Seth Goldman and Julie Farkas have a clear philanthropic vision. Their stories explain why.

Seth's story

Seth Goldman learned about tzedakah as a child in religious school. The Hebrew concept, signifying charity, meant giving something of yourself to others, even if just a dime.

Growing up in a Jewish family in Wellesley, Massachusetts, Seth saw people all around him give much more than mere cents, bringing that act of tzedakah, literally, home.

He watched his father, Marshall Goldman, lead, chair and champion multiple groups like the Boston Baroque orchestra, Hillel and the Klezmer Conservatory Band and generally raise money for causes he cared about. He wasn’t the biggest check-writer, Seth says of his dad, an economics professor at Wellesley College and,
later, associate director of Harvard University’s Russian Research Center. “He just always wanted to support things that he believed in.”

Seth witnessed his older sister raise money for an international relief nonprofit. Years later as an adult, he himself worked with the precursor to U.S. volunteer agency AmeriCorps. “That notion of service was something I have always embraced,” he says.

Today, the prominent local business owner may perhaps be best known as founder of Bethesda’s Honest Tea. But well before that, he had volunteered for Michael Dukakis’ campaigns for Massachusetts governor and president. He’d live in China and the Soviet Union, after writing his Harvard University senior thesis on political and economic reform in both countries. He’d go on to serve as deputy press secretary for then-Sen. Lloyd Bentsen, D-Texas, and earn a master’s from Yale University’s School of Management. He’d move to the D.C. area and work in sales and marketing for Calvert Investments’ social investment fund before venturing down the entrepreneurial path himself.

For years, Seth steadily adopted and applied his family’s approach to his own work and life. He brewed it into the very ethos of his bottled tea business from its earliest days, driving his decisions on suppliers and fair wages, and inducing him to send even further funding, like he did with the Native American tribe supplying his company peppermint leaves.

He’s built a career — and identity — grounded in social impact.

All of those experiences shaped Seth’s trajectory including, most notably, a brief spell in Longview, Texas.

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**About Seth**

*Co-founder and chief change agent, Eat the Change*

**Age:** 57

**Education:** Bachelor’s in government, Harvard University; master’s in private and public management, Yale University

**Boards:** Beyond Meat, PLNT Burger, Bethesda Green
**First business:** Selling found golf balls on the Wellesley College golf course  
**First job:** Cleaning dishes at Bailey’s Ice Cream in Wellesley  
**Favorite Just Ice Tea flavor:** Half Tea & Half Lemonade

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**Julie's story**

From the moment she started school, Julie Farkas saw the civil rights movement effect change — from her backyard to her family room.

Julie, raised in a Jewish family in Alexandria, grew up attending majority-Black public schools until busing policies changed that dynamic in Virginia.

She watched her father, Ray Farkas, cover the importance and impact of the civil rights movement for NBC Nightly News’ “Huntley-Brinkley Report.” And she knew it was a need bigger than any one person.

“Every day from kindergarten on, I saw my economic privilege and white-skin privilege,” she says. “I remember my experiences in elementary school and thinking how different my experiences were from the kid who was sitting right next to me.”

As a crossing guard in elementary school, Julie stood at an intersection of Alexandria’s biggest public housing project alongside homes sliding off their foundations, only about a mile from her family’s split-level house. After college, she read a Parade Magazine cover story featuring urban planning pioneer Jim Rouse and his goal to achieve affordable housing for all Americans within a generation.

“I literally wrote him a letter,” she recalls. “I said, ‘You may be 72 and I may be 22, but we both want to save the world, and I’d love to help you.’”

Julie secured her first job with what’s now known as Enterprise Community Partners, where she helped other organizations build employment agencies for low-income and homeless individuals. After four years, she’d take a leave of absence to get involved in the presidential campaign — a suggestion from her dad. She’d go on to
team up with what’s now Bridges to Independence in Arlington, followed by long-held stints with the former Consumer Health Foundation and District nonprofit Urban Alliance.

She also took notes from her grandfather, Joseph Zoltan Farkas, who ran a business while working to foster equity himself. He’d previously escaped Hungary before World War II — and lost about 40 family members in the Holocaust.

