

# Together We Can: A History of Shalom Park

“A meeting was held at the office of Family Dollar Stores, Inc., on Monday, June 11, 1979, at the invitation of Leon Levine to members of the community interested in the purchase of a 17-acre tract of land on Providence Road.” So wrote Mark Bernstein, secretary for the day. It was the beginning of a journey to create the world’s first Jewish campus, Shalom Park.

Earlier that year, Sam Lerner and Abe Luski discovered the 17-acre tract fortuitously located adjacent to a 24-acre track owned by Temple Beth El. Yet Temple Beth El’s congregation could not afford to build on their land at that time. The second tract was only available because of a divorce settlement.

Twenty-two men formed a limited partnership, purchased the 17-acres for \$310,000 and signed a Letter of Intent to purchase the property with the understanding that, if there existed an opportunity to create a Jewish campus, the land would be donated to that effort.

The idea of a Charlotte Jewish campus had been batted around among community leaders and championed by Morris Speizman and Mark Bernstein since the 1960s. “The Charlotte Jewish community in those days was very

fragmented. Children of one temple never even knew children of the other temple,” explains Leon Levine, founder of Family Dollar Stores, Inc. “We all felt we had to do something ... for the children.”

Another major factor was the state of facilities amongst all the major Charlotte Jewish institutions. They all had needs, but to build at the same time would have drained Charlotte’s Jewish community of incredible financial resources. Harry Lerner, former president of the Jewish Federation, recalls, “We needed time to explore the viability of a campus, but we had to ask the institutions to hold their plans, sometimes on blind faith. One day in late 1979, I literally went from an Amity Club board meeting about constructing a new gym to a Temple Israel board meeting in Dilworth about their planned \$250,000 basement renovation.”

Furthermore, Temple Beth El’s board was on the fence about whether to sell their 24-acres. Their congregation was approximately half the size of Temple Israel’s. Instead of selling to outside developers, Temple Beth El sold its property to the new Foundation of Shalom Park for the original purchase price, \$150,000. The other institutions agreed to put

their plans on hold and to redirect financial resources.

But Shalom Park would not have happened without the support of Herman Blumenthal and Leon Levine. Each would eventually donate one million dollars a piece to the seven million dollar project.

Mr. Bernstein recalls Herman Blumenthal fondly. “Harry Lerner and I showed him the 17-acre property to engage his support. Blackberry brambles covered the parcel. We stood by the road, while Herman traipsed around, and when he finally came out, he had a big tear in his pant leg,” laughs Bernstein.

Al Levine, also a significant donor to Shalom Park, said a few years after the groundbreaking, “These communities are going to be here long after we are gone. If you want to perpetuate Jewish life, you have to have a strong infrastructure ...”

Even with this generous support, the Council of Presidents, a group of Charlotte Jewish lay leaders, would meet regularly for the next three years to develop the Joint Venture Agreement, signed on January 6, 1984. Issues the Council discussed included shared space, Jewish holidays, and the Kashrut policy. The Council

named Mark Bernstein, a lawyer at Parker Poe, to convene and mediate these discussions, a task for which he was superbly suited, both in terms of education and temperament.

The major donors did not dictate how the Park would look or function, but rather, they stepped back to let the Council decide. Communication and perseverance among the institutions’ community leaders were the keys to success. Former Foundation of Shalom Park director, Marvin Bienstock, says, “The people who came together had an ability to share, to listen and to understand. Together they developed a commitment to creating something very special for the Jewish community.”

Mr. Bienstock wrote a book called *Together We Can: A History of Shalom Park*, which, along with personal interviews, provides much of our historical record for these *CJN* articles about Shalom Park. The book was edited by the recently departed Louise Bernstein. For more information about creating a legacy gift for the Foundation of Shalom Park, please contact Kevin Levine at [hklevine@shalomcharlotte.org](mailto:hklevine@shalomcharlotte.org) or 704-944-6840. ✪

## Teen Programming at the LJCC in January

By Jessie Cohen, Teen and Group Services Coordinator

Many of you know that we have a thriving summer camp for teens at the Levine JCC every summer, but we also have fun and exciting activities during the school year as well. At the JCC, we create a fun and safe haven for the teens in our community to come and enjoy each other as well as participate in a variety of great activities and programs that have gained a tremendous following over the past few years. Between trips to such as the Sports Connection or just chillin’ in the Teen Lounge, the LJCC is the social spot to be.

This month is no exception. We have a lot planned for our 6th-8th graders in January.

We have Jammin’ at the J, a time for teens to hang out, dance, and play basketball with their friends. Mitzvah Madness (MM) projects to earn Community Service hours and learn more about the community in which they live. We also have two Teen Extreme programs when school is out. We will be going to Jump Sky High one day and just relaxing, playing games and watching a movie in the Teen Lounge the other. We also have a Teen Social at the end of the month, which will be followed by a Teen Advisory Group meeting, TAG.

TAG is an opportunity where the teens come in and meet with me for an hour once a month to help me create, plan, and implement programs that they want to see happen here at the LJCC. This group gives me their ideas along with suggestions on current programs and trips. It is an awesome opportunity for me to get feed-



Teens do a variety of fun activities at the LJCC.

### How Healthy Is Your Relationship?

Do you feel controlled by your partner? Do you constantly experience insults, humiliation, threatening acts or gestures, bullying? Does your partner control the finances, isolate you from friends and family, treat you like a servant, make everything your fault. Is there violence?

Up to 25% of all Jewish women, teens, and even some men are currently in abusive situations.

Shalom Bayit-NC is working to end domestic abuse in our Jewish community by raising awareness, offering education and providing services to people suffering at the hands of intimate partners. Call 704-756-9209.

back from the teens about what they really want.

Here is a listing of our upcoming teen events in January:

- \* 18th - Jammin’ at the J, 7-11 PM
- \* 19th - a Mitzvah Madness (MM) project for 2 hours of Community Service
- \* 20th & 21st - Teen Extreme, a school’s out program
- \* 26th - Teen Social and Teen Advisory Group (TAG) Meeting

We provide a fun variety of activities to engage all of our teens in our community.

I am looking forward to our 2014 activities and to Summer Teen Camp.

Like us on Facebook – Levine JCC Teens ✪

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