



Marcia Jo Zerivitz, LHD, Founding Executive Director, Jewish Museum of Florida-FIU, is a native West Virginian. She has lived in Florida for more than half a century. Florida International University awarded her a Doctor of Humane Letters Honoris Causa in 2016 for her vision and leadership throughout her life to expand knowledge, enrich collective historic memory and cultivate diversity. Marcia Jo has been a trailblazer in the American and Floridian Jewish communities serving national, state and local organizations and has broken the “glass ceiling” as the first woman in many positions.

Arriving in Orlando in 1966 as a military wife, she immersed herself in everything Jewish, primarily ORT, Hadassah, her congregation, Israel Bonds and Jewish Federation, becoming president of the Jewish Federation of Greater Orlando (1978–80) and then associate director (1980–1984). She led missions to Israel, initiated new programs and managed the campaign (CAP) to expand the campus. She was invited for the first United Jewish Appeal (UJA) Women’s Young Leadership Cabinet in 1974 and served on AIPAC’s national council. When she transitioned to the Jewish professional world in 1980, two early tasks were as fundraiser for Hadassah’s Camp Judaea and Pinellas County Jewish Day School. Throughout, Marcia Jo observed that the Jewish community in Florida had a major challenge—its continuity—and decided to focus on collecting and preserving, for future generations, the stories and material evidence of the contributions of Jews to the Sunshine State.

From 1984 to 1992, she traveled 250,000 miles throughout Florida, recruiting volunteers to assist in conducting grassroots research and retrieving the state’s hidden, 250+ year Jewish history. As part of the MOSAIC team, she raised the funds, created a collection and helped develop the storyline of Jewish life in Florida for the 2,000 sq. ft. MOSAIC exhibit that traveled to 13 cities (1990-1994). For each local community, she created exhibits and educational materials.

In 1995, under her direction, this project evolved into the Jewish Museum of Florida (JMOF), now housed in two adjacent restored former synagogues, on the National Register of Historic Places. JMOF collects, preserves and interprets 250 years of the Jewish experience in Florida in the context of American and world Jewish history, art and culture and also to reflect the immigration experience of all Americans. In 16 years, Marcia Jo developed and presented more than 70 exhibits (>50% were originals created with her staff) with 500 educational and cultural programs, and led the Museum to be accredited by the American Alliance of Museums (AAM), an honor earned by less than 5% of the nation’s museums. This is perhaps the first museum in the US to document the history of one ethnic group in a state.

For the Museum, Marcia led the fundraising for \$36 million including a \$3 million endowment fund. Of this, \$7.5 million was in public grants. She wrote the majority of the grants and served on grants panels for the State of Florida.

Marcia Jo initiated the legislation for both a Florida Jewish History Month (FJHM) each January and a Jewish American Heritage Month (JAHM) each May to increase awareness of the contributions by Jews to the state and nation and she serves on the JAHM board. In 2009, as part of the Museum’s strategic plan, Marcia Jo began a search for an academic partner to help ensure the long-term impact and outreach of the mission of JMOF. She initiated contact with Florida International University, and, in 2012, the partnership was finalized, resulting in JMOF-FIU.

Marcia Jo retired from JMOF in 2011. She continues to curate exhibits, research and write books and articles on Florida Jewish history. She gives PowerPoint lectures on topics related to discrimination and Jewish history and consults in the field. She resides on St. Pete Beach with her husband Elliott whom she credits as her partner in this journey. She is credited with an innovative process that gave the world something they did not have before: the compelling story of one ethnic group in a hugely diverse Florida. During her career, she has recruited, trained, managed and motivated more than 12,000 volunteers, and overseen the planning, budgeting, management and fundraising of nearly \$100 million.

Marcia Jo wrote (with co-author) Florida Jewish Heritage Trail (250 sites in 44 cities with Jewish historical significance), published by Florida Department of State. She authored the photo-documentaries Jews of Greater Miami and Jews of Tampa for Arcadia Publishing and all Florida entries for Encyclopedia Judaica. She was editor/writer for ninety-six issues of JMOF's quarterly membership newsletter TILES and her scholarship has been used in films, historical journals and books, including by Brandeis University Press. She has been published nationally and internationally. Marcia Jo was the main on-camera narrator for the 2014 PBS documentary, A Call to Serve: Florida Jews in the U.S. Military, based on JMOF exhibit. Most recently, she curated Kehillah: A History of Jewish Life in Greater Orlando and wrote the exhibit catalog and is currently writing her seminal book on the Jewish History of Florida for release in 2020.