“He was really my inspiration,” Julie says. “So much of my career and work has been informed by what he did with his life, always moving forward and trying to do anything he could do.”

She took that mentality on a trip to Longview, Texas.

### About Julie

**Chief impact officer, Eat the Change; senior adviser, Springsong Museum**

**Age:** 60  
**Education:** Bachelor’s in urban planning, University of Virginia  
**Boards:** Conservation Nation’s Education Advisory Council  
**First business:** Creating the LifeWorks employment program at the Arlington-Alexandria Coalition for the Homeless, now Bridges to Independence  
**First job:** Scooping ice cream at Scoops in Skyline Mall  
**Favorite Just Ice Tea flavor:** Berry Hibiscus Herbal Tea

### Their meeting

Julie Farkas arrived in Longview, in September 1988. That’s when she met Seth Goldman who, like her, was in Texas working for the Michael Dukakis-Lloyd Bentsen presidential campaign.

Four days later, Julie says, “we planned our whole life together.”

Soon, they lived in Moscow, teaching English to kindergartners and high schoolers, journalists and historians. They got engaged Nov. 15, 1989, in the middle of Red Square with Saint Basil’s Cathedral and Lenin’s Mausoleum in the backdrop. After a year as the only
Westerners in a Soviet apartment building, they moved back: first to Arlington, then to New Haven, Connecticut, and in 1995, to Bethesda — to the same house they live in today.

It’s where they raised three sons, established their careers and made names for themselves not just in work, but also in a shared passion — in areas ranging from population health to climate change, social entrepreneurship to social justice. It’s where they became vegetarians in 2005, following the lead of their oldest son, Jonah, and vegans in 2019, joining their second son, Elie, further fueling their hunger to protect the environment through plant-based food.

It’s also where they gave their kids a fourth brother, as they affectionately refer to Honest Tea, the homegrown beverage business that Seth co-founded in 1998 with Yale professor Barry Nalebuff, generating $250,000 in its first year. The company started in the family’s kitchen before it entered the world’s stage.

A decade later, in 2008, Seth sold a 40% stake of his business baby to The Coca-Cola Co. (NYSE: KO) for $43 million. Three years later, he relinquished the whole thing to the Atlanta beverage giant. He dubbed himself “TeaEO emeritus” in 2015, scaling back his daily duties with Honest Tea to focus on his role as executive chairman for West Coast plant-based protein company Beyond Meat Inc. — important to Seth, too, because vegetarian food choices were frustratingly limited, he says. And in 2019, he officially stepped down from Honest Tea, a brand that by then had logged $600 million in sales. It then shifted to Coca-Cola’s Atlanta headquarters.

**Their philosophy**

Throughout that journey, Seth and Julie brought in enough to regularly give back.

Over the years, they’ve prioritized each other’s causes and committed a total $5 million in gifts using ImpactAssets, a donor-advised fund that grew out of Calvert. Through that vehicle, they also made more than $1.5 million in community loans and investments in funds that support underrepresented entrepreneurs — another way, they say, to help build wealth in historically marginalized communities.
The philanthropic missions were clear for both: equity and access to opportunity, food ethics and animal welfare, Jewish community and Holocaust education. And, in some cases, deeply personal gifts, like their $100,000 donation to a Georgetown University Medical Center clinical trial of a treatment for Parkinson’s disease, a progressive disorder that has afflicted Julie’s grandfather, father and, now, her brother — who today is benefiting from that very drug.

They’ve given more than $600,000 over time to the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, where Julie says she imbibed the “very tragic narrative that my grandfather likely never knew and that he never talked about.” They’ve donated $300,000 to help create the Honest Tea Entrepreneurship Suite in Yale’s management school and $150,000 to create a major in food policy in the Center for Ethics at Emory University, where two of their sons went to college. They’ve given to Greater Washington nonprofits, including Poolesville’s Poplar Springs Animal Sanctuary, Bethesda-Chevy Chase High School’s Educational Foundation and Silver Spring’s CollegeTracks.

