



Dancing was a big part of a JCC Gala.

My JCC story started in nursery school and continued through Camp Shalom, dance classes with Dorothy Silverhurst, musical theater, and teen programs. I was on Teen Council, volunteered at vacation programs, worked as a Camp Shalom counselor, and even went on the "Let's Go Israel" teen trip. I was there several times a week — it was just part of my life.

Some of my fondest memories are of The Gala, the talent show my mom performed in every year. She would bring the house down, and the whole community would come out for a night of laughter, music, and celebration.

And then there was my dad — first in the over-40 basketball league, then the over-50 league... and eventually the "everyone's injured, let's just schvitz" league. My sister, Amy, and I would go with him to the gym in our teen years, and it was impossible to get out of there quickly because he talked to everyone. He was the mayor of the fitness center.

Rick: The fitness center has always been a special place and its been an important part of my life. Its kept me motivated and provides me with a variety of ways to keep interested in fitness, to maintain, and even improve, my fitness.

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Julie: One of the things I've always loved about the JCC is how it connected us as a family. It wasn't just a place my dad went for meetings or my mom went to volunteer. It was an incredible place that had something special for everyone at every age. We're a close family, and the JCC gave us ways to participate that brought us even closer — to each other and to our Judaism.

Rick: When Julie and Jerry told me they wanted to mark my 80th birthday by creating a fund in my honor, I was incredibly touched.

Julie: We wanted to do something that felt meaningful — something that truly reflected who my dad is. Supporting the JCC felt like the perfect fit.

The JCC has been woven through every stage of our lives. It's where my parents met, where my sister and I grew up, and where my dad still finds joy and community.

Rick: It's amazing to see that continuity. To see what the JCC meant to my kids — and now what it can mean for future generations — that's what it's all about.

### The Rick Robinson JCC Fitness Fund

Created in honor of Rick's 80th birthday, the Rick Robinson JCC Fitness Fund at the Jewish Community Foundation supports the Mandell JCC's Fitness Center — helping to sustain a welcoming space that promotes health, friendship, and community connection for generations to come.



# THE DONOR DIFFERENCE

A Newsletter for the Mandell JCC Community Donor Circle



The Polk Family

## OUR DONORS WHY THEY DO IT

### Molly and Ryan Polk

When Molly and Ryan Polk moved to West Hartford eight years ago with their two-year-old twin daughters, Ella and Nora, one of the first things people told them was, "You have to check out the JCC." They took a tour of the Early Childhood Center, met other staff, and were immediately impressed by the warmth of the community.

“Not being Jewish, our first question was, can we even join?” Molly recalled with a laugh. “But from that very first visit, everyone made us feel welcome. We knew right away this was a special place.”

Since then, the Mandell JCC has become a true part of their family's life. From swim lessons and family room playdates to summer days at Camp Shalom and, most recently, theater auditions, pottery and

dance recitals, their daughters have grown up within the walls — and heart — of the J. “The JCC has grown with our family and we have grown along with it,” Molly said. “When the girls were little, it was the climbing gym and Kids Korner. Now it's Camp Shalom, classes, theater — it's been this beautiful, full-circle, consistent part of their childhood.”

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That sense of consistency and community has meant the world to Molly and Ryan, especially after relocating several times for work before settling in West Hartford. “It can be hard to make friends as adults,” Ryan shared. “The JCC helped us build a foundation here — a community where our kids feel connected and where we do, too.” Having lived in several places before finding

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Waiting for the Camp Shalom bus.

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their way to Connecticut, they both agree: "This is home now," Molly said simply. "And the JCC was absolutely a part of us feeling that way."

Their connection to the JCC runs even deeper through their involvement as volunteers and donors. Molly serves on the JCC Board of Directors, bringing her professional expertise in marketing and her role at the University of Hartford to strengthen partnerships between the two institutions. "I love being part of the board," she said. "And I think it's important to have diverse voices represented — especially as a non-Jewish member, I feel that my contributions and perspective matter. The JCC truly is a place for all people, and it's incredible to see how they create space and programming for the larger community to come together. It's also important to us that our girls understand and appreciate different faiths, cultures, and backgrounds. It's a part of what makes living here in West Hartford so amazing."

