

Building the future of Covenant Place

PAGE 4A

STL JEWISH LIGHT

STLJEWISHLIGHT.COM

15 ELUL, 5777

SEPT. 6, 2017

VOL. 75 NO. 36



KANTOR to CANTOR

Rabbi leads spiritual first-response team in Texas

BY ANDREW SILOW-CARROLL
JTA

It was a day before Hurricane Harvey was due to make landfall, and Rabbi Shira Stern knew she was headed for Texas.

As a director of Disaster Spiritual Care for the American Red Cross, she knew there would be people who would have other needs beyond shelter, beyond medical care, beyond a hot meal and a place to dry out. She met people just like them after floods devastated part of West Virginia in 2016, and when Superstorm Sandy pounded her own state, New Jersey, in 2012.

So after a circuitous two days of travel she found herself in Dallas, overseeing a team of chaplains in the shelters set up for families chased out of Houston by flooding that so far has claimed 46 lives and destroyed tens of thousands of homes and businesses.

She and her team of six volunteer chaplains are helping evacuees "access their own spiritual resources," Stern said, speaking from the Kay Bailey Hutchinson Convention Center in Dallas, which has beds for as many as 5,000 people displaced by the storm. "We don't impose [our faith] on anybody. We meet people who are very religious or not religious at all or just atheist. We listen to their stories and affirm what they have gone through."

The clergy of all faiths are spiritual first responders, working with families as they arrive at shelters in Dallas and Fort Worth and partnering with local churches and faith-based organizations to do what Stern calls a "seamless carryover for continual care."

"We are a crisis team, and during the long haul of rebuilding, Houston and Davenport and Beaumont and all these other places are going to need long-term care," she said. "In the process we are creating relationships with all of these faith-based groups."

Spiritual care is perhaps a lesser-known facet of relief provided by the American Red Cross and other organizations on hand, including the Salvation Army and the National Guard. And it can discomfit some people who worry that clergy are there to make converts among distraught people.

But Stern insists the work they do has nothing to do with proselytizing and



Rabbi Shira Stern

St. Louis woman donates a kidney to help beloved B'nai Amoona cantor emeritus

BY ELLEN FUTTERMAN
EDITOR

The idea began percolating three years ago, when a friend in Israel talked about how donating a kidney had changed her life. Lynnsie Balk Kantor was intrigued.

"She wound up leaving her job and working for the organization that gets recipients for kidney donors in Israel," said Kantor, 55, a St. Louis-area real estate agent and B'nai Amoona congregant.

A year later, a distant cousin of Kantor's in Dallas needed a kidney and

posted a phone number on Facebook for possible donors. "I called the number in Dallas but they never got back to me," said Kantor, "so I put it out of my mind."

Then this February, Kantor heard through Facebook and the B'nai Amoona grapevine that Hazzan Leon S. Lissek, 81, needed a kidney. He had been the cantor at B'nai Amoona for 30 years, retiring in 1998 as cantor emeritus, a title he still holds. He and his wife, Michal, now live in Teaneck, N.J. The couple has three children and six grandchildren.

Kantor had grown up with Cantor Lissek, who as a child was placed in a

French Catholic orphanage by his mother during World War II to escape the Holocaust. He had officiated at Kantor's bat mitzvah and those of her siblings and became good friends with her parents. Kantor's father, Edward Balk, was president of B'nai Amoona for several years during Lissek's tenure.

"I remember being scared of the Hazzan when I was little because he had this amazing, booming voice that could fill a massive room," said Kantor. "He and his family were such a big part of our family when I was growing up and we stayed in touch after they left."

The information Kantor had picked up from Lissek's Facebook page pointed her to Renewal, a Brooklyn, N.Y.-based nonprofit that works to save lives through kidney donations. Founded in 2006, its roots are in Brooklyn's ultra-Orthodox community of Borough Park.

Wanting to help Lissek, Kantor contacted Renewal and received a package, which instructed her to swab four areas inside her cheeks, then mail the swab sticks back. A blood test and cheek swabs are often the first steps in determining donor-recipient compatibility.

