Honoree Marjorie Blenden with Josh Gottesman, Rabbi Shimmy Steinmetz, and Rabbi Binyamin Blau

Honorees Shayna and Chaim Pinsker with Gottesman and Rabbi Steinmetz

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Hillside shul celebrates 70 years

Community members, family, and friends gathered as Congregation Adath Israel of Hillside celebrated its 70th anniversary. About 200 guests joined at a dinner at the Shackamaxon Country Club in Scotch Plains to mark the anniversary and to honor Marjorie Blenden, recipient of the Rav Teitz zt"l Legacy award and Shayna and Chaim Pinsker, recipients of the Alexander Krause a"h Service award.

Representative Josh Gottesman (D-NJ Dist. 5), chairman of the Adath Israel board, welcomed Rabbi Shimmy Steinmetz; members of the Teitz family; Hillside's newly elected mayor, Andrea Hyatt; and members of Yeshiva University's board of trustees and longtime supporters, including Janet Hod, Dr. Monique Katz and her son, Michael Katz, and siblings Ellen Weissberg and Mark Weissberg.

The Weissbergs are family members of Marjorie Blenden. Their father Jesse's name adorns the shul building. Mayor Hyatt presented the honorees proclamations from the town thanking them for their dedication to the community. Mr. Gottesman thanked everyone who helped sustain the shul over seven decades. "Tonight is about hakaras hatov, recognizing the people who built this shul, sustained it, and continue to ensure its future," he said.

Richard Joel, Yeshiva University's president emeritus, was at the dinner to honor his longtime friend, Ms. Blenden. "Marjorie is a model of Jewish leadership rooted in responsibility and service, and is someone who quietly shaped institutions through consistency, values, and long-term commitment," he said. "She represents the kind of leadership that doesn't seek recognition but leaves an impact that lasts for generations. Marjorie embodies the idea that Torah leadership is lived every day, through devotion to community and responsibility to others."

A video tribute showing Ms. Blenden's lifelong impact on Jewish education, philanthropy, and community building was played, and reflections from communal leaders emphasized her leadership, institutional loyalty, and commitment to Torah, education, and the Hillside community. She was praised as a bridge to Adath Israel's founding generation and a living force behind its continued growth.

Yeshiva University President Rabbi Dr. Ari Berman

Yeshiva University President Emeritus Richard Joel

Dr. Rivkah Blau, daughter of Adath Israel's founder, Rav Pinchas Teitz z"l, said that "Marjorie doesn't just support institutions; she carries their stories, their values, and their future forward every single day." Dr. Blau's sister, Shulamith Teitz-Ebner, said, "My father believed that leadership meant responsibility, not recognition, and Marjorie lives that belief in everything she does."

Rabbi Binyamin Blau, nephew of the community's longtime Rav HaIr, Rav Elazar Mayer Teitz z"l, introduced Ms. Blenden, tracing her lifelong dedication to the Jewish Educational Center and the Elizabeth and Hillside communities. He highlighted her parents, Leonard and Bea Diener, their foundational role, and her personal embodiment of continuity and service. "Marjorie doesn't just represent our past – she is the bridge that connects our past to our future," he said. "Her devotion to Torah, community, responsibility, and humility reflect the same values as the namesake of the award she was receiving, Rav Elazar Mayer Teitz z"l, just a few weeks before the Rav's first yahrzeit. Marjorie is a direct continuation of Rav Teitz's vision, proof that his legacy lives on through people who internalize its values."

In her speech, Ms.Blenden talked about her upbringing, her parents' devotion to Jewish communal life, and the responsibility of carrying forward a legacy. "Whatever I have been able to do comes from being raised to believe that the community always comes first," she said. Service as an obligation, not an achievement, she said, crediting her family and mentors.

She told a story recalling the board vote to build the Adath Israel shul more than 70 years ago. Rav Pinchas Teitz z"l and her father were in the minority, hoping to build the shul, when the motion was voted down. Rav Teitz paused, looked around the room, and declared, "The motion carries," insisting that leadership sometimes means acting on faith in the future. "He believed so deeply in the future of this community that he was willing to act on faith, and today, all of us are living the result of that moment," she said.

Honoring community members building for the future, the recipients of the Alexander Krause a"h Service award, Shayna and Chaim Pinsker, were recognized. Their nephew, Yehudah Pinsker, introduced them, telling personal anecdotes that illustrated their hands-on approach to community life, from leading the youth committee to always having their door open to hosting community events and visiting families. He added, "If you see a problem, fix it. That's exactly how Chaim and Shayna live their lives."

Chaim and Shayna Pinsker talked about their commitment to their community and its youth, and to shared responsibility. "What we're being recognized for isn't one big thing. It's showing up, again and again, for our community," they said. "We learned what real leadership looks like by watching people like Marjorie doing the work without needing the spotlight."

The evening ended with Rabbi Steinmetz reflecting on the shul's three pillars: mesorah (tradition), ruchnius (spirituality), and areivus (communal responsibility). He honored Marjorie Blenden as the embodiment of continuity and the Pinskers as exemplars of active service, challenging everyone there to help shape the next chapter. "The question isn't whether Adath Israel will thrive," he said. "It's who among us will step forward to help write the next chapter."

There is a video of the evening posted at AdathIsraelShul.org/Dinner26. To learn more about the Adath Israel community, email WelcomeToHillside@gmail.com.