



The Center for Jewish Life

Embracing Our Past. Building Our Future.

UPDATE!

ISSUE 7

Issue 7 Editor – Larry I. Taren

AUGUST 2015

NEW HONORARY CAMPAIGN CO-CHAIRS ROUND OUT ALL-STAR CAMPAIGN LEADERSHIP TEAM



The Campaign to create the Center for Jewish Life is thrilled to announce that Bill and Essy Davidowitz, together with Allan and Sue Kluger, have accepted the positions of Honorary Campaign Co-chairs.

Both couples are well known for their philanthropic efforts and tireless devotion to public service. By accepting this role, the Davidowitzes

and the Klugers have added experience, passion and commitment to an already accomplished group of leaders. The announcement follows the donation of more than 13 acres of land on which the Center will be built, another signal of the growing momentum for this project.

Campaign Co-chairs Paula Chaiken and Larry Taren said in a joint statement that they were “overjoyed to have individuals with such depth and breadth of experience and longstanding commitment to the Jewish community joining our leadership team. We are confident that their generosity and example will also inspire others to support our community campaign.”

The Center for Jewish Life, which will be located on 3rd Avenue in Kingston, represents a significant investment in the future of the region’s Jewish community. Its amenities and services will be open to all. Plans for the Center include a state-of-the-art pool and fitness center, basketball courts, exercise studios, modern classrooms and meeting spaces, a center for autism services, library and resource rooms, and office space for various Jewish agencies that will call the Center their home. 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.

“We have been living in this community for 60 years,” said Bill Davidowitz, a businessman and noted philanthropist, explaining why he and Essy decided to accept leadership roles and make a generous contribution. “It is a great Jewish community and we want to keep it that way.”

(Note: A profile of the Klugers will appear in the next newsletter.)

Both Bill and Essy grew up in Hazleton and have been living in the Wilkes-Barre area since the 1950s. The parents of

four children and grandparents of nine are philanthropic and business pillars of the community. Bill ran the Penn Footwear Company for many years and, though no longer involved in manufacturing, he remains active in the business. He is a longtime Penn State supporter and serves on the advisory board of Penn State Wilkes-Barre. In the mid-2000s, he chaired a drive to build a new academic commons for Penn State and an annual academic scholarship is named after the couple.

Essy’s volunteerism and nonprofit leadership has spanned decades: She’s served on the Wilkes University Board of Trustees since 1973 and has chaired the university’s academic program committee. The list of organizations she has been active with includes: The Jewish Community Center, the Luzerne County Agency on Aging, Hadassah, and the local branch of the National Council of Jewish Women, for which she served as national president and as non-governmental representative to the United Nations. She is also an accomplished flutist and harpist. Essy has edited a number of books on various topics, including education and modern Jewish literature. She was the recipient of the 1998 Distinguished Community Service Award from the Anti-Defamation League.

“We grew up in a very active environment,” said Essy, noting that both her father and father-in-law, an immigrant from Russia, had been president of their shul. “We were influenced by people who mentored us.” She cited Wilkes University’s founding president, Dr. Eugene S. Farley, Rabbi A.D. Barras of Temple Israel, and JCC director Louis Smith as her mentors in philanthropy and community affairs.

“We had an understanding that we were blessed and had an obligation to give back.”

The couple feels a sense of stewardship over the current JCC and that it is their duty and the obligation of the community to invest in the Center for Jewish Life for the benefit of future generations. They said that the Center will serve both the Jewish and general populations and should help to attract more Jewish families to the Wyoming Valley. They said it made little sense to invest in restoring the current building, one that, even if refurbished, would still lack adequate space and parking facilities.

“We enjoy the work that has been done by the generations that preceded us,” said Essy. “We have had a declining Jewish population. The new Center will attract people from outside the community.”

Bill noted that when the project is completed, “it will be a tremendous boost to our community.”

