

THE JEWISH COMMUNITY CENTER



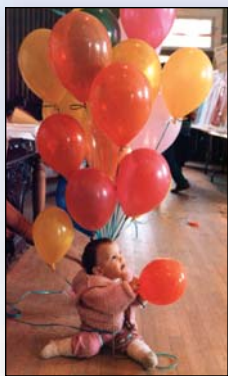
The spirit of Asheville's Jewish Community

By 1916 Asheville had two congregations: Beth Ha Tephila and Bikor Cholim, but one Jewish community. Its youth, including Leo Finkelstein and Julius Levitch, yearned for a meeting place of their own. Rabbi Fox, of Bikor Cholim (today known as Beth Israel), who also doubled as a mohel and a schochet, encouraged the boys to be part of a national Jewish movement, so they formed a Young Men's Hebrew Association (YMHA). The organization soon needed more space

for more frequent functions including B'nai B'rith and Hadassah meetings and hospitality to Jewish soldiers serving in World War I. In 1917, the YMHA was reorganized into the Jewish Community Club. The Great Depression of 1929, forced the closure of their own space, but meetings and events continued to be held in rented locations around town - even in the historic S&W cafeteria.



The JCC was founded in 1938, and officially incorporated in 1940 when the building was acquired. In 1950 the JCC was celebrating its first 10 years of accomplishments (pictured above): a community wide Sunday school, organizing dances for soldiers, hosting weddings, and offering classes and lectures. Letters of commendation were received from national organizations such as the National Jewish Welfare Board and the B'nai B'rith for achievements of our tiny Jewish community. Slot machines and Bingo were big revenue sources. The slot machines were removed in the 1940s before the local authorities could confiscate them!



Kenneth Michalove began the Seven Dwarfs Preschool at the JCC in 1962. It closed for a period and was refounded in 1984 as Shalom Children's Center which continues to receive high ratings for its excellence. "A Special Place for that Special Face: JCC Preschool... because - a good beginning has no end." - read a 1979 advertisement. In the 1980s an after school program was developed. High school youth group programs included BBYO and earlier AZT, enabling Jewish youth to connect. Photo: Teva Brown, daughter of former director Geoff Brown.

Today's JCC

Frank Silverman wanted his son to have a place to socialize with other Jewish youth. When Silverman asked others to donate and made a donation himself, Ashevilleans reacted by organizing a Jewish community center. This was in 1938. Once again there would be a location where social, recreational and cultural events could take place. This was during a time of turmoil and heightened anti-Semitism for Jews around the world. Julius Levitch secured a property on (236) Charlotte Street for the community center. With a mortgage of \$2,000, the house was remodeled. After WWII began, the Jewish Welfare Board became interested in the JCC. The Board furnished funds so that once a week, on Saturday night, the center was able to have a spaghetti supper for the Jewish soldiers that arrived in Asheville from Camp Croft, South Carolina, recalls JCC member Sarah Goldstein. Several marriages resulted; the first wedding ceremony conducted at the JCC united Ruth and Morris Fox (October 31, 1940).



Searching for a way to strengthen Jewish identity in the aftermath of the Holocaust, in 1951 a day camp was begun and a few years later a swimming pool was constructed. Camp director was Joseph Lalley Jr. (standing on the left in the back of the children) assistant head master at Gibbons Hall Boys School, a unit of St. Genevieve of the Pines, the local Catholic School.



Hilde Hoffman arrived in Asheville in 1946. She was a Holocaust survivor determined to be involved with her new Jewish Family - the Asheville Jewish community. She had been a child caregiver as a teenager in Germany so it was natural that she would be a part of the childcare program at the JCC. In appreciation and recognition of her years of service Hilde's House was named in her honor and continues to serve as the infant daycare. Photo: Top row, left to right: Reed Trotter, Eli Whalen, Hilde Hoffman, Bottom Row: Left to right: unknown, Erwin Byrd, Lauren Winner, Anna Stanko.

Going door-to-door, the officers of the nascent community center began to solicit funds. Estelle Marder, who moved to Asheville with her husband and his brother's family in 1939, recalls that three days after they arrived two men, who would later become close friends, appeared at the door soliciting funds to help buy a building for the Jewish Community Center. "Remember, we're from New York. We didn't

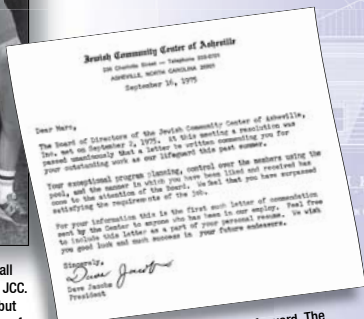


JCC programs are intergenerational. The Maturing Adult Club was formed in the late 1970s and later an elder day care program began at the JCC which was taken over by Jewish Family Services. Left to right: Esther Hyman, Estelle Marder, Helen Lichenfels Gumpert, unknown, Helen Beninga

know anything called a Jewish Community Center. We knew community centers but we assumed, we didn't even think about it, they were Jewish. Well, we gave them money and they left. And I turned to Dave and I said, 'What's a Jewish Community Center?' He said 'I guess it's for Jews only.' It turned out not to be for Jews only. It's the best thing that happened to us..." From 1938-1974 Asheville had the only JCC affiliated with the national organization in the state of North Carolina. In 1950 the center had 167 members.



A torch run to celebrate Hanukkah (1980s), began at City Hall and went to Beth Israel and Beth Ha Tephila ending at the JCC. There representatives not only of the Jewish community, but other civic and religious leaders participated in the lighting of the menorah. Throughout its history the JCC has reached out to the larger Asheville community, strengthening bonds and increasing understanding. Photo: Marc Rudow, Cindy Corley, Kerry Friedman



Marc Rudow was an exemplary lifeguard. The swimming pool has been an important part of summer gatherings as well as camp activities.



The old house served the community until it was torn down in June 1993 to make way for the current building. Thus began a new opportunity for the JCC to become a cohesive agency ready to take on the challenges of the future - serving not only the Jewish community, but the greater Asheville community.

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