

# Academy Gala Honors Founders

estimates Luski. After the Academy moves, the property will be sold and proceeds turned over to the Foundation of the Charlotte Jewish Community.

Money alone, of course, was not enough to start the Academy. The idea of opening a Jewish day school in Charlotte, where students would study both secular and Judaic studies, was first encouraged by Rabbi Michael Hecht, rabbi at Temple Israel prior to Rabbi Richard Rocklin's arrival in 1970. Several meetings about such a school were held. Also, the late I.D. Blumenthal had helped launch a day school in Greensboro in 1969 and wanted to see one in Charlotte. He had a vision that, one day, four Jewish day schools would feed students to a central state Hebrew high school in Clemmons, N.C.

The event that galvanized Charlotteans into action was a tragic auto accident that took the lives of two brothers, as one drove the other to afternoon Hebrew school at Temple Israel. "The entire town was devastated by news of the accident," says Luski.

During the shiva period for Michael and Jonathan Baron, as members of the Jewish community met for minyan at the Baron home, people began to talk and plan. The Baron family wanted memorial con-

tributions to be used to establish a day school and the rabbis of the three synagogues quickly lent their support. September 1, 1971 was set for the school opening.

## Enormous Efforts Expended In Short Time

Besides acquiring the house and property, an enormous amount of planning, renovating, hiring, fund-raising and purchasing had to be done in nine months.

"The people who really worked on setting the school up were Marvin Baron, me, Hilbert Fuerstman and Saul Brenner," remembers Stanley Kornfeld. "Hilbert was one of the unsung heroes. Typically, he would pick me up at 11:30 p.m. to handle some crisis at a meeting at the Barons'."

The founding of the day school coincided with the open school movement. Its first director, Dr. Stann Reiziss, had experience with non-graded open classroom teaching. The school also began in the midst of the turmoil resulting from court-ordered busing in the public school system. Families were discouraged from registering their children at the Academy to avoid busing, however, and, in fact, few had this motivation for sending their children to the new school.



A bit of nostalgia: Dr. Stan Reiziss instructing group of Academy's first students.

Parental support for the school was not broad-based in Charlotte. "There were some families who were for it, but there was anti-day school sentiment, too. You heard the same arguments then that you hear today," says Kornfeld. "We thought if we had a program (open school) that parents would like, we'd get some students." The first year, 20 students, ages five to eight, were enrolled.

Later, in 1976, Rabbi Sanford Tucker became director and the school's Judaic program and profile were

strengthened. Enrollment rose to the high 40's, taxing the school's physical facilities which were in need of major repairs.

## Federation Gives Support

I.D. Blumenthal and Morris Speizman not only donated money to meet these needs, they also championed the school and won critical funding from the Charlotte Jewish Federation. Other individuals also donated money and the Jewish community turned out in force at the first fund-raising Gala in 1978 to hear

Abba Eban speak.

The school's strong program and unique Jewish environment have been maintained by subsequent directors Raphael Panitz, Eleanor Weinglass (1981-1985), interim director Berta Straz, and many exceptionally talented and dedicated teachers.

But it has been the parents and a hard core of friends who have kept the school alive through staff changes, enrollment ups and downs and financial problems.

"Money itself is not going to make the school," says Luski. "It takes a nice crowd of committed young parents. That's what makes it a reality."

Many of those parents and parents of Academy alumni will be cooking, arranging and decorating for the June 1 Gala. Ann Abel is chairing the event. Peggy Gartner is in charge of the food. Stephen Fishman will serve as master of ceremonies, as the founding "investors" are honored and a drawing is held for a Jewish art object and numerous door prizes.

The Academy is on the brink of a second beginning. In many ways it is as challenging as the first, but today there are many more supporters to see it through the next 16 years. Join them at the Gala.

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