About a month later, on March 19, Lissek's wife and son, along with Rabbi Josh Sturm, director of community outreach at Renewal, held an informational meeting at B'nai Amoona to answer questions about kidney donations. Kantor attended the meeting, which she

Lynnsie Kantor (pictured above and at right) donated a kidney to B'nai Amoona's Hazzan Emeritus, Leon S. Lissek (pictured at right with Kantor). The two spent time together at a New York hospital before the surgery.



TOP PHOTO:
BILL MOTCHAN
RIGHT PHOTO:
COURTESY
LYNNSIE
KANTOR

See KANTOR on page 6A ▶

See CHAPLAIN on page 8A ▶

Kantor: St. Louis woman donates a kidney to B'nai Amoona cantor emeritus

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1A

found to be extremely educational and uplifting.

Sturm's presentation included videos of living donors talking about their experiences. He noted that kidney donation is considered a low-risk surgery for the donor, with few long-term complications, and has a very high rate of success for the recipient.

Sturm also spoke about Lissek, who though in his 80s and significantly older than most kidney recipients, takes meticulous care of himself, working out regularly with a trainer and eating healthfully. He is in such good shape, in fact, that he didn't yet need to be on dialysis, which is unusual for a patient waiting for a kidney.

If there was any doubt in Kantor's mind, the Renewal presentation convinced her that donating a kidney was right for her. She also wondered if her kidney would be compatible and find its way to Cantor Lissek.



"The relationship between the Lisseks and the Balks began when Hazzan/Cantor Leon Lissek was hired by B'nai Amoona. The entire synagogue fell in love with his voice and wonderful soul, with Michal's vibrant spirit and their three kids, Devorah, Shmuel and Shira. Though I was a shy girl at age 13 and quite frankly terrified of this big man as I studied for my bat mitzvah, I grew to understand what a gentle giant he was."

— July 30th, 5:25 p.m. Lynnsie Balk Kantor's Facebook page



About 11 years ago, an acquaintance of Renewal founder and chairman Mendy Reiner approached him, asking for help in finding a kidney. Reiner decided they should advertise in a couple of Jewish newspapers.

"Lo and behold," Sturm said, "not only did they get a number of people who responded that they were willing to donate, but they also had a number of people who reached out and said, 'Would you be willing to do the same for my sister, my brother, my aunt, who also need a kidney?'"

"Mendy realized there was such a need in the Jewish community — not that the need is greater in the Jewish community than any

other community — but that's where he was dealing. He saw the need and Renewal was born," Sturm added.

The organization's first-year goal was to help facilitate one kidney transplant. "They figured if they could save one life it would be awesome," said Sturm. "The next year they doubled their goal with two transplants.

Last year, the organization was involved in 67 kidney transplants, Sturm said. And it hopes to surpass that number this year.

Although Renewal started in the ultra-Orthodox community, it has since expanded to other streams of Judaism across North America. "We don't interrogate people about their religious affiliation," said Sturm. "That said, we are a Jewish organization and the overwhelming number of patients on our waiting list — 95 percent — come from different parts of the Jewish community. Unfortunately, we don't have a refrigerator full of kidneys. We can't help everyone."

According to the National Kidney Foundation, approximately 18,000 people were on the national waiting list for a kidney in 1990; today, that list has more than 100,000 names. Yet there are only 18,000 to 19,000 transplants each year and roughly 5,000 to 6,000 people die while waiting.

Top causes of kidney disease include high blood pressure and diabetes, both of which have escalated in recent decades in connection to the increased rate of obesity. Sturm notes that with dialysis being able to extend life for at least five years, some potential recipients who might have died in earlier years waiting for a kidney stay on the transplant list much longer.

Renewal helps potential recipients spread the word about their need — a strategy Sturm says is crucial. "We can create ads if they want for their local newspaper and flyers at their synagogue," said Sturm. "We also encourage a potential recipient to reach out using social media."

