



The Center for Jewish Life

Embracing Our Past. Building Our Future.

UPDATE!

ISSUE 5

Issue 5 Editor – Debbie Hollander

MARCH 2015

COHEN FAMILY MAKES \$1 MILLION GIFT

Throughout his life, Larry Cohen has spent countless hours at the JCC of Wyoming Valley, playing basketball, bowling, or hitting the gym. Also, Larry and his wife, Sally, have watched their children enjoy numerous opportunities and develop lifelong friendships at the JCC.

Motivated by a strong desire to see future generations have the same opportunities, the Cohen family has announced a \$1 million gift to the Campaign for the Center for Jewish Life. In appreciation for this transformative gift, the swimming pool at the new Center will be named in honor of the Cohen family.

“The JCC has been part of my life for many years and part of my children’s lives for many years,” said Larry Cohen in a recent interview.

The Center for Jewish Life represents a significant investment in the future of the region’s Jewish community. It also will serve community members of all faiths and backgrounds. The Center will provide much-needed space for educational, social, cultural, recreational, and religious activities for decades to come and will replace the aging Jewish Community Center and Jewish Family Service buildings in Wilkes-Barre.

Speaking for the family, Larry said he is hoping the Center for Jewish Life accomplishes two things. The first is to enable Jewish communal organizations to save costs and provide better services. The second is to entice young Jewish families to move to the area, including young professionals who grew up in the area, left and are now looking for a good place to raise families.

“Consolidation is a good solution for everybody to have a better situation and to control the costs,” said Larry, a longtime member of Temple Israel, which has voted to relocate its religious school and administrative offices to the Third Avenue campus in Kingston. “Everybody has these aging buildings in need of all kinds of repair. If we do wind up with a smaller Jewish community, we need to manage the costs in order to make the whole thing viable.”

Larry remains hopeful that the existence of the Center will attract new families to the area.

The Wyoming Valley, he said, boasts a great deal of employment opportunities, especially in the medical field. Having a cutting-edge center and vibrant Jewish community might help families that are considering jobs in Wilkes-Barre make the decision to stay.

“We think it is a nice place to raise kids. But families need a reason to come here, or a reason to come back,” he said.



The Cohen Family: (Left to right) Rebecca Binder with husband Chuck Cohen, Larry Cohen, Sally Cohen, and Rick Cohen.

“Unless we have a vibrant Jewish community experience, you won’t attract many young people who will be interested in coming here. The Center represents an investment in the future.”

The Cohen name is well known in the Wyoming Valley. The family founded and continues to run Benco Dental, the nation’s largest privately owned distributor of dental equipment. The company was started in 1930 by Larry’s father, Benjamin J. Cohen, an immigrant from Russia who peddled dental instruments throughout Pennsylvania, New York, New Jersey, and Ohio. Today, Larry’s sons Chuck and Rick jointly run the company as executive and managing directors, respectively.

Through a family foundation, the Cohens devote a great deal of their resources to improving access to dental care. Larry is an active and generous supporter of his alma mater, Wilkes University. The school’s Science Center is named for the Cohen family.

The family is passionate about Jewish life in the Wyoming Valley. With this gift, the Cohens hope to inspire others to support the Campaign and perhaps give more than they thought they could.

“We are extremely proud of this gift,” explained Larry. “Several generations of my family have invested in the future of the Jewish community in the Wyoming Valley. We want the community to thrive for generations to come – and we believe it will.”

STATE SENATOR LAUDS CENTER FOR JEWISH LIFE



State Senator Lisa Baker was thrilled when she first learned of plans to build a new Center for Jewish Life in Kingston; her excitement has only grown as the project has moved closer to reality.

“Personally, I think our entire community benefits from a financial perspective and a spiritual perspective,” said Baker in a recent interview. “By rehabbing a property and expanding it, the JCA is showing confidence in the future of the area.”

Baker, a Republican serving in her third term in Harrisburg, represents the 20th Senatorial District, which includes substantial parts of Luzerne and Susquehanna counties and all of Pike, Wayne, and Wyoming Counties. The Third Avenue site in Kingston, where the new Center will be built, sits within the boundaries of the district. She heads the Senate Labor and Industry Committee.

Baker supported a \$1.2 million state gaming grant for the project because of the potential economic benefit to Kingston and the desire to see an out-of-use-property become a vibrant communal center.

Though she couldn't make any promises, she encourages applying for further government funding in the future.

But she also believes that the Jewish community – guided by Jewish tradition and values - has made invaluable contributions to the Wyoming Valley area and she wants to see the community continue to thrive.

“The Jewish faith has always had deep roots here in this community, so to see it thrive is a positive thing,” said Baker, a frequent attendee of Jewish communal events.

Baker noted that she has always been impressed with the scope of programming and services the Jewish community has been able to offer in its outdated JCC building. The potential, she said, for what can be accomplished in a state of the art facility is limitless.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

? How can I support the Campaign?

