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The Federation Campaign Profiles in Tzedakah

That the flame will live on

By Susan Kramer

Some people give to charity because they've been raised to be generous. Some give out of a sense of obligation to give back to a community that has treated them well. Some give so that their own personal goals and ideals can prosper. Bobbi and Don Bernstein give for all those reasons — and for the sheer pleasure of it. Just talking about why they have, in recent years, endowed gifts to the Jewish Federation of Greater Charlotte in excess of \$700,000 makes Bobbi positively glow with pleasure. "We love to see the good our money can do," she says. "What's the point of having it if you don't use it to help others?" They admit that it is exciting — even fun — to be able to give generously to favorite causes — so much fun, in fact, that they recommend others try it.

Don, who serves as both Chairman for the newly created Foundation for the Charlotte Jewish Community (FCJC) and Co-chair (along with Jill Newman) of this year's Federation Campaign says that creating and funding endowments is the most significant step one could take for the future of the community — a responsibility that can't be left to someone else.

In 1996, Bobbi created an endowment at the FCJC to perpetuate her Lion of Judah gift (the

premier level of giving in the Federation's Women's Division.) This year, Don also established an endowment at FCJC. Their total gift of \$700,000 will, at their death, provide the Federation with at least \$35,000 (plus interest) annually.

Bobbi points to the flame on the Lion that she wears so proudly. "See that flame?" she asks. "I got that when I endowed my gift. Now I know that the flame will live on after me."

Don and Bobbi have lived in Charlotte for over twenty years, and the Jewish community has always been a large part of their lives. Their resumes detailing the various positions they have held in our community read like a Federation Directory. Together they are either currently serving or have served on the Boards of the Jewish Federation of Greater Charlotte, the Foundation of the Charlotte Jewish Community, the Jewish Community Center, and Temple Beth El. One or both have served at various times as President of the Federation, Campaign Co-Chair for the Federation, Chair of Jewish Family Services Board, and Chair of the Foundation for the Charlotte Jewish Community — and that's only a partial list of their Jewish endeavors. Their commitments to the larger community,

which emphasize their love of the arts, is equally as impressive.

Catalysts for change

The Bernsteins see their gifts and service as catalysts for change. When Bobbi became a Lion of Judah (requiring a \$5,000 gift) in 1986, she was the first in the Charlotte community to wear the prestigious Lion. Now there are 22 Lions of Judah in Charlotte, and the annual combined gifts from the Women's Division has grown from \$25,000 to over \$300,000 this year.

Don recognized the challenge of preparing the next generation of Jewish leaders and stepped forward to underwrite a leadership development program. The first "class" of the Bernstein Leadership Development Program, with 43 participants, will culminate their 18 month program with a trip to Washington in March of 1998, and a second group is now being put together. (Contact Cary Bernstein at the Federation if you're interested.) As Don points out, there are many other worthwhile programs that need funding and "anyone who steps forward will reap great personal satisfaction from doing it, as we have."

"We try to recognize a need and set a standard and example," Don explains. "If we can do these things, most certainly others —



Bobbi and Don Bernstein

both with more means than us, and less than us, can do it also. By going beyond talking about it and doing it, we hope others will follow."

The most significant role that the Bernsteins have played in building a better future for the community has been their commitment to the Foundation of the Charlotte Jewish Community. As Don and Bobbi see it, the Foundation, through an annual distribution of income, could provide a substantial portion of the annual community needs.

So strong is his belief that the Foundation holds the key to financial security for our community's needs that next year, Don plans to ask the Federation itself for an allocation from the annual campaign. Even 5 to 10% of the annual campaign now could provide 30% of our annual funding

requirements before long. "A savings plan for the future" he calls it, and though it won't solve all the needs, it will be a good start.

Don envisions the day that the total endowment might total in excess of \$50 million. It's a dream, he readily admits, but dreams beget reality. "Shalom Park was a dream when it was first envisioned," he states. "It has become an example for the entire country. Our endowment can do the same."

And that, finally, is the ultimate reason the Bernsteins give so generously. Not just tradition, or obligation, or even the pleasure they derive, but because of their dream that the flame that they have ignited today will live on in a brighter future for the entire Jewish community. ✪

Religion in the schools: parents speak out

By Susan Kramer

Barry Ross had never felt like a minority in New York. There, a large Jewish population and some very clear cut policies in the school system regarding religious displays on school property provided a comfort level where religion was concerned. Then on December 4, the Christmas tree was lit at Providence High School where Barry teaches. Suddenly, he was a minority.

Similar tales were heard frequently at a meeting at Shalom Park on December 5 when Assistant Superintendent Barbara Pellin met with about 60 parents who wished to air their concerns about religion in the classroom. The meeting was called by the School Issues Committee, a subcommittee of the Jewish Community Relations Committee of the Jewish Federation of Greater Charlotte. The purpose of the evening's meeting, according to Co-chairs Tammy Seigel and Jackie

Fishman, was to open a dialogue with the Charlotte-Mecklenburg School system. Seigel stated in her opening remarks that their committee had surveyed the Jewish community last year to assess the areas of concern and to look for solutions. Since that time, the committee has concentrated on three areas, including opening a dialogue with the school administration, building a community coalition with other religious groups in the community that share the same concerns, and addressing specific issues of concern to the Jewish community.

In her remarks, Ms Pellin stressed that the school system is committed to listening to all parents concerns — both religious and secular. "We can't deal with concerns if we listen only to ourselves."

Ms Pellin stated that the current policy regarding religion in the schools was last visited in 1985.

Noting that there are now 130 schools, 97,000 students and 12,000 employees, she acknowledged that the needs of the student population are now different and that some changes need to be made.

Superintendent Eric Smith has already begun that process of review and change with his formation of an Interfaith Advisory Committee. Rabbi Jim Bennett of Temple Beth El sits on that council. Ms. Pellin stated, "Your avenue to address these issues is through this council."

Additionally, she suggested that parents who have concerns first go to the child's teacher. If the parent feels that that approach is not satisfactory, then they should go the principal of the school, then to the Regional Superintendent. If all other avenues fail, then concerns can be addressed directly to Ms. Pellin's office, and ultimately to Dr.

Smith. "We are not about promoting any one faith. We are about serving all children. We need to understand all faiths. When we serve all children, we serve their faiths."

"Every single day this month [December] my daughter is going to be reminded that she is different."

Generally, the parents present for the meeting gave teachers and principals high marks for making an effort to respect their children's religion, whether it be through proper coding of absences for religious holidays or sensitivity to Jewish children's needs during the Christmas season. Still, the nature of the com-

ments indicated that there seems to be little knowledge of other religions and cultures in the schools. Parents are frustrated with having to revisit the same issues year and year and in general agreed that there is too much emphasis on Christmas in December.

"Every single day this month, my daughter is going to be reminded that she is different," stated one mother of her middle school aged daughter. Another urged Ms. Pellin and Dr. Smith to "Go see for yourself during the next two weeks what is really going on in the schools."

"We feel that this was a very positive first step," stated Ms. Seigel after the meeting. "The lines of communication have been opened, and we feel that there is an increased awareness on the part of the school administration." She adds that policy updates will be communicated to the School Issues Committee and community at large through Ms. Pellin's office and through the Interfaith Advisory Committee.

The School Issues Committee will meet again in January to begin to explore ways that the community can help implement change in the area of cultural sensitivity within school system. If you have questions or comments about these issues or would like to get involved in the work of this committee, please contact Cary Bernstein at the Federation office at 366-5007.

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