

Presidential Matters

By Steve Aronowitz



One of the key players in the successful consolidation of Oakland and Little Neck Jewish Centers has decided that it is time to turn over the leadership responsibilities to other members of our congregation. Bob Stern, who was not only instrumental in the temple merger, but was the unquestionable leader of Oakland Jewish Center from 2007, will retire from his co-president position, effective June 30th. I will remain as co-president until June 30, 2017. A new co-president will be selected by the membership to serve with me as the synagogue holds its upcoming elections. Information will follow in a separate mailing.

Bob will be honored at a special *Oneg Shabbat* on June 17th. This will be our opportunity to say ‘thank you’ to one of our most impressive members. There is no question that this consolidation would never have happened without Bob’s perseverance. As a negotiator, representing his congregation, Bob knew what he wanted as we worked toward an agreement. Every point he debated was based on making sure Oakland members who were to travel to Little Neck were greeted as equal partners in the merger. Ask anyone and I am certain that he or she will agree Bob gets an “A” for his work.

Bob was elected president in 2007 after serving many years on Oakland’s board of trustees. Our friendship is, of course, highlighted by our co-presidency of what ranks as one of the area’s most successful consolidations. It’s more than that! I recognized Bob’s strengths quickly; he came to each meeting prepared. He articulated his points convincingly and I benefitted from his organizational skills. Believe me – even though Bob spends winter months in Florida, we talk often and his passion for the synagogue is well-documented.

Bob and I often laughed at some of our thoughts expressed through our individual presidential terms and then as we worked together. He told his board that while he agreed to accept the presidency after Marty Leventhal passed away in late 2006, “there should be no expectation of my increasing my attendance at services!” We didn’t know each other at the time, but we expressed the same point of view and it didn’t quite work out that way at either shul. You know where to find us when we are in town.

Our consolidation recognizes Bob’s vision. He was successful, with the able assistance of the board, to finalize the sale of the OJC building while signing a 15-year rent free agreement, allowing the synagogue to remain on site. When the buyer, ANIBIC, had difficulty securing a mortgage, Bob rescued it by mutually agreeing to a satisfactory mortgage package.

Bob’s business sense enabled Oakland to negotiate from a strong position due to its contract with ANIBIC. Perhaps his greatest accomplishment was looking for a consolidation before the synagogue was on *its last legs*. “I assembled a consolidation team and we met with several temples to seek out our best fit. After several first dates, and a few second dates, we opted to “go steady” with LNJC.”

History reveals that the consolidation discussions were overwhelmingly positive; in fact, it seemed that, for the most part, the respective negotiating members were “on the same team.”

Serving as president since 2007 defies logic; after all, how does someone have the energy and enthusiasm to lead such an important entity for so long? Bob and I agree that our responsibility is to work with the board and find new leaders – no easy task! Neither of us has any desire to bow out; the temple is too important, we’re both proud of our accomplishments, and it’s evident that a new consolidation effort is essential – something we are both interested in being part of.

What’s next for Bob? That’s easy – “I’m looking forward to spending some of my new “free time” babysitting Sam. And spoiling him and his new baby sister expected later this spring.

I know you will want to join your friends and temple members to say, “thank you,” to Bob Stern, on June 17th.