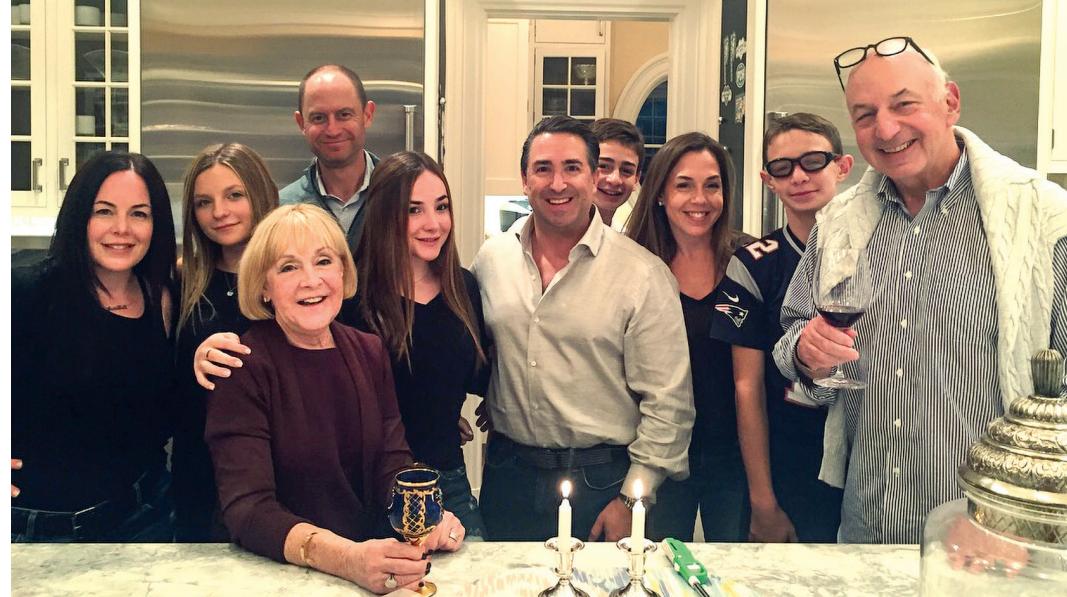
When it comes to giving back, Molly and Ryan's philosophy is simple: support the places that have made a difference in your life. "We give to the organizations that have real meaning for our family," Molly said. "The JCC has given us so many wonderful opportunities and memories, and we want to help ensure that other families can experience that too. We feel that we have a responsibility to say thank you and support the mission of what happens here."

They've been especially inspired by the growth and energy of JNext, the JCC's young adult philanthropy and engagement group. "JNext is doing amazing things," Ryan said. "From the new features in the Family Room to installing new parts of Jonathan's Dream — it's really a group that's committed to community, friendship, and helping shape the future of the J."

For Molly and Ryan, supporting the JCC isn't just about gratitude for the past; it's an investment in the future. "The JCC is only as strong as its leadership — professional, volunteer, and philanthropic," Molly reflected. "It's rare to find a place that has such a deep, multigenerational connection, where families stay involved year after year. That's what makes this community so special — and we're proud to be a part of it."



All smiles at the JCC Dance Recital.



## ENDOWMENT INSPIRATION

### The Robinson Family

For the Robinson family, the Mandell JCC has always been more than a community center — it's been a second home. So when Julie (Robinson) Levy and her husband, Jerry, decided how to honor her father Rick's 80th birthday, they chose the place that had shaped all their lives — creating a fund in his name to support the JCC and celebrate the legacy he helped build.

Julie: The JCC has always been part of our family's story — a place that has shaped who we are across generations. For us, it's never been "just a building." It's where friendships were made, where we connected to our Jewish identity, and where our family found a true sense of belonging.

Rick: My connection to the JCC started when I was a kid at Camp Shalom. As a teenager, everything about my involvement changed. Back then, the teen programs were built around fraternities and sororities, and I joined Sigma Phi. It became a big part of my identity and was a terrific growth experience. We had dances, programs, service projects — it was a prestigious thing to be part of.

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" Julie: My connection to the JCC is so special. It's basically where I grew up and spent much of my childhood — a place that always felt like a second home. My parents were very active there, especially my dad, and they instilled in me the values of Tikkun Olam and pride in being Jewish from a young age. Going to a diverse school, the JCC gave me a space where I felt connected to other Jewish kids. was where my community was.

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