

Mitzvah Making at the Cemetery

By Kelly Reed Keeling

The buds are bursting and the spring robins have begun their nesting in the numerous trees at the Hebrew Cemetery. As the landscape greens around the headstones, we remember that life indeed springs eternal and that each person buried at the cemetery lives on in the memories of the loved ones they left behind. Caring for the deceased is both an obligation and a privilege, and the cemetery provides ways to fulfill this mitzvah through membership, volunteering, or making a gift.

Several decades ago, some community leaders, such as Hilbert Fuerstman and Nat "Buddy" Roberts, took it upon themselves to improve the Hebrew Cemetery's landscape and graveside services. In September 2013, both Fuerstman and Roberts were recognized as Lifetime Members for over 40 years of service to the Hebrew Cemetery. Over the years, other leaders have followed in their footsteps, such as Marc Silverman, Bill Gorelick, Kevin Levine, and Brian Yesowitch, who together with the Board, generous donors and the Jewish community, are implementing the cemetery's long-range Master Plan.

For anyone who has visited the Cemetery recently, you are well aware that the Cemetery expansion is in full swing, with the outer construction complete for the Memorial Building (pictured here) and the final six acres graded and surveyed. Over time, the beautification efforts have paid off, and today the Hebrew Cemetery is superbly maintained, both by professional staff and by the periodic efforts of volunteer groups.

One such volunteer and Hebrew Cemetery member, Stefan Pienkny, recalls initially getting involved in the Cemetery's work



Nat "Buddy" Roberts (far right), pictured with his family. Photo courtesy of Silver Stream Creative Group.

through a Temple Beth El Brotherhood Mitzvah Day project back in the late 90s. Pienkny and his wife, Gail, moved to Charlotte in 1987. He is an architect and principal with Gantt Huberman Architects, his wife was an insurance executive. "At the time, the cemetery was sorely neglected. We cleaned headstones, cleared brush, and placed fresh sod," recalls Pienkny. "Little did I imagine that we would require the cemetery's services in just a few short years." Gale died four years ago, and is buried at the cemetery.



The new Memorial building. Photo courtesy of Silver Stream Creative Group.

At this year's Annual Memorial Service, Karen Knoble, attested to the simple reason why we must care for the cemetery, namely that the cemetery is the community's sacred ground. She shared that the Hebrew Cemetery is:

- * Sacred because the remains of our loved ones are here.
- * Sacred because we come here as a community to recall our loved ones.
- * Sacred because in the same way that God comforted Isaac

when Abraham died, we comfort each other in times of need and times of grief.

Furthermore, Ms. Knoble said that, in fact, she was compelled to move from Judaic observance to Judaic conversion upon the death of her beloved father-in-law, Shelly. Through his service and burial, she learned first-hand "how the Jewish traditions encourage us to express our feelings of loss

while also strengthening us to carry on." Ms. Knoble and her husband, Barry Bobrow, have made a legacy gift to the Hebrew Cemetery.

In addition to legacy gifts, memberships help cover the ongoing costs of operating the Cemetery. "Membership and active participation with committees help provide care for these sacred grounds," says Alan Gottheim, Hebrew Cemetery Board Member. "My parents, Donald and Frances Gottheim, moved down from Cherry Hill, NJ to be closer to us. We were fortunate to have six good years with mom and seven and a half with dad here in Charlotte. Mom participated in Jewish Family Service's Adult Bat Mitzvah the summer before she died. It was the highlight of her life. They are both buried at the Hebrew Cemetery here in Charlotte."

Membership is only \$72 per year. The Hebrew Cemetery is a community cemetery, not affiliated with any one temple, so it relies on membership and contributions to sustain it. The Cemetery receives halakic guidance from Rabbis representing multiple Jewish traditions. All Jews, affiliated and unaffiliated, are welcome to be buried here. Membership benefits include discounted rates on plots and service fees.

We welcome you to come visit the Cemetery at 1801 Statesville Ave, Charlotte, NC 28206 from 9 AM-4:30 PM, Monday to Friday, and 10 AM-4 PM on Sunday. To learn more about membership,

legacy gifts (donations that do not impact your current finances), donations, or volunteer work, or to arrange your pre-planning visit, please contact our warm and personable director, Sandra Goldman, at director@hebrewcemetery.org or 704-576-1859. Her



office is located at Shalom Park, 5007 Providence Road, Suite 105. ☆

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