

In Praise of Volunteers (May 2008)

The presumption is that we are honoring Marge Grayson and Bob Adler this month because they are past-presidents, the most prestigious position of synagogue volunteerism. And this is true. Bob and Marge served Temple Ner Tamid during critical junctures in its history. They provided us with the highest caliber of leadership, helping us to strengthen as an institution and grow as a community. We would not be who we are today without their vision. They have helped pave the path upon which we walk.

But that is not why I admire these two people. What makes Marge and Bob so extraordinary, what makes them so worthy of our respect is that—today, years after their terms as president have expired—they remain integral parts of Temple Ner Tamid. Being “president” was not and has never been the goal of their sense of service and devotion to this congregation. They didn’t get involved just to merit the *kovod* or “honor” of leadership. Rather it is their leadership—that is their willingness to lead by example, to do what is necessary especially when no one else is willing to step forward—that is at the core of why we bestow upon them the *kovod* they unquestionably deserve. Bob Adler and Marge Grayson are the paradigm of a synagogue’s *neshamah* or soul.

Nevertheless, let us be clear: When we honor Bob and Marge we are, in fact, celebrating Temple Ner Tamid. Everything they do here, they do for us. Through their words and their deeds Marge and Bob embody devotion to Judaism and dedication to the Jewish people. For them it’s about Erev Shabbat and Torah study, Purimspiel and Israel. Their bookshelves reveal Jewish texts and Temple membership directories. The Temple is more than just a “home away from home” for these two; it is more than an “extension” of their family life. The synagogue—and Temple Ner Tamid in particular—is their home and their family.

Yet what is most inspiring for me about Marge Grayson and Bob Adler is how their personal journeys reflect the “eternal flame” of Ner Tamid. Marge grew up here. She was confirmed on our bimah. Marge demonstrates to us all that devotion to synagogue is a life-long affair; it’s not just a place to drop off your kids, but rather to enter and discover yourself through the giving of yourself. Marge models for us how it is that synagogues can be links that join the generations together. And Bob is the Jew who came home. I will always remember sitting with him on the edge of our bimah during a Hanukkah party, his first day here at Ner Tamid. He was just opening the door to rediscovering his identity. Yet from that moment on Bob has not merely embraced his heritage but brought countless others along with him. You know who you are.

Thank God for Robert Adler and Marjorie Grayson. Their names are honored among our people, and we are blessed to be able to call them our own.