The gift-making process isn’t always so clear-cut — and certainly sparks disagreements. Julie generally prefers to support changemakers on the ground rather than larger, often well-endowed organizations. While she’d challenge whether an institution like the Yale School of Management really needs their support, Seth would argue the 46-year-old institution is still young enough and able to foster the next generation of business leaders “who can embrace a more enlightened view” of their role. “It does feel like our gifts to Yale make a visible difference to the school,” he says.

But across their donations, “moving the needle on big issues can be hard,” Julie says. Individual anecdotes give them hope, but otherwise, Seth says, “there’s always the question about whether your donation really makes a difference.”

It’s one of the reasons they dole out dollars and also get involved themselves. The couple teamed with Montgomery College to establish the Longview ACES Pathway Scholarship, named after the city that united them 34 years ago. It’s a $1 million commitment over multiple years that will support 20 students in the county’s
Achieving Collegiate Excellence and Success (ACES) program, which provides first-generation college students, many from low-income families, a route to a bachelor’s degree from the Universities at Shady Grove and, ultimately, paid professional internships.

“There’s nothing more gratifying,” Julie says, “than being able to give someone just a little bit of assistance and to see them just take the ball and run with it.”

**Their grants**

The partners’ philanthropic compass directed them to a new initiative in 2020.

They created Eat the Change Impact, the nonprofit and eponymous arm of Seth’s new food company, which he’s running with business partner and chef Spike Mendelsohn. ETC Impact, which predates its sister company, aims to support organizations working to make the world healthier, whether through promoting biodiversity, addressing food waste or expanding access to plant-based diets.

Through the program, Seth and Julie awarded $1.25 million to both national and community organizations, many in the D.C. area, over three rounds of annual grants ranging from $5,000 to $25,000. Only a handful of those groups had budgets of more than $1 million, while others sat below $100,000.

The partners have had missteps along the way, like when they awarded a grant to an organic farming organization that they later learned was promoting organic meat, Seth says. “Given that we don’t have infinite funds, I’d rather support something that’s fully aligned,” he says.

Julie points out the need to meet with prospective grant recipients in-person, as a written application doesn’t always capture an organization’s work. “We are investing in people as well as ideas and programs, so getting to know the people is important.”

She says her prior experience creating the Consumer Health Foundation’s grants program helped them shape ETC Impact. Last year, it caught the attention of Flora Plant Butter, which
contributed more money, increasing its number of grants as resources continued to shrink through Covid.

The program has funneled funding to several local nonprofits, including Silver Spring’s Charles Koiner Conservancy for Urban Farming, AfriThrive and D.C. Greens, a 13-year-old nonprofit working to foster health equity through food.

D.C. Greens received a total of $60,000 from ETC Impact, allowing it to develop an agricultural and community wellness space in Ward 8’s Oxon Run Park called The Well. That $2.4 million project on Department of Parks and Recreation land, in the works since 2018, broke ground in July 2021 and delivered a year later.

It wasn’t just the sizes of the couple’s checks — they offered other support, too, says D.C. Greens Development Director Abby Bluestone. Seth and Julie are “very committed to being a part of the conversation and a part of the learning process” and “bringing the expertise that they bring, but knowing also when to defer,” Bluestone says. “The impact that we have as an organization is also a reflection of the support that we get from the foundations we work with.”

Their impact

The Well was little more than grass and weeds in the summer of 2021 — not even a bench or trash can, Julie says, describing her first visit to the Congress Heights park.

Now, the 1-plus-acre property sports growing fields and community gathering space. Julie and Seth went to the site, this time in late October, for a gathering of ETC Impact’s other grantees. The question on everyone’s mind that day: how to keep this support going.

“It’s really part of our wiring now, and it certainly continues to be a cause that Julie and I care a lot about,” Seth says.

The trajectory is similar to the nonprofit’s counterpart, for-profit company, Eat the Change, founded later in 2020 with a familiar mission: to democratize plant-based diets.
“It’s not an accident that the impacts that we seek to have come out of our business are very much aligned with the grants program,” Seth says. “You’re never sure if these businesses are going to be profitable, so you want to feel like the impact happens regardless of the business’ profitability.”