That's exactly what the Lisseks did, casting a wide net to as many people as possible who might want to get tested and donate. In Cantor Lissek's case, doctors advised that he seek a live kidney donor as opposed to a cadaver donor — a live kidney tends to work better and longer than a deceased donor kidney.

In-depth testing on live donors includes blood and urine work (blood and tissue types must be compatible between donor



Lynnsie Kantor said she has no physical restrictions placed on after donating a kidney, with the exception of no yoga or heavy lifting for six weeks. PHOTO: BILL MOTCHAN

and recipient), a chest X-ray, electrocardiogram, CAT scan of the abdomen and psychosocial counseling.

Then the Lisseks did what is perhaps the hardest thing of all: They waited. And prayed.



Renewal is paying the costs of transportation, hotels, food, and anything else I might need. The recipient's insurance pays the medical bills. (Renewal) make(s) the whole process feel incredibly easy and supported.

— Aug. 6, 10:27 p.m. Lynnsie Balk Kantor's Facebook page



At 7:27 p.m. on Wednesday, July 19, Kantor placed a call to the Lisseks at their home in Teaneck. Michal Lissek answered the phone. She sounded delighted to hear from Kantor, who asked how everyone was doing.

"We're doing well," said Michal. "But we still don't have a match.

"Leon is at the top of the list," she continued. By that time, he had been on the Renewal waiting list for nine months.

"As of three weeks ago, we were told there were two people who were a match for Leon who were being tested," she added.

Kantor then asked Michal to put her husband on the phone, too. After a few pleasantries, Kantor said to the Lisseks, "Guess what? I was one of the people being tested. And as of this morning, I learned I am going to have the honor of giving you my kidney."

Choruses of "Oh my God" and "I can't believe it" erupted, along with shrieks of delight. Cantor Lissek started to cry. Tears of joy, Michal said.

Now that the Lisseks knew, Kantor had others to tell, including her three adult children, siblings, ex-husband and a few good friends — her "board of directors," as she calls them. Although she was 99 percent sure, she still wanted feedback on whether she should give her kidney to an elderly person like Lissek, or someone younger.

She received two emails that convinced her following her heart was the right decision. The first was from her youngest son, Noam, 22, who wrote: "The chances of you matching with someone you know and love seem pretty rare. I think you should do it."

The other was from her brother in Cincinnati, Rabbi Hanan Balk. He pointed out that she could donate her kidney to a 30-year-old and some horrible tragedy, even death, could befall that person. "Only God knows how long life is," Balk told his sister. "Hazzan Lissek could have a lot of good years with your kidney."

► Organ donation and transplantation statistics

**data from The National Kidney Foundation*

• There are currently more than 120,000 people waiting for lifesaving organ transplants in the United States. Of these, more than 100,000 await kidney transplants.

• The median wait time for an individual's first kidney transplant is 3.6 years and can vary depending on health, compatibility and availability of organs. (Renewal says its goal is to match recipients with a donor within six months.)

• In 2014, 17,107 kidney transplants took place in the United States. Of these, 11,570 came from deceased donors and 5,537 came from living donors.

On average:
• Over 3,000 new patients are added to the kidney waiting list each month.

• 13 people die each day while waiting for a life-saving kidney transplant.

• Every 14 minutes someone is added to the kidney transplant list.

For more information about becoming a kidney donor:

National Kidney Foundation: kidney.org
Renewal: Life-Renewal.org or 718-431-9831

Meanwhile, the jubilation that a match had been found was not lost on the Lisseks. With no family members matching or being able to donate and with his advanced age, they had had their doubts Lissek would ever get a healthy kidney.

"That such a person exists on this Earth to give of themselves so courageously and bravely . . . Lynnsie is an angel," said

Continues on opposite page ►

816 Hanley #6B • Clayton
Welcome Home to this spacious open floor plan with plenty of windows. Perfect location for the buyer who enjoys all of the amenities that a full service building offers. This is a stylish unit with gleaming wood floors, fresh paint, walk-in closet, custom built-in Murphy Bed in second bedroom and laundry hook up. Enjoy a spacious balcony with a stunning view. **\$237,000**
Helen Costello • 314-651-7792

LAURA MCCARTHY
REAL ESTATE

BREADSMITH
HAND MADE. HEARTH BAKED.

