

## Irene Cohen

My husband Irving and I came to Greensboro for the first time 45 years ago to visit some friends who had moved from New Jersey. We instantly fell in love with the Jewish community; and because we were young and very gutsy, we decided to pick up and move south. It all depended on whether I could find an ob-gyn I liked in Greensboro, because I was pregnant at the time with our second son. We did find a doctor who passed the test, and we wasted no time selling our house in New Jersey and moving here.

I will never forget the warm welcome we received. Scott was born a few months after we arrived; and when we had the bris, people I did not know were knocking on my door to bring us challahs and to say *mazel tov*. The Jewish community just opened itself up to us and made us feel at home, and the people here became our new family because our real family was in New Jersey.

When we lived up North, we were not very involved in Jewish life because our lives were saturated with it. What drew us to Greensboro was how vibrant the Jewish life was. We wanted to become involved right away, so we joined Beth David Synagogue and became very active in starting B'nai Shalom Day School. It was a real struggle to get that school started—I should know, I served on the board. But it was important to us that our kids be exposed to both secular and Judaic education. We put our oldest son in first grade when the school opened—he was one of its guinea pigs. Because I did not have much of a Jewish education myself growing up, I learned along with my kids. We just celebrated the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of B'nai Shalom and I am so proud to have been a part of building this school that has attracted so many wonderful people to our community.

It was always easy to become active in projects here, because people were so eager to include me. It started out as a social thing; but as I become involved, I realized how important this work was to people that we were helping, and it became much more of a philanthropic endeavor. To me, it is very important to help others in our community and around the world. I have been very involved in JDC, Hadassah, and National Council of Jewish Women. But the organization that has touched me the most is the Greensboro Jewish Federation. I was campaign chair for the Women's Division one year and I wear my lion pin proudly. I have especially enjoyed participating in the Russian resettlement project and the Beltsy Partnership.

Resettling refugees from the former Soviet Union was a very special thing; to be able to help these people, who did not know anything about where they were coming, get their footing in Greensboro. I do not scrub the floors in my own house, but it was such pleasure to get an apartment ready for them, to go in and clean it, put food in the cabinets and make the beds. The new immigrants were so overwhelmed when we would pick them up at the airport and bring them to their new apartments. It reminded me what a special community this is when I saw people go out of their way to donate their special goods and services—helping with the job hunt, finding translators, donating and hauling furniture, giving extra spending money. Irv was in the restaurant business so we were able to supply things like silverware and glasses. After 21 years, we have seen some of these kids graduate from B'nai Shalom, then high school and college, and go on to become doctors and attorneys. We could not be prouder to have helped bring them over.

Being involved in the Beltsy Partnership also gave us a special personal connection. Along with our friends, Shelley and Frank Weiner, we had the incredible experience of sponsoring Eva Moscovitch, a Moldovan girl who came to the American Hebrew Academy as a freshman. Here was this girl, who spoke hardly any English when she came, but who worked so hard that she got a full scholarship to Mount Holyoke. It was wonderful seeing her grow, and it was a wonderful thing to be able to help somebody. Hopefully she will go back and help others.

Irv and I have two grandsons, and I very much would like to see them involved in Jewish organizations. I hope they spend some time in Israel. And as far as being philanthropic and giving back, I think they have grown up with that—they see their parents do it, they know that Irv and I do it, and we talk about it with them. I just want them to grow up to be healthy, caring human beings.