Donors may support the Campaign in many tangible ways, especially through current gifts of cash and appreciated securities. We also welcome legacy gifts.

? How long do I have to pay for my pledge to the Campaign?

Campaign gifts may be paid over as many as five years.

? Is my contribution to the Campaign tax deductible?

100% of every contribution to the Campaign is tax deductible. The timing of the tax deduction may depend on how a donor's contribution is structured. Please consult your tax professional to confirm the appropriate timing of your deduction(s).

? How do I know how much to give?

There are many ways to support the Campaign. Donors need to reflect upon the important role that our Jewish institutions play in the life of the Jewish population of the Wyoming Valley and the need to ensure that these institutions can prosper in the future to determine the appropriate level of contribution. Any member of the Campaign's leadership team will be happy to meet and talk with donors to respond to questions.

? How will my gift be recognized?

The Center for Jewish Life Campaign offers a number of honor categories as well as the opportunity to name and/or dedicate parts of the new facility to pay tribute to those who support the Campaign. Please consult the Campaign materials for further details.

HOW TO FIND OUT MORE:

For more information about any aspect of the project or the campaign, or to learn about how you can help with the creation of the Center for Jewish Life, please do not hesitate to contact Danny Goldberg, executive director of the Jewish Community Alliance of Northeastern Pennsylvania: by email at jca.exec@jewishwilkes-barre.org or by phone at 570-824-4646, ext. 235.

PAYING IT FORWARD IN THE 21ST CENTURY

BY DEBBIE HOLLANDER



Have you ever been fortunate enough to be behind a kind person in a drive-through line who was nice enough to treat you to your coffee? After accepting the gift, do you feel inspired to do the same for the person behind you? This trend of “Paying it Forward” has been happening all over our country. It brings a smile to many faces, boosts morale, and makes people feel a glimmer of hope for mankind in this often somber and sometimes scary world we live in.

“Paying it Forward” is not a new concept. It definitely predates the 2000 film “Pay it Forward” starring Kevin Spacey and Helen Hunt. According to Wikipedia, the phrase may date to 1916. Generations ago, when my great-grandparents moved to the Wyoming Valley, the viability of a Jewish Community was uncertain. The idea of my family and others remaining here was not a given. There were no guarantees that they would stay for any length of time. Their generation set out to establish a strong foundation for a Jewish Community, even though they were not sure if it would grow, or to what extent it would prosper. It was not at all clear that they, let alone their children, would remain in Wyoming Valley to reap the benefits of what they were building.

Thankfully, my family and many other families “paid it forward.” I remember actively enjoying the JCC from a very early age: The activities, the sports and most importantly, the life-long friendships. The feeling of belonging and the comfort and fun of running around the Center on Sundays provided memories that will stay with me forever. It is a feeling that I would like others to enjoy as they grow up in our area.

We can learn a lot from our ancestors, as well as from the person in front of us at Starbucks. Let’s all just “pay it forward.” Bring a smile to someone’s face...boost morale...give a glimmer of hope that we can all use in these uncertain times. We NEED to preserve a Jewish presence in the Wyoming Valley, not only for ourselves and our children but our grandchildren and great-grandchildren. It is our responsibility. The task is as important now as it was then. Please support the effort to build the new Center for Jewish Life. Every little bit will help, and will be appreciated by generations to follow. I guarantee that future generations will thank us for our efforts. One can only imagine how our descendants, inspired by what we build today, aim to “pay forward” tomorrow.

OUR INITIAL DONORS

We acknowledge with gratitude commitments to our campaign from donors whose vision and support will make possible a new chapter in our Jewish community.

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OSCAR NIGHT GATHERING

Donors gathered Feb. 22 at the home of Campaign Co-chair Paula Chaiken and her husband Joe Kraus for an Oscar night gathering. The evening featured a talk by Center for Jewish Life project architect David Sheydwasser, who offered thoughts about giving new life to old buildings. The event was the first of a series of planned donor receptions honoring those who have invested in the future of our community.



JASON AND KELSEY NATAUPSKY

“After living in Philadelphia for the past seven years, moving back to the Wyoming Valley was a major transition. One of our biggest concerns was the status of our JCC and Jewish community. We are happy to know that the addition of this amazing new facility will provide a place to use the gym, host events, and participate in community activities not only for us, but for future generations as well. This is a really exciting step for our new Jewish Community.”

THANK YOU EDITORS

The editors of the Center for Jewish Life Update represent various demographics and constituencies in our community. They have worked hard to keep the community informed about the progress of this transformative project. The Wyoming Valley Jewish Community would like to thank the individuals who have edited the newsletter: Laurie Schwager, Paula Chaiken, Kiera Lantz, Larry Taren, and Debbie Hollander.

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