, graduating in the top five percent. Lori’s parents beamed at her Police Officer of the Month award—a moment that marked a significant turning point in their support.

“I was always told, ‘You can’t make a difference,’” Lori says. “But I knew I did. I saved lives. I reunited a lost child with their parents. I helped victims of domestic abuse. That was the impact.”

After nearly eight years on the force, an injury in the line of duty led to early retirement. True to form, Lori didn’t slow down. “I was 35. I still felt strong. I wasn’t ready to sit at home.”

Lori eventually pursued her longtime dream of culinary school, where she graduated with honors, served as executive chef of her commencement ceremony, and spent over 20 years in the restaurant business.

Throughout her journey, Lori’s passion for fitness never faded. Certified as a personal trainer in 2012, she started working with clients one-on-one. When she applied to several gyms, one place stood out.

“Coming to [Sid Jacobson] JCC felt like a full-circle moment,” Lori says. “As a traditional Jew, I wanted to be in a place where I didn’t have to explain who I was. It just felt right.”

Now, after more than a decade at SJJCC, Lori leads with intention—both in fitness and visibility. She openly shares her identity with members who may be seeking connection, acceptance, or simply reassurance.

“It’s important to me that they know they’re not alone,” she says. “If I can be that individual for even one person, then I’ve done my job.”

Lori believes change begins at home. “I taught my daughter that everyone deserves respect. You don’t have to agree with someone’s lifestyle—you just have to treat them like a human being.”

That mindset isn’t hers alone.

At SJJCC, Lori doesn’t just make space for others—she’s embraced in return and celebrated for exactly who she is.

“Lori lights up the JCC—making staff and members alike feel right at home with her energy and care,” says Lisa Rosenkrantz, Chief Operating Officer at Sid Jacobson JCC. “It’s an absolute joy to work beside her.”

“Lori brings more than fitness to the JCC—she brings heart, energy, and a sense of belonging,” states Steve Miller, Director of Health + Wellness. “Her passion inspires all of us to move, grow, and feel truly seen. Her positivity is contagious, and her dedication lifts us all.”

“I can be myself [at the JCC]. And what’s better than that?”