

# Harry Swimmer Spearheaded Fund Raising to Build Shalom Park

“There are rules for successful fundraising, and Harry Swimmer broke them all as he conducted a campaign which was successful by any standard,” writes Marvin Bienstock, the first director of Shalom Park, in his book “Together We Can: The Story of Shalom Park.”

In our *Charlotte Jewish News* series about the history of Shalom Park, we have already discussed how:

\* Sam Lerner and Abe Luski found the 17-acre property adja-

cent to Temple Beth El’s property, and brought it to the attention of Herman Blumenthal and Leon Levine;

\* Leon Levine and 21 other area Jewish leaders purchased the 17-acres and committed its use for the good of the Jewish Charlotte community; and

\* the Council of Presidents, convened by Harry Lerner and moderated for over three years by Mark Bernstein, created consensus about how Shalom Park should look and operate.

Which brings us to a critical moment in the Park’s history - raising the money to build Phase I of Shalom Park. Dr. Armstrong sold his 13 adjoining acres to make Shalom Park the 54 acres you find today. The JCC and the temples’ education programs were the immediate priorities for facilities. Herman Blumenthal and Leon Levine initially donated \$1 million each to underwrite the project, but to raise the rest of the funds, the community turned to Harry Swimmer.

Harry, founder of Swimmer Insurance, was the perfect man for the job. As his profession was to sell insurance, Harry says, he already knew everybody in town. Harry, now 84, is still active running the day-to-day operations of Misty Meadows Mitey Riders, a horseback riding program in Weddington, NC for children with physical and mental disabilities. However, he recently sat down to reflect on the early days of Shalom Park.

“The Jewish leaders tapped me to lead the capital campaign, and invited me to a meeting at the City Club,” recounts Harry. “I said, ‘Ok, I’ll do it. But here are the rules.’ For instance, I felt it was important to put donor names and levels out [in the public eye]. That was unheard of in those days. Then I went around the room and named an amount. When we adjourned, everyone at that table was on the same page, and we had started our campaign.”

“I felt it was important to aim high. When people approached one donor level, I would always work on getting them to the next level. People came to expect it. I remember I asked one couple for \$25,000 (even though I knew they could give more). They started hounding me, and ended up giving more,” recalls Harry, chuckling.

“Cary Bernstein and Sara Schreiber kept me organized. All of the requests were made in person. A few people starting ducking me. A few people said Shalom Park was going to become a Jewish ghetto. But those people were few and far between. Most everyone was extremely committed to Shalom Park and was very generous as well. We even raised \$750,000 from the [non-Jewish] community at-large.”

While some people were concerned that the Park’s fundraising would reduce donor dollars for local and global needs, the size of the Federation’s campaign and its commitment to the United Jewish Appeal (UJA) actually increased during the Park’s development. The temples were able to raise the money they needed to build in the early 1990s, in part because Swimmer was able to encourage the major donors to pay off their pledges in a timely manner.

In large development projects, campaign write-offs (dollars pledged, but not collected) are usually 7-9%, but in the case of



Shalom Park, the write-offs were less than 2%. That is how committed the Jewish Charlotte community was to Shalom Park.

Ultimately, the Park’s first capital campaign raised over \$7 million, with over 500 Jewish families participating. Today, you can find the donor names on the mirrored plaques in the original Shalom Park lobby, outside the Foundation of Shalom Park’s office. The total dollars included the sale of the JCC/Amity Club property and the Charlotte Hebrew Academy, and funded \$800,000 for an endowment.

“I felt strongly that you need to have an endowment for the lean years, for the repairs and maintenance that come down the road,” stresses Harry. “I didn’t want to bankrupt our children’s project.”

“As an elder statesman, if you will, I’m thrilled with how Shalom Park has evolved,” concludes Harry.

