

Stephen D. Solender

A CAREER IN JEWISH COMMUNAL SERVICE

Stephen D. Solender has provided the Jewish community with unparalleled professional leadership, exemplary service, and an abiding commitment to the social imperatives of Judaism throughout his long, distinguished, and productive career in Jewish communal service.

Steve played a seminal role in the formation of the United Jewish Communities (UJC), the most complex, significant, and far-reaching reorganization of the Jewish community in the past fifty years. He was selected as UJC's first President and CEO in 1999 and serves now as its President *Emeritus*.

Steve's appointment to UJC followed his successful professional leadership of the UJA-Federation of New York (1986-1999), and THE ASSOCIATED: Jewish Community Federation of Baltimore (1979-1986). His career began at the Jewish Community Centers of Chicago in 1962. He was later associated with the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC) in Geneva (1969-1975).

EDUCATION AND COMMITMENT

Steve received his M.S. in Social Work from the Columbia University School of Social Work in New York in 1962. He met his wife, the former Elsa Adelman, when they co-directed the first Columbia-Barnard Help Day instituted to send freshmen as volunteers to social service agencies throughout the city.

Steve received a tuition grant from the National Jewish Welfare Board (JWB) in return for his commitment to be engaged in the Jewish Center field for two years after

graduation. His interest in the Center movement came naturally.

His father, Sanford Solender, directed the Center's Division of the JWB (now JCC Association), and he later became that organization's Executive Vice President. Steve's grandfather, Samuel Solender, was the director of the Washington Heights-Inwood YMHA in Manhattan.

Among Steve's fond memories of his youth are being introduced by his grandfather to the Brooklyn Dodgers Jackie Robinson and Roy Campanella on Baseball Day at the Y, helping his dad prepare hot dogs for campers at Cleveland's Camp Wise on Lake Erie during World War II, and singing with Pete Seeger at Camp Willoway (Mt. Vernon Y) as a counselor.

JEWISH CENTERS IN CHICAGO

Elsa and Steve relocated to Chicago in 1962, where Steve began his career in Jewish communal service as a Teen Worker at the South Side Jewish Center. He soon was promoted to Program Director of the Center's branch in Skokie.

Prof. Bernard Reisman, then Skokie Branch Director, supervised Steve, and Abe Vinick and Morris Levin were also his influential mentors at the Chicago Centers. Steve recalls driving from one forest preserve to another with Reisman, entertaining at day camps as Chief Hot Foot and Chief Running Beaver, respectively.

Steve was named Director of the Skokie Branch in 1966. Under his leadership, a capital campaign for a new Jewish Center building in Skokie was started.

JDC IN GENEVA

In 1969, JDC recruited Steve as its consultant on Jewish centers and Youth. Steve, Elsa, and sons Michael and Dan (then five and three years old) moved to Geneva, Switzerland.

Steve's JDC assignments took him to twenty-two countries, where he offered consultative services to European Jewish communities that had been virtually destroyed by the Holocaust. An entire generation of Jewish leaders slaughtered by the Nazis had to be reestablished.

Steve organized training programs for youth leaders in Western Europe and North Africa, helped inaugurate the Jewish Center movement in Israel, developed programs for youth in Europe and North Africa in collaboration with the Jewish Agency for Israel, and served as liaison to develop Centers in the Communist-dominated communities of Eastern Europe.

In time, Steve's assignment with JDC was expanded to include staffing the European Council on Jewish Community Services, heading the Division of Community Organization and Development, and supervising the program of services to Jews in Muslim and Arab countries. During this period, Steve learned from and was inspired by the creative leadership of the late Louis Horowitz, JDC Director General.

A Special Fundraising Campaign

Steve undertook a special, personal fundraising campaign on behalf of the son of a close friend when Michael Lourie, an Israeli tank commander, was seriously burned in the fight for the Golan Heights during the 1973 Yom Kippur War. Michael needed special burn dressings that were available only from a company in the United States that insisted on cash payments. Steve helped to raise the necessary funds from Geneva's expatriate Jewish community. Previously reticent about raising funds, Steve came to recognize that he could do so, successfully and enthusiastically, if he believed in the cause for which the funding was being sought.

