

A CONVERSATION WITH ELIZABETH AND SID GELLER

Both of you have a long history with The Cedars dating back to the Jewish Home for the Aged era. Can you share some highlights of your experience with us?

Sid: My first experience with the Jewish Home for the Aged was delivering kosher meat during high school for my uncles and grandfather who owned S. Blumenthal and Sons in Portland. During the two afternoons a week that I made deliveries, I got to know Jules Krem who was the director of the Jewish Home. My mother, Mary Blumenthal, was on the Auxiliary board and my paternal grandmother had been a patient there.

Liz: While Sid had a lot of relatives in Portland, I grew up in Massachusetts, but had a connection to the Jewish Home through my mother's brother, Harvey Ansell, the first certified dermatologist in Maine, and his wife, Pauline, who also served on the Auxiliary board.

Why is philanthropy important to the two of you and your family?

Sid: When I was growing up, we really didn't have much money, but my mother volunteered for every Jewish organization and was even selected as Hadassah's "Woman of the Year". She started a group for newly arrived immigrants and would bring my brother and me to meet them when they arrived at Union Station in Portland. She made sure that they had food and furniture, found them apartments, and maintained contact with these people.

But it wasn't until I was starting college that my family was just getting out of debt. My father worked for 42 years for Central Maine Power, but in addition he had business a that was not very successful and meant that there wasn't much extra money. A lot of my friends' parents had money, and I remember thinking to myself that if ever I could make \$100 a week I would be rich, and it finally happened!

Liz: Sid and I both worked hard and at some point, it became very important to give back. Waterville has been good to us and I think in a way we have been good to that community. Years ago, I was president of the local Hadassah, B'nai Brith and involved with the Synagogue Sisterhood. I also was on the board of United Way and remain involved with their Marketing Committee. I always have been interested in art and when I retired from a career in education 14 years ago, I took the docent training at Colby Museum and now lead some of the group tours. I also volunteer at the Mid Maine homeless shelter one day a week. When we are at our Florida home, I volunteer at the Boca Raton Regional Hospital. All of these experiences have been so wonderful because of the people I have met and worked with, and I just can't imagine not giving back. It is important to give back through a financial contribution, but I like to be involved in a hands-on way, too.

How do you decide what organizations are most deserving of your philanthropic investment?

Liz: As a couple, we have some favorite charities. I'm involved in a different way in the community than Sid is. He has been on boards and on the Zoning Board as part of city government and very involved in the business aspect, while my time is spent as a volunteer for different nonprofit organizations. But it was not until we were older that we had the means to "invest" in organizations in a more meaningful way.

Sid: I learned a lot about investing from my aunt, Sylvia Hoffman, who read the Wall Street Journal from beginning to end. It was Sylvia and my Uncle Alvin for whom The Hoffman Center at The Cedars is named. Those two really understood what it meant to "invest" in the things that matter most in life.

What has inspired you the most to keep "giving back" to The Cedars as loyal donors?

Sid: The Cedars has been good to our families and our families have been involved for a very long time, and also have been the beneficiaries of the care that is offered.

Liz: The fact that The Cedars is so well run including the state-of-the-art rehab center is fabulous. The evidence-based data about patients who come to the rehab center and how soon they get well is remarkable. The Osher Inn and the Atrium set a very high standard with the way the walls are curved, the choice of wall colors, and how every detail is just so impressive.

Sid: We just love Kathy (*Callnan*). She is so fantastic in how she manages the organization and the connections that she has made throughout Maine and beyond.

Liz: Because we knew that The Cedars was a good place, we really got involved including the many years that Sid has served on the Board.

Tell me about your choice of making a planned gift in the form of a Charitable Remainder Trust and why that was the right vehicle for you to make a more significant gift to The Cedars.

Sid: We had discussed this idea with Kathy as a way to give back to the Cedars in a more significant way beyond our Annual Fund gift.

Liz: We know we can't take it with us and we already have provided for our children. So what do you do? You give back and The Cedars is our number one charity of choice.

What are your hopes and dreams for the future of The Cedars?

Liz: We hope that The Cedars continues to grow by keeping on top of the latest trends related to aging. Maine has a very significant aging population, so it remains important for people to know how well run The Cedars is. We tell people about The Cedars all the time and what a wonderfully strong organization it has been for over 85 years. Longevity of The Cedars speaks volumes!

Sid: I would like to see a greater future focus on memory loss and dementia and future construction focused on single-family homes for individual residency. The Cedars already is a premiere facility in the state of Maine and with our current planning, will continue to be so in the future. From a tax perspective, a lot of people don't realize how little it costs to give money to charity and I hope that The Cedars will become an even more significant beneficiary.

Liz: As a lawyer, Sid really understood how charitable giving works and that's exactly how he got his Uncle Alvin to give such a significant gift. Uncle Alvin didn't like the idea of the government getting a lot of his money, so, it was an easy case to make in terms of making a large capital gift to The Cedars.

Uncle Alvin gave with a warm hand, not a cold hand. He gave while he was alive, but after his wife, Sylvia, had already passed. When he saw a building named in their honor along with the celebration, and so many family members present at the building dedication, he loved the attention and the fact that he could enjoy making this happen for The Cedars while he was still alive.

What could we do at The Cedars to inspire the next generation of donors?

Liz: Bill and Melinda Gates are so very charitable; they along with Warren Buffet, set a new standard for giving. There are so many people that are so wealthy and they want a bigger house, a bigger boat, more cars, but how much stuff do you need? We both came from humble beginnings with never much money. Maybe that is why material things aren't quite that important to us.

Sid: Making "giving" a priority must become a mind-set with our current residents and their families. The Cedars is all about relationships and that is what has the most potential to lead others toward the path of generosity. Just talking with people helps them understand the needs that exist here and how well they are being met.

Liz: Some people think that the only way to give is to the Annual Fund—which is critically important to support—but there are a variety of ways to make an even more long-lasting charitable gift to The Cedars. Our Charitable Remainder Trust is an example of just one such possibility.