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HAPPY PASSOVER TO

Diane Rosenberg from Margie, Ben, Jackie, Cameron and Hanna Liebstein

Elaine and Marty Schefflin from Margie, Ben, Jackie, Cameron and Hanna Liebstein ♣

Community News

More Than A Legacy A Tribute to Mark Bernstein, z"l

By Amy Krakovitz

Each month, the Foundation for the Charlotte Jewish Community publishes a "Legacy Story," a beautiful tribute to a family or individual that has written themselves into the FCJC Book of Life through the Create Your Jewish Legacy program. Mark and Louise Bernstein (z"l) were one such family, and here is the piece Mark wrote for the FCJC. This is the first time it is appearing in *The Charlotte Jewish News*:

"In the Babylonian Talmud, there is an interesting story about a man who planted a carob tree. A carob tree is known to begin to bear fruit seventy years after the date that it is planted. When challenged by his neighbors whether he would ever eat the fruit of the tree, the man replied, 'I am doing as my ancestors did. Just as they planted a carob tree for their children, so am I planting the tree for my children.'

"Our family has been deeply involved in helping to nourish and replant the trees that bear the fruits of our Judaic tradition. We are proud that we have been a part of a faith that has endured 5,000 years, inspired the creation of some of the world's other great religions and enriched the lives of its adherents in so many meaningful ways. Our parents and grandparents set the example by providing financial support and leadership for Jewish institutions that served their communities. When it was first organized, Temple Beth El held services in a room above a grocery store until its first sanctuary was built on Providence Road. Our family pitched in to help the struggling congregation, providing food for covered dish dinners and money to purchase a Torah.

"In the years that followed, we have supported Temple Beth El, the Jewish Community Center, the Charlotte Jewish Federation, the Foundation of Shalom Park, and other community programs, including the planning of Shalom Park. We are very pleased that our children, including their spouses and children, continue this tradition by assuming positions of leadership in the Jewish community and teaching in the religious schools.

"When we were younger with few resources to expend, we practiced our tradition as volunteers. As our resources increased and our strength diminishes, we have continued this tradition by contributing to the community through our lifetime gifts. To inspire and support the generations to come, we have made provisions in our estate planning documents to provide endowment support for the Jewish institutions that have meant so much to us during our lives.

"We hope that, like the planter in the carob story, our gifts will both inspire and assist future gen-

erations to continue to perpetuate the great traditions of Judaism throughout the community in which we have been privileged to serve."

Building Shalom Park

Much has been written and said about Mark Bernstein since he passed away a few weeks ago. He was an exemplary professional at his law firm; he was the consummate family man; he was a clear-



Photo of Louise and Mark Bernstein (z"l) courtesy of The Foundation for the Charlotte Jewish Community

eyed visionary; he was tirelessly devoted to his community. Each story and eulogy touched on all his service: to the Symphony, the Blumenthal Performing Arts Center, the Levine Center for the Arts, Shalom Park, Temple Beth El, The Jewish Federation of Greater Charlotte, and more. Stunningly, none of this appears to be exaggeration or hyperbole. Bernstein was everything his friends and family professed him to be.

"When I first met him," says Bill Gorelick, "I thought he was very sophisticated. He impressed me as an outstanding gentleman." And soon Gorelick would get to know him as part of the committee that developed Shalom Park. "Mark just felt that all the Jews in Charlotte should know each other, that their kids should play together."

It was certainly a huge task to unite Temple Israel, Temple Beth El, and the Jewish Community Center on one piece of property. In Bernstein's own words: "I was considered a crackpot sometimes. ... Nobody in his right mind had ever attempted anything like that before."

But as we all know, after years of negotiating, the Joint Venture was conceived, written, and implemented and many credit Bernstein with putting it all together. "Take it from me," says Bob Abel, "without Mark Bernstein, the Shalom Park concept would have been DOA. He had the patience of a saint, was smart enough to wade through and understand the competing issues, and had the interpersonal skills to deal with a myriad of competing egos and personalities. I used to tell young people to get involved in community organizations, if for no other

reason, than to be exposed to leadership skills like his that they probably won't be privy to in their own organizations."

His skills at overcoming differences in any board room were legendary. Michael Marsicano, President and CEO of The Foundation For The Carolinas, remembers, "I would marvel ... watching him pull the threads of diverse ideas expressed around the room and weave them into a tapestry of direction everyone could support. It was artful."

But Bernstein saw his own strengths in these meetings differently. Regarding the negotiating skills needed to make an agreement, he opined, "The theological differences [in the institutions] weren't serious enough. ... Our shared heritage made us compatible." And though many have lauded him for "vision" when it comes to creation of Shalom Park, he laid the credit elsewhere. "The sum of the parts was greater than the whole," he said, about uniting the organizations. "The synergy of the combined institutions brought a greater energy" to the Jewish community, he said.

Though Bernstein may have discounted his own talents in seeing the creation of Shalom Park to its fruition, his colleague in both professional and community circles, Sara Schreiberman, disagrees. "He was a quiet force," she says. "At every meeting, he was the one who had all the right questions. He left no stone unturned."

Beyond his efforts to establish Shalom Park, Schreiberman says, his interweavings of his Jewish pride and his community pride were strong.

Larry Polsky remembers how instrumental Bernstein was in helping him bring Coltec to Charlotte from New York. "We initially had those typical views of a southern city, that there would be no Jews or it would be anti-Semitic," Polsky explains, but Bernstein quickly assured them of the great and growing Jewish community in Charlotte and of the welcoming nature of the city's non-Jews. But beyond that, even after Coltec moved its headquarters here, Bernstein "demonstrated his sincerity," Polsky says, "by expressing a continuing interest in the company and in my personal life." The Bernsteins and the Polskys became dear personal friends as a result of this encounter.

It's just this kind of human decency that Skip Smart, a colleague of Bernstein's from Parker Poe often witnessed. When Smart was a first-year associate, Bernstein was his mentor and often invited him into meetings with clients. "In one specific incident, I saw a client come in, literally bent over with the weight of his situation holding him down," Smart remembers. "Mark would make clear that he understood what the issue was, that his client's problem was his problem, and that he was there to accompany him on his journey. I literally saw this

(Continued on page 22)

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