Indeed, Eat the Change is not yet profitable. Thus far, it comprises a few business ingredients: PLNT Burger, a vegan fast-casual restaurant chain from Mendelsohn; a growing line of plant-based snacks, including organic carrot chews and mushroom jerky; and Just Ice Tea — read: justice — a bottled tea brand launched just months ago, thanks to Seth’s experience, connections and a quick $15 million secured in investment capital.

The tea line wasn’t part of the original plan, but came to fruition after Coca-Cola announced in May it would discontinue the Honest Tea brand, leaving in its wake suppliers that have long relied on that business. Just Ice Tea has signed on with those suppliers and similarly promotes organic agriculture, but is aiming for greater, more profitable sustainability, Seth says.

He’s still on the board of Beyond Meat, which makes plant-based burgers as an alternative to animal meat, now as board chair. In his 10 years on the board, he’s seen a less than $1 million-enterprise go public in 2019 and, nowadays, forecast the likes of $400 million to $425 million in revenue for this year.

That said, Beyond Meat has not been without serious challenges. That revenue projection is a drop from the company’s original targets as supply chain issues and inflation have sliced into the top line. Last month, the company cut its full-year guidance and announced a major layoff of about 200 employees, capping a stock slide that took its price from $107 a year ago to below $15. And its chief operating officer, Douglas Ramsey, was suspended after he was arrested for biting a man’s nose, followed by more executive departures.

Seth says he can’t comment much given Beyond Meat is a public company. “The journey is like any journey — you just go through different stages. And, certainly, this year has been a challenging stage,” he says. “But I’m still a huge believer in what the company is aspiring to do, and its impact, and the products.”
As of Beyond Meat’s latest proxy statement filed in March with the Securities and Exchange Commission, Seth owned 987,748 shares, or 1.6% of the company. Though, today, he says his ownership stake has dipped to 942,105 shares, with the couple’s ImpactAssets account owning another 151,000 shares. That investment in the company, he says, is key to their investments in the community. “It’s a big bet for me and for us,” he says.

Ultimately, the pair is “unusually aligned,” as Seth describes it, because they both support and challenge each other. Their interests differ and overlap. They bring distinct sets of skills to the table. They listen. They don’t stray from the course — thanks mostly to Julie, per Seth, who likens her role to that of a sailboat’s centerboard. Both attribute their shared mission to their lessons and observations as children of particularly active families.

“So much of the work that we do, whether you want to call it social justice or leveling the playing field of opportunity — for me, it’s just been a driving force since my earliest days,” Julie says.

Not unlike his own father, “we’re not writing the largest checks,” Seth says. “It’s about that engagement.”

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**Big beneficiaries**

*The couple also makes philanthropic donations outside of ETC Impact, with gifts generally falling into categories like equity and justice, the environment, Holocaust education and Jewish community initiatives, and social entrepreneurship. Here are some recipients of gifts totaling $100,000 or more:*

**U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum:** To support the museum’s programs

**Emory University’s Center for Ethics:** To create a new major in food policy

**Yale University:** To create the Honest Tea Entrepreneurship Suite

**Longview ACES Pathway Scholarship:** To support a class of 20 students at Montgomery College over multiple years

**Georgetown University Medical Center:** For a phase 2 clinical trial of nilotinib in Parkinson’s Disease. The gift was made in memory of Julie’s grandfather, Ray Farkas
**Bread for the City:** To support low-income D.C. residents with access to food, clothing, health care and other services

**The Aspen Institute:** To launch the organization’s food and society fellowship

**Bethesda Green:** To support the Bethesda nonprofit’s programming for social impact startups focused on environmental sustainability

**D.C. Central Kitchen:** To support its campaign to help fund its new headquarters

**Urban Alliance Foundation:** To help provide high school students equitable access to career development

**Springsong Museum:** To support the launch of the new nonprofit near the home where Rachel Carson wrote an environmental science book, “Silent Spring.” Julie is serving as strategic adviser.

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*Sara Gilgore*

Staff Reporter

*Washington Business Journal*