RETURNING TO THE UNITED STATES

THE ASSOCIATED—Baltimore

Steve and his family returned from Geneva to the United States in 1975 where Steve accepted the post of Director of Planning and Budgeting of THE ASSOCIATED: Jewish Community Federation of Baltimore. Four years later he succeeded Robert I. Hiller as President of the Federation. He was especially appreciative of strong collaborative relationships in Baltimore with presidents and other outstanding lay leaders.

UJA—Federation of New York

Steve became Co-Executive Vice President of the recently merged UJA-Federation of New York in 1986, a post he shared with harmonious collegiality for three years with Ernest Michel. In 1989, he was named the organization's first solo Chief Executive Officer.

United Jewish Communities

The United Jewish Communities was formed in 1999 as a result of the merger of the United Jewish Appeal, United Israel Appeal, and the Council of Jewish Federations. Steve played a leading role in the complex negotiations leading to the restructuring of the most significant organizational component in the Jewish community. He served for six months as Interim Director of the new entity, while a search for a permanent executive was undertaken. In 1999, Steve was named as the first UJC President and CEO.

Steve was honored upon his retirement by being asked to serve as UJC President *Emeritus*. He has remained actively involved in special tasks of mediation, lay and professional leadership development, financial resource development, as well as "troubleshooting."

PROFESSIONAL LEADERSHIP

The World Council of Jewish Communal Service (WCJCS), the Jewish Communal Service Association (JCSA), and the Associ-

ation of Jewish Community Organization Personnel (AJCOP) owe a debt of gratitude to Steve for his outstanding efforts on behalf of the profession.

Under Steve's stewardship as WCJCS President, the World Council significantly increased its programmatic activities, as well as its outreach to Jewish communities in Eastern Europe, the former Soviet Union, and Latin America.

JCSA has been appreciably strengthened by Steve's long-standing support and readiness to undertake important programmatic and financial assignments on behalf of the association. As Dinner Committee chair of JCSA's 100th Anniversary Celebration in 1999, Steve stated that JCSA is the "central address" for professionals in North America.

SPECIAL AWARDS AND RECOGNITION

Steve's illustrious career in Jewish communal service received special and often unique recognition. He was the first social worker to receive Columbia College's John Jay Award for Distinguished Professional Achievement. He received the first Lifetime Professional Achievement Award given by the UJA-Federation of New York. Recently, Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion invested Steve with a Doctor of Humane Letters.

Steve is also the recipient of the Distinguished

Service Award from Wurzweiler School of Social Work of Yeshiva University and the Herman Z. Quittman Award for Outstanding Organizational Leadership from B'nai Zion.

Among Steve's particular gratifications as his career enters a new phase are being able to spend more time with his six grandchildren (with a seventh expected shortly); traveling, hiking, and cross-country skiing with his wife; and reading more extensively in fields such as American and Middle Eastern history and biography. He continues to jog most mornings each year.

IN APPRECIATION

The Jewish Communal Service Association, in conjunction with many of Steve's colleagues, has created this unique, special edition of the *Journal of Jewish Communal Service* to pay tribute to his immense contributions to the profession.

Steve joins Prof. Bernard Reisman, Founding Director of the Hornstein Program in Jewish Communal Service at Brandeis University, and the late Sidney Z. Vincent, Executive Director of the Jewish Federation of Cleveland, as the only communal service professionals thus honored in the eighty years of *Journal* publication.

*“A nation needs its guides and shepherd,
its scouts and leaders of the flock, who will
carry out the function of leadership:
the ability to feel and the power to think”*

- ADIN STEINSALTZ FROM *The Spirit of Strife*

To Stephen D. Solender

***with deepest respect,
gratitude and admiration***

The Staff of UJA-Federation of New York