

Talking with Ottawa Jewish community leaders

Chuck and Bonnie Merovitz:

Dynamic duo has huge impact on community

By Benita Siemiatycki

Editor's note: This year, the Ottawa Jewish Bulletin is speaking with a number of longtime community leaders about some of their leadership accomplishments and about challenges the community faces now and will face in the future.

When trying to summarize Chuck and Bonnie Merovitz's contributions to our community, it might be easier to list what the dynamic duo *hasn't* done.

When Chuck and Bonnie arrived in Ottawa from Montreal in 1974, the young couple threw themselves into their new community, leaving an indelible mark. Chuck joined an informal group of former Montrealers, which became the men's B'nai Brith Bytown Lodge, and, when Hy Hochberg, executive director of the Jewish Community Council of Ottawa/Vaad Ha'ir (now the Jewish Federation of Ottawa) started a leadership initiative for young couples, they jumped on board.

That was Bonnie's springboard into volunteering, starting with ORT and then UJA, eventually co-chairing the Women's Campaign. In the early-1980s, Bonnie and Chuck became co-chairs of the Vaad's Shalom Welcome Service and, while their boys were students at Talmud Torah Afternoon School, Bonnie sat on the parents' committee.

At just 37 years of age, Bonnie and Chuck set up an insurance fund with the Ottawa Jewish Community Foundation to ensure their family left a lasting legacy. Chuck chaired the UJA Campaign in 2001, and Bonnie, for the second time, chaired the Women's Campaign in 2004. Both sat on the board of the Ottawa Jewish Community Foundation. Together with Roz and Steve Fremeth, they were honoured by State of



Chuck and Bonnie Merovitz

Israel Bonds. Bonnie and Steve Fremeth also chaired the Bonds campaign.

One of the most enduring events Chuck worked on was the launch of the golf tournament for the Jewish Federation of Ottawa. He and Sunny Tavel worked to bring the event to Ottawa and, 20 years later, it still stands as one of the Federation's premiere fundraising events.

Bonnie joined the Federation's Allocations Committee, which directs and allocates funding to our community's beneficiary agencies.

"It is one of the most worthwhile things I ever did," she said, because she got to see how the money is spent to benefit the community. She went on to chair the committee and led a change in process from organizational to program funding.

In the meantime, Chuck was extending his volunteerism to the secular community. Touched by his mother's experience with cancer, he served on the Ottawa Regional Cancer Foundation, and helped raise \$3.5 million to purchase the CyberKnife system for the Ottawa Hospital in 2010. He also served on the Survivorship Task Force Committee, which was struck to raise funds for programming at the new Maplesoft Centre, Eastern Ontario's first cancer survivorship centre.

One of Chuck's proudest achievements is his role in establishing the Richard and Annette Bloch Cancer Survivors Park, located on 4.5 acres at the corner of Alta Vista Drive, Industrial Avenue and Riverside Drive. The idea came to life when Chuck and Bonnie were vacationing in Palm Springs, Cali-

fornia. While driving, they stumbled upon a beautiful park, and learned it was a cancer survivors' park. He returned home and sold the idea to the Ottawa Regional Cancer Centre, becoming chair of the committee to develop it. One of 22 cancer survivor parks across North America, the park is designed to nurture feelings of peace and serenity among cancer survivors and their families.

Declining enrolment in Ottawa's Jewish schools is a primary concern for the couple. Bonnie has noticed that Jewish education seems to be a lesser priority among many younger parents than it was when she was raising children. She also has concerns about the next generation's willingness to support Jewish causes through volunteerism or donations.

As older community members, who have traditionally been the major donors, retire and have less disposable income, it is incumbent on younger people who can to give, she said.

Chuck laments that younger people seem to prefer volunteering in the secular community, or for global issues, leaving little time to give to Jewish organizations.

One of our community's greatest assets, said Bonnie, is the seasoned lay leaders who can mentor new and younger leaders. She hopes the community continues to utilize past leadership for their experience and expertise.

Bonnie also said Ottawa is blessed with top-notch institutions that promote Judaism and community building, and provide excellent services to our children, the disabled, the vulnerable and the elderly.

Bonnie works as a physiotherapist and Chuck is a partner with the legal firm Merovitz Potechin. They have two sons, and two grandsons.