THE GIFT OF THE LAND

By David Schwager

Co-Chair, Real Estate Committee



Perhaps no development in our community's campaign has been more significant than the donation of the approximately 13-14 acre parcel of land in Kingston that will soon be the home to the

Center for Jewish Life. On May 28th, the Cohen, Lantz, and Friedman families formally transferred the land on 3rd Avenue to the Trustee of the Jewish Community Center Building, who holds the land for the benefit of the Jewish community.

Why was this step so important? The donor families purchased this land in 2011 and, from the very outset, what they sought to do was to offer the community the opportunity to make a fair choice: Renovate the current JCC or move to a new site. The community would only have a real choice if it controlled two locations. The three families purchased the land and called their partnership Project Home Run because they knew they had created a win-win situation for everyone. If the community wanted to move its base of operations and build a brand new cultural, educational, social, and athletic center, they would donate the property. Only if the community had chosen to stay put, would the three families have looked to sell or develop this property.

For many reasons – not the least significant of which is cost - the community has wisely opted to invest in the future, rather than retrofit a building that has outlived its usefulness.

The gift came about only after a significant amount of planning, development, and organizing had taken place. We have already accounted for more than \$6 million of the \$9 million needed to build our new home. The official transfer of the land is further validation of the project and represents the donors' highest degree of confidence. Along with the property, the donors have also passed onto the community the right to receive \$1.25 million in state funds for the development of the site.

On a parallel front, the Real Estate Committee, and Design Sub-Committee, has moved forward with planning for the development of the site. Architects were interviewed and local architect David Sheydwasser was selected to create a design for the development of the site. Many of you have already seen the renderings of the outside of the new building. Now, having determined the spaces that need to be housed in the new Center for Jewish life, the Design Sub-Committee is continuing to work with Mr. Sheydwasser to fine tune the interior spaces.

As we move closer to our goal – and realizing the vision of the Cohen, Friedman, and Lantz families – we must remember that this project belongs to all of us. Each and every member of our community is responsible for seeing the Center for Jewish Life to fruition. We want future generations to look back and remember how we invested wisely, acted decisively, and built a Center that helped a community thrive.

Moving Forward Toward Our Ultimate Goal

By Paula Chaiken and Larry Taren

Co-Chairpersons, Campaign for the Center for Jewish Life



We are pleased to report that momentum continues to build for the campaign for the Center for Jewish Life. As our committee's efforts to raise funds for the Center move forward, the project continues to move towards construction.

Donors at all levels are getting involved in this community campaign. As reported elsewhere in this newsletter, Bill and Essy Davidowitz and Allan and Sue Kluger, have joined the campaign team as honorary campaign co-chairs. We are the beneficiaries of their generosity, wisdom and experience. The campaign is proud to have a number of communal pillars, longtime activists, as well as younger individuals, serving in a variety of leadership and supporting roles. The enthusiastic backing of the Davidowitzes, Klugers and so many others speaks to the compelling need for the Center for Jewish Life.

Donors have embraced dedication opportunities. Committed dedications include: the swimming pool area, lounge, library/resource room, men's and women's locker

rooms and three meeting rooms. The decision to dedicate a space in the new Center represents a profound commitment to our community. For those looking to leave a lasting legacy, and make a statement about the importance of this project, many dedication opportunities remain.

On a parallel track, the Building Committee is hard at work on refining the design of the future Center. In fact, as the necessary funds are falling into place, we are pleased to announce October 4th as the date for the official groundbreaking.

Remember, the campaign for the Center for Jewish life is our community project and it is the responsibility of all of us to see it completed successfully. This project is a collective investment in our Jewish future and in the Wyoming Valley. Please give generously and give in a way that is meaningful to you. The Center for Jewish Life will be a resource, a communal hub and a center of Jewish values that we will pass on to future generations.

To find out more about the campaign, contact either Campaign Co-chair Paula Chaiken, at pchaiken@gmail.com, or Co-chair Larry Taren at ltaren@live.com.

