Temple Solel Member Spotlight

In our last article we announced Temple Solel’s participation in the URJ (Union for Reform Judaism) Congregational Benchmarking and Assessment Survey. We want to thank all of those who took the survey because it will help us better understand how well our congregation is doing and how we can improve.

We want to introduce you to two of our members, Ron and Marge Siegel, who cannot be described as retired, because of how they live their lives each day. They have been on quite a journey over the past eleven years living in the Carolinas after relocating from New Jersey. Ron spent over thirty years as a volunteer EMT saving lives, delivering babies, all while stopping-the-bleeding and keeping the vital organs oxygenated with a specialized focus on HVAC.

Marge is a graduate of Cranford College and an educator based in New York City teaching multiple-aged young people in a variety of academies. She then, in a new phase of her career, specialized in accounting.

We especially enjoy hearing their stories about Temple Beth Chaim in West Windsor, NJ, because the humble beginnings there sound a lot like our current congregation in South Carolina. Like many of our members, both Ron and Marge grew up in different sects of Judaism and have found a comfortable familiarity in Temple Solel’s blended and inclusive congregation. They told an endearing story about their Rabbi Emeritus, Eric Wajntraub, who led the Israel trip they were on together. A religious man in Jerusalem walked up to the group and said, "I would love to meet your Rabbi. Where is he?"

When fingers pointed towards the trendy man wearing a natty shirt, shorts, and sandals outfit, the religious man shook his head, turned on his heels, and went the other way. "That is refreshing to us when we see clergy show a little chutzpah, which in this case translates into being realistic and approachable." They speak very fondly of Rabbi Eric. Ron and Marge helped their small congregation start from meeting in a Lutheran church to meeting about 850 families. With her passion for education, Marge was instrumental in the formation of their religious school, which is still a thriving hidden, interesting, and greatest positive impact they both had on our city at Charlotte Douglas International Airport’s USO center. They are active volunteers with their shift beginning at 4:30 AM to welcome thousands of active duty, retired, and reservists from all branches of the military, including their families, many flying on an airplane for the first time. In one month it is not unusual for as many as 15,000 military personnel and their dependents to pass through the Charlotte center. The USO is not the more familiar entertainment focus of past times during wartime, but rather a practical place of safety and comfort in the airport to rest and get food, especially by many of our military soldiers are on limited income and might not be able to afford these options being made available without charge. There is also a quiet room, video game area, a place for children, business area with computers, and a library to take or leave a book.

One of the most sobering services provided by the USO is what Ron and Marge called, "fallen angel support." There are honors teams who escort and accompany the families through the airport who are flying with or receiving the body of their fallen loved one. The quiet room at the USO is reserved for the family’s privacy and they are surrounded and protected during transport every step they take at the airport. The USO is also involved in many other projects such as providing special support when 4000+ men and women arrive by buses from Fort Jackson, SC at 3 AM before catching flights to see their families for the holidays. The USO feeds them breakfast, provides extra conference room space to wait comfortably, and helps coordinate their movement through the airport. Other projects include: "Flights of Honor" to take WWII or other veterans to memorials in Washington, DC; help discharged veterans find jobs, and holding fund raisers to sustain these good works. We want to honor Ron and Marge for all of their support and effort in our community. Having them as part of our congregation is a true blessing for Temple Solel.

We hope you will consider joining us by reservation for a special second night Community Seder led by our lay leader, Russ Cohen, on April 20 beginning at 6 PM in the Family Life Center, UMC Belair located at 8095 Shelby Malls Rd, Fort Mill, SC 29707. This will be a catered event with a reasonable fee. For more information write us at info@templesolel.org or call 803-519-9370. Temple Solel holds regular Shabbat services at 7 PM on the second and fourth Fridays of each month. We hope to see you soon in the Community Room at St. Philip 292 Munn Road, Fort Mill, SC.