

# REMEMBERING ABE LEVENTHAL Z”L

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Abe Leventhal may not have had kids of his own, but he was still a true family man.

The Waverly Inn proprietor left nearly \$8,000,000 to the region’s Jewish youth through a bequest to the Atlantic Jewish Foundation. He also left millions more to Jewish and general charities across Atlantic Canada.

His decision to leave the residue of his estate for local university and Camp Kadimah scholarships should come as no surprise. While Abe Leventhal kept a relatively low profile as owner of the Waverly Inn, word of his generosity spread throughout the Jewish community. A successful and gruff businessman, the depth of his pockets seemed squarely matched with a drive to give their contents away.

## CAMP KADIMAH FUNDING

Summer camp is a well-established fixture of North American Jewish culture, and the phenomena as we know it today harkens back to the late 19th century. As a fourteen-year camp veteran myself, I can tell you it played a fundamental role in the development of my identity, not merely as a Jew, but as a maturing young man who lived ten months of the year in a major city.

There is no understating the importance of Camp Kadimah.

“It is the biggest piece of infrastructure that the Atlantic Jewish Council operates,” said Victor Goldberg, a long-time family friend of the Leventhals. “It’s our crowning glory and accomplishment and it allows Jewish children in Atlantic Canada to go and meet other Jewish children.” He is confident Leventhal understood what Kadimah means to the local Jewish community.

Though he was never a camper himself, Leventhal had his fair share of camp experiences. In the 1930’s, he became the first Jewish Cub Master. An Eagle Scout in his younger days, he acquired a taste of camp spirit in a world unrecognizable to Camp Kadimah’s contemporary, millennial campers.

In a recent video interview, Larry Freeman, once a cub under Leventhal, reminisced about his days with the scouts under Leventhal’s tutelage. “I like to think I was his favorite cub, and here’s why,” he said smiling, before disappearing out of the frame.

He quickly returned, proudly displaying the “Efficiency Shield” Leventhal had bestowed upon him as a nine-year-old, back in 1958. He remembers events clearly, 63 years later—a simple testament to the endurance of Jewish camp memories, and a story that bears an uncanny resemblance to 21st-century summertime moments of my own.

## LOCAL UNIVERSITY SCHOLARSHIPS

The value of education needs no explanation, but the intention behind Leventhal’s scholarship fund runs deeper than simple tuition fees.

“He recognized the importance of helping people afford university tuition and that if people were encouraged to go to universities in Halifax, that they might stay in Halifax,” Goldberg said.

University is a pivotal time in a young person’s life. For many, it’s a rite of passage into adulthood. It’s a departure from the family nest and a place for one to plant the first true seeds of their future. By offering to fund the development of our youth within Nova Scotian shores, Leventhal helped maintain the longevity of the small, local Jewish community.

We live in a time when young Jewish kids leave the province *en masse* to pursue Canada’s bigger cities, Toronto, Montreal, and so on. The effect on the Atlantic Jewish community has been significant. We are experiencing a

slow contraction as the older and younger generations go their separate ways.

People like Leventhal are giving life to our presence in these provinces. His benevolence has ensured not only that young Jews have the opportunity to experience the staples of modern Jewish life—education, summer camp and community, but that their children will in turn be able to live these same activities in our beautiful corner of Canada.

## MENSCHKEIT

Leventhal understood the significance of Tzedakah and as one who truly does, never expected anything in return for what he gave—except maybe a tax receipt. Still, his quiet reputation as a philanthropic figure often brought fundraisers to his doorstep.

Calvin Blades, who helped Leventhal run the Waverly for almost thirty years, recalls a running joke between Leventhal and Ruth Goldbloom, a prominent Canadian fundraiser and one of the co-founders of the Pier 21 Museum. “She would often come to Abe for donations,” Blades said. “As soon as she would walk through the door he would say ‘sit down, save me the spiel, and tell me how much you need.’ And he would write a cheque.”

One might say that all living beings share one trait—an inherent motivation to provide security and life for future generations. In the present world, these definitions have taken on new meaning. Parents might open college funds right at birth or buy life insurance policies in case of death. Whether they follow instinct or expectation matters little, the motivation to instill a bright, or brighter day for those who come next is all the same.

For Abe Leventhal, a man with no children, this sense of duty extended far beyond the reach of those living under his roof. Throughout his life, he demonstrated in action that to him, these familial bonds bore roots across the entirety of the Jewish community, and often, far beyond the synagogue steps. ❁