We hope that, like Harry, your commitment to Shalom Park remains strong. For more information about how to make a legacy gift that will not impact your current finances, please contact H. Kevin Levine, Executive Director, Foundation of Shalom Park, 704-944-6840 or [hklevine@shalom-charlotte.org](mailto:hklevine@shalom-charlotte.org). ✨

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Scott is a long time community volunteer, leader, and sponsor in the Jewish community since 1985. Both he and Tricia, along with their dental team, volunteer their time and expertise to make a positive impact in our community.

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## Moishe House Charlotte

Moishe House Charlotte welcomes a new month of events. For those of you new to Moishe House, it is a non-profit organization devoted to promoting community for Jewish young adults in their 20s and early 30s. The Moishe House Foundation includes 60 houses in 13 different countries. The organization brings together small groups of Jewish young adults who live together and plan programs for other Jewish young adults out of their home. Charlotte’s Moishe House was born in August 2013 and has hosted over 40 events either out of their home or partnering with other Jewish or social justice organizations in Charlotte. Our events range from purely social gatherings including games, movies, and happy hours to spiritual Shabbats and Rosh Chodesh celebrations to repair the world events like stream clean ups and challah making for JFS. Here are our May events.

**Sketching in the Galleries: Drawing from Flowers, Wednesday, May 7, 6-7 PM, Mint Museum Uptown**

Join us for a delightful evening at the Mint where we will refine our eyes as we study closely the variety of flower motifs on display. Museum educator, Joel Smeltzer, will lead us in sketching what we observe of these delicate forms. No experience is required and all materials will be provided. Just register at the following link and show up. <http://www.mintmuseum.org/happenings/406/sketching-in-the-galleries-drawing-from>

-flowers.  
**Healthy Relationships, a Two Part Workshop Hosted by Amy Silverman**  
7:30 PM, Thursday, May 15, at the Moishe House

Amy Silverman, famous here at Moishe House for her natural healing abilities and tremendous insight into human behavior and relationships, will be hosting a fabulous dual workshop.

**Part 1 - Finding Your Match**  
We’ll discuss how to be healthy while looking for love including identifying core values, understanding chemistry, and evaluating potential relationships.

**Part 2 - Healthy Happiness**  
Learn how to maintain and nourish your current relationship and to avoid common relationship mistakes. We will also practice techniques on how to work through challenges with our loved ones.

This event will be interactive, humorous, and insightful and many of the lessons derived from it can be applied to all of life. Sweet treats will accompany as always.

**Music Barbeque Lag B’Omer Bash with Chabad, Sunday May 18, 4 PM, William Davie Park**

Celebrate Lag B’Omer at this festive gathering in the park organized by Chabad of Charlotte. A scrumptious barbeque will be accompanied by an Israeli musical concert. This will be an awesome opportunity to connect with others. Please bring a friend.  
**The Knight Foundation Focus Group, Wednesday, May 21, 7:30**

**PM at Moishe House**  
Partake in this essential focus group led by renowned journalist, Susan Patterson, in which we will delve into what community means in Charlotte. We will explore such questions as: What keeps you in Charlotte? What makes you feel like part of this community or doesn’t? What culture does Charlotte reflect? And what would we like to manifest as a community for our city? Your experiences and insights are invaluable and we’d love to receive them! Wine and light appetizers will be served.

The Knight Foundation is established on the belief that “democracy thrives when people and communities are informed and engaged.” Read more about it at: [www.knightfoundation.org](http://www.knightfoundation.org).

**Welcome Rachel Shabbat Dinner Potluck Grill-Off at the Moishe House**  
Friday May 30, 7:30 PM

Bring in Shabbat with us for an epic meal followed by a night of celebration as we welcome, Rachel Dilles, into our home. Rachel will be our new fourth resident and we are truly excited to have her as a crucial part of Moishe House’s path in Charlotte. Come meet our new friend and eat abundantly. As the main course will be provided, all sides, desserts and of course, alcohol, are welcome.

For more information about Moishe House Charlotte please email us at [mohocharlotte@gmail.com](mailto:mohocharlotte@gmail.com) or find us on facebook at [www.facebook.com/MoisheHouseCharlotte](http://www.facebook.com/MoisheHouseCharlotte). ✨