

Community News

How Jewish People in Charlotte Found Old-Fashioned Jewish Values at JDRF Annual Gala to be Held November 14 at Charlotte Convention Center

By Amy Krakovitz

None of the people you are about to read about ever imagined that they would be involved with the JDRF. But because diabetes visited itself upon the children of their households, they found a place that has helped them and a place where they can in turn try to help others. But not one of them would have chosen this path if it had not been thrust upon them.

Four years ago, when he was five years old, Noah Wilk was diagnosed with Type I diabetes. Keith Greenspon, now a grown man who runs his own local business, was diagnosed at age 8-1/2. And Benny Goldstein received his Type I diagnosis before he even turned two.

But what each of these people has in common is not just their Type I diabetes, or even the fact that they are Jewish; they also have their connections to the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation.

Keith's mother, Roz Greenspon, was instrumental in opening the local chapter of JDRF in the early 1970s. "Keith gave me the courage to step out on limbs that were cracking," she says. "I was a mother who was angry and frightened."

In the 1970s, when Keith was first diagnosed, there were no insulin pumps or even blood test-

ing meters. He used a primitive kind of pill dissolving solution to test his urine several times a day, and – even as an elementary school aged child – injected himself several times a day with insulin. "I really didn't want to be different when I was that age," Keith says. "I hid my diabetes from my friends and acted as normal as I could." About giving himself injections starting at age 8-1/2, he says, "That kind of thing really helped me to grow stronger and be more determined. It made me grow in a positive way." Now, as an adult, Keith wears an insulin pump, so self-injections are a thing of the past.



Benny Goldstein

Noah Wilk and Benny Goldstein wear insulin pumps, too. "We just changed his inset," explains his mom, radio personality Stacey Simms. "Benny wanted to make sure that his grandma knew that it was no big deal. He faces these obstacles with a lot of humor. This disease has made him tough and smart and given him a lot of strength."

"Noah is terrific," Jon Wilk says about his almost-9-year-old son. "He tests his own blood 8-10 times a day, gives himself insulin, and still plays soccer in a challenge league."

The huge leap in medication and instrumentation used in dealing with Type I diabetes would be impossible without the funds raised by the JDRF. And most people involved would agree that there would be no JDRF in Charlotte if not for Roz Greenspon.

With amazing determination and a lot of chutzpah, Roz presented the case for opening the local

chapter of JDRF to everyone she knew. Before all the funding was in place, the JDRF "office" was a box of papers she kept under her bed. "It was a very lonely time," she says. But her gratitude to Ed Karp, Leon Levine, and many others is obvious. It was their assistance that made the local chapter a reality.

The first gala, in 1976, was a roast ("We raised about \$10,000," Roz says). One of the first "roastees" was college basketball phenom Michael Jordan.

Fast forward to 2009: "Our fund raising goal for the gala is \$500,000," says Jon Wilk, who currently serves as president of the board of directors of the local JDRF.

Among the other fundraising efforts of JDRF is the annual walk, where one can see the Got Wilk? family team. And Stacey Simms presented the organization a check for \$10,000 from the proceeds of sales of her cookbook, "I Can't Cook but I Know Someone Who Can."

One thing about JDRF Roz is proud of: "People can see outcomes for their money. The research being done with the money we've raised has resulted in tangible leaps forward in diabetes management. ... These children are the living examples of the results of the funds that have been raised."

Mitchell Feld, also diagnosed when he was in elementary school, and now currently an associate in a local law firm, has just received a new generation pump that tests his blood and dispenses the necessary amount of insulin he needs continuously. "It's like he has an artificial pancreas," says his mother, Barbara Feld.

Any linkages to Jewish backgrounds and Type I diabetes are tenuous. Most statistics don't bear it out. But there's no denying a commonality and there's no denying a strong connection with community when you need them.

Stacey Simms still relives the shock of the day Benny was diagnosed. "We had an ice skating event with the Lake Norman Jewish Congregation that weekend and I took Leah, though I felt like I was still in a daze. ... It was like walking into my own family. ... The congregation has been so supportive."

This year's gala, November 14 at the Charlotte Convention Center, will honor Al de Molina of GMAC. Tickets are \$250 each and tables and sponsorships are available. Visit www.jdrf.org for more information.

Whatever happens, Roz Greenspon is ever grateful to the community for their support. "I thank you from the bottom of my pancreas," she says, "it's deeper than my heart." ♣

Support Local Business
CAROLINA MARKING DEVICES, INC.
Over 50 Years Serving Charlotte
 3405 S. Tryon St.
 Charlotte, NC 28232
 Tel: 704-525-7600 Fax: 704-525-7187
**PERMA STAMPS, RUBBER STAMPS,
 NOTARY & CORPORATE SEALS,
 SIGNS, BANNERS, MAGNETIC SIGNS,
 and more...**
Ada Shapiro *Jeffrey Shapiro*

STONECRAFT BUILDERS

- ❖ KITCHENS
- ❖ BATHS
- ❖ ADDITIONS
- ❖ OUTDOOR SPACES

11220 Elm Ln. Suite 205-A
 Charlotte, NC 28277
 704.541.0000
www.stonecraftbuildersllc.com

HomeBuilders
 Association Of Charlotte

JAGUAR
 SCOTT JAGUAR

THIS IS THE NEW **JAGUAR**

400 Tyvola Road • 704-527-7000 • www.scottjag.com