Donor Spotlight: Larry Amdur

Larry Amdur lives with his wife, Elaine, in Kingston; the couple spends half the year in Fort Myers, Florida. The retired sales representative for Carter Footwear grew up in Wilkes-Barre, graduated from Wilkes College, and has spent most of his life in the Wyoming Valley. The father of three recently discussed his support for the Center for Jewish Life.

Growing up, did you spend much time at the JCC?

The JCC was a central, integral part of my life. I would go to the JCC on South River Street after school, go home and have dinner and go back to the Center most evenings. I participated in arts, theater, basketball, fitness, you name it. Julia Lieberman Smith, the program director at the time, was a significant influence on my life. As she did with so many kids, she really took an interest in me and encouraged me.

Have you been involved in the JCC as an adult?

These days, we attend various JCC programs. Currently, I work out at the JCC fitness center three or four times a week. I served on the board for many years and from 1978-1980, served as president. I remember acknowledging that it was an opportunity to serve an institution that impacted my life so significantly. I have also served on the board of Temple B'nai B'rith.

Why did you decide to make a generous contribution to the Campaign for the Center for Jewish Life?

I feel that it is my responsibility to give back to the community that has given me and our family so much.

Admittedly, I was hesitant and resistant to the project until my meeting with Chuck Cohen. I felt that the demographics just wouldn't support the new Center. Chuck's presentation convinced me otherwise. If one hopes for a Jewish future in our area, the best possible solution is to complete this project. It makes no sense to pour money into our aging building, as compared to the desirability of a new facility with extensive parking and lower annual costs. My hope is that there will be enough Jews in the community who will be able to support the new project and that the facility will be appealing to the general population.

I am thankful that the leadership of the project is doing such a good job and I am appreciative of their efforts. I don't think the project would have gotten off the ground without the significant support of the Cohen, Lantz and Friedman families.

Thoughts from a JCCA Official



It's good the JCA leadership has given thought to how the community is best served going forward. What worked in the past is not a guarantor of what works in the future, and there are ample examples of communities, including some in Pennsylvania, that have lost their JCCs forever. Moving to a new site is not only warranted from a program and service-use perspective, but it sends a powerful message that while Wilkes-Barre is a small Jewish community, it can still have a meaningful future. Change is hard, but not responding to change is worse.

David Posner is a Vice-President for JWB, Strategic Performance, and Community Consultation at the JCC Association. His primary work is out of the Jack, Joseph and Morton Mandel Center for Excellence in Leadership and Management at JCC Association.

The Center for Jewish Life Has Gone Viral

There's been no greater champion and advocate for the Center for Jewish Life project than Building Committee Co-Chair Chuck Cohen. Have you seen Chuck's video on YouTube? He makes a reasoned and passionate case for the necessity of our campaign.

To check it out, please type the short link below into your web browser: <http://bit.ly/CaseC4JL>





The Center for Jewish Life

60 South River Street
Wilkes-Barre PA 18702

Non-Profit
Presorted
U.S. Postage
PAID
Wilkes-Barre, PA
Permit No. 51

Return Service Requested

*Please join the Jewish community
as we celebrate the groundbreaking for*

THE NEW

Center for Jewish Life

Sunday, October 4, 2015

10:00 AM – 11:30 AM

at the site on Third Avenue, Kingston

We will enjoy a light breakfast in a sukkah followed by
a ceremonial groundbreaking, including brief remarks from dignitaries.

We hope our entire community will join us as we commemorate this exciting
new chapter in our history. Watch your mail for an invitation.

*“The leadership of the Campaign for the Center for Jewish Life
mourns the passing of Anna Cervenak, beloved partner of Max
Bartikowsky. Anna was a generous supporter of our project and
understood the impact it will have on the wider community. We will
all miss her passion, dedication and kindness.”*

