

Unexpected Gifts Bring Joy to Local Jewish Institutions

By Phil Warshauer

Not many things bring a smile to your face like a nice surprise. The bigger the surprise, the greater impact it has on your day, your life, or the lives of others. It can leave a lasting impression that provides as much joy in the future as it did when it first occurred.

Temple Beth El, the Hebrew Cemetery Association and Temple Israel were surprised when they received a letter prior to Thanksgiving. Each letter contained a generous gift from the estate of Hilda Kirsner, who passed away in March of 2007 at the age of 94. Kirsner, a Charlotte native, also left generous gifts to the American Heart Association, the American Cancer Society, and B'nai Israel Synagogue in Hampton, Virginia.

"Hilda knew what she wanted to do and felt it was her duty to give back," said Tony Giordano, her estate attorney. "She had no children and gave approximately half of her estate to charity. That's a wonderful legacy to leave."

Hilda Kirsner had deep roots in the Charlotte Jewish community, as her family settled in Charlotte in the early 1900s. Her mother, Hattie Smith Malever, was Temple Israel's first Sisterhood President and an original member of Charlotte's Hadassah chapter. Her uncle, M.B. Smith, was a former Temple Israel president and is viewed as one of the driving forces behind the establishment and maintenance of the Hebrew Cemetery. Dedicated service to the cemetery was continued by his son, Alfred E. Smith, for more than 25 years.

"I think Judaism was important to Hilda," remembered Ben Sinkoe, a cousin and former resident of Charlotte who now resides in Black Mountain. "She wasn't particularly active in the Jewish

community but she took pride in her family's role in building the community. She was raised as a member of Temple Israel but later joined Temple Beth El."

"We are very grateful that we might have touched her life in some positive way," added Dan Ruda, President of Temple Israel. "We are truly overwhelmed by her generosity. We are placing a permanent Yahrzeit plaque in her memory and are discussing other possibilities to honor her."

It is not unusual for organizations to receive "surprise" estate gifts. Many individuals decide to give back to their community after their death without any advance notification to the recipient organizations. There are many reasons for retaining anonymity. A common thread of estate gifts is a desire to give back and support an organization's future.

"Hilda Kirsner's gift to the Hebrew Cemetery Association helps assure its proper operation well beyond her years and most of ours," said President Kevin

Levine. "Her substantial gift will add to a secure, invested perpetual care fund. We express thanks to her extended family and only wish we had an opportunity to express our gratitude to Hilda."

"We were as surprised as anyone else over the generosity of her gift," added Adam Bernstein, President of Temple Beth El. "It is amazing to think that a decision made potentially decades ago could make such an immediate impact today given the challenging economic environment we live in. It is pleasing to know Temple Beth El was such an important part of her life. It will enable us to reach out to others by supporting our Outreach Program."

In accepting Hilda's generous gift, each organization is also accepting the responsibility of administering the gift in a manner that will honor an individual they never knew. In doing so this not only honors the gifts they have received in the past but illustrates to future donors their commitment to the future.

"We hope that we will conduct ourselves, as an organization, in such a way as to honor and be worthy of this type of consideration in the lives of all of the people who are impacted by Temple Israel," said Ruda.

A bronze tablet with the sculptured photo of Hilda's uncle, M.B. Smith, can be found on the front of Hebrew Cemetery's chapel. It reads: His greatest desire realized a beautiful cemetery for the generations to come.

Hilda Kirsner's gift will also continue to serve future genera-



tions to come and her generosity is remembered today by those of us who never knew her. ☆

Phil Warshauer is the Director of Planned Giving for the Foundation for the Charlotte Jewish Community. To include your story in the Book of Life, contact Phil at 704-973-4544 or pwarshauer@charlottejewish-foundation.org.



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David Silverman Memorial Basketball Endowment Fund

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Mazel Tov to Shara and Rich Star on the birth of their daughter, Samantha from Stacey and Ira Slomka

In loving memory of David Silverman from Stacey and Ira Slomka

Menaker Family Judaic Programs Endowment Fund

Mazel Tov to Pam and Scott Menaker on their marriage from

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