

FIRST HEBREW CONGREGATION NAMES SOCIAL HALL FOR BEN AND HARRIETT TEITEL



Ben and Harriett Teitel were co-owners of the popular Mendelson's Atlantic Resort in South Haven

Ben Teitel, a pioneer in the development of resorts and apartments along Lake Michigan's west coast, and his wife, Harriett, were honored on July 19, 2015, when the social hall at the First Hebrew Congregation in South Haven was dedicated in their memory. Rabbi Alan Cohen presided over the ceremony, which included the ritual setting of the mezuzah on the social hall's door post. About one hundred fifty attended the dedication and reception.

Teitel served as general manager and co-owner (with his in-laws) of the famed Mendelson's Atlantic Resort in South Haven. Harriett was the gracious hostess, warmly greeting guests in the dining room and serving as a surrogate mom to hundreds of students who got their first work experience at the resort. After Harriett's death in 1964, Ben developed apartment units in southwest Michigan, many of which were purchased by tourists who wanted a more permanent base in South Haven. The first project, Lakecrest Towers at 222 North Shore Drive, built in 1966, spearheaded what Teitel called a "...one-man urban-renewal program for the beach area in South Haven," a risky venture at the time. Many developers have since built upon Teitel's visionary success. Before his death in 1985, Ben Teitel established the Ben N. Teitel Charitable Trust to benefit thousands of Jewish elderly, children, and students in Michigan, Israel, and Ukraine.

"While many small synagogues in Michigan are struggling or closing, the First Hebrew Congregation thrives," said Jerry Cook, Teitel's nephew and executor of the Teitel Trust. "For this reason, it was decided to aid the synagogue's ongoing restoration program with funds to improve the social hall, where key ritual and community activities take place."

Funds were used to remove old carpeting and refinish the hardwood floors underneath, install a new HVAC system, repair walls, add period lighting and window coverings, and reframe historic photos and images to ensure their preservation.

Cook said that his uncle wanted to write a book about his life entitled, "Live Each Day As If It Were Saturday Night." Although the book was never written, the donated funds from the Ben N. Teitel Charitable Trust have built an ever-growing living legacy, a legacy appropriately enhanced by restoring the synagogue social hall, where Ben and Harriet enjoyed many joyous occasions."

– Jerry Cook



Restoration work was done to maintain the original style of the building, built in 1928.

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