



THE LAURA & ALVIN SIEGAL
LIFELONG LEARNING
PROGRAM

Jewish Explorations

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THE INSPIRATIONAL LEGACY OF ALVIN SIEGAL

Dear Friends,

When you meet a person who is near the end of their life, it can take work to imagine them youthful and full of vigor. I thought about that difficulty when I met Alvin Siegal five years ago, shortly after I had moved to town. He was 90 years old at the time. Charming and soft-spoken, I wondered what he had been like as an entrepreneur and community visionary in his earlier years.

From reading his obituaries, I learned that he was a gentle leader, a man with big ideas, who was also easy-going, optimistic, even-tempered and down-to-earth. I also learned about his professional life in real estate and in mortgage banking, his devotion to his family, his service in the US army, and his impressive long-distance running.

By the time I met Alvin, he was no longer running or working. Still, the role he had played in building and shaping two particular Jewish institutions in town continue to have a major impact on my life.

In the late 1990s, when Cleveland College of Jewish Studies was faltering, Alvin committed himself to stabilizing and reinvigorating the institution. Through his leadership, and with his and his wife Laura's major financial backing, the institution regained viability, and is now flourishing in its new iteration as the Alvin and Laura Siegal Lifelong Learning Program at Case Western Reserve University (where I direct the Jewish Studies program).



What was it that drew Alvin to this particular institution? I asked this question to Marc Silverstein and to Judge Dan Polster, who worked closely with Alvin in their leadership of the organization. They both told me that he was – in simple terms – a lifelong learner. He did not have a special affinity towards a particular topic, but was forever curious, and understood that learning does not come to an end when one's school days are over. Together with Laura, Alvin

loved to participate in the classroom, which came alive with the excitement of teachers and students studying and discussing together. As I write from my CWRU office, I am grateful for his commitment to a life of learning not only for himself, but for the broad public.

I am also grateful to Alvin Siegal for his dedication to Warrensville Center Synagogue, where he was a long-time member and a leader. When the congregation faced demographic changes in the early 2000s, Alvin understood if it was to survive, it would need to move. He played an important role in ensuring the institution's future by making this move possible. Again, he and his wife Laura provided major financial backing, which enabled the building of the beautiful structure the congregation now occupies.

This synagogue – with its new name [Oheb Zedek Cedar Sinai](#) – has played a central role in my family's life since we moved to town. As members here, we attend regularly, have made dear friends, gained a sense of belonging in the Cleveland Jewish community, and have found a comfortable and inspiring space for our prayers.

I am sorry I never knew Alvin Siegal when he was young and full of vigor. Still, I am inspired by the work he left behind, and by his nimble visions of how institutions might be reinvented as circumstances demanded. And of course, am thankful for the tremendous impact Alvin Siegal has had on my own life here in Cleveland.

Best,
Alanna E. Cooper
Director, CWRU Jewish Lifelong Learning