10031 Manchester Road
1 mile east of Lindbergh

During Rosh Hashanah we eat sweet foods to symbolize a sweet year.

From Sept. 15th to Sept. 29th
Breadsmith will tempt you with:

- Honey Cakes (Sept. 18th, 19th & 20th)
- Round Challah (with or without raisins)
- Braided Challah (no raisins)
- Apple Pie Bread

Don't miss out! Our deadline for orders is 5pm, Sept. 18th
(314) 822-8200
Start off your New Year with "The Best Challah in St. Louis!"

☺ Pareve



Nava Kantor at right, visits her mother, Lynnsie Kantor, a kidney donor, after her surgery in New York City last month.

Michal. “We are absolutely overwhelmed by her generosity and selflessness.”



Arrived in NYC this afternoon. I had dinner tonight with my sister and 4 of my nieces and nephews. Afterwards we wanted to have a pic taken of us outside and there were two women sitting nearby so we asked them. We were chatting ...and when one heard that I was donating a kidney she took me aside and told me that she herself has only one kidney. Hers was removed due to a disease of some kind, and she wanted to assure me that I would be totally fine, that the surgery isn't difficult at all, and that the only thing she can't do is play hockey (she was Canadian)! What are the chances of the woman we asked for the picture had had a kidney removed, in all of NYC?

— Aug. 6, 9:54 p.m., Lynnsie Balk Kantor's Facebook page



Renewal only works with certain hospitals that have a lot of experience with kidney transplants, explained Sturm, including New York-Presbyterian/Weill Cornell Medical Center. That's where #OperationKantor2Cantor — as Kantor had named it — took place on Tuesday, Aug. 8.

Kantor and Lissek each had their own team of doctors and transplant coordinators, as well as friends and family to support them. The day before the surgery, Kantor, Lissek and their supporters gathered for a prayer service. Among those in the group was Rabbi Shelley Kniaz, 57, who knows the Lisseks because they belong to the same congregation in Teaneck. When Kniaz first heard about Lissek's need for a kidney, she, too, decided to get tested in the hopes of donating hers to him. But they were not a match.

Still, she said, she decided to donate to someone else in July, who turned out to be a 61-year-old woman. Kniaz neither knew this woman nor have they since met, though she hopes one day they will. Nevertheless, she says donating her kidney was one of her best decisions, ever. “I only wish I had another kidney to give,” Kniaz said.

“Shelley Kniaz was two weeks ahead of me, so it was great to meet her, especially so soon after her surgery,” said Kantor. “She reassured me how easy it was and showed me her scar.”

Like Kniaz and many other donors, Kantor's left kidney was removed laproscopically. This form of surgery, performed under general anesthesia, uses a very small incision, a thin scope with a camera to view inside of the body, and wand-like instruments to remove the kidney. The surgery took three hours.

Two days later, she left the hospital for a nearby hotel that had been arranged — and paid for — by Renewal. Donors typically spend two weeks or so after surgery recuperating, which mostly entails getting over minor pain and discomfort. So while Kantor was told she couldn't do yoga for six weeks, she was quickly able to walk all over the city and take in the sights. The only medication she took after surgery was Tylenol, and not even much of that.

“The worst part of the whole thing was the anesthesia because it caused dry mouth,” said Kantor. “The risk of this surgery is less than that of an appendectomy or gall bladder removal. With those, the patient is sick, so they're going into the surgery with a disadvantage.

“The process of organ transplantation makes sure the donor is healthy. I felt healthier than any other time in my life because everything was checked and re-checked.”

Still, before she did any celebrating, Kantor needed to make sure Kantor Lissek also had fully healed. She knew that as the recipient, it would be harder for him, and he did feel nauseous, weak

and dizzy for days after the surgery as he was being pumped with anti-rejection drugs.

On Aug. 18, just 10 days after the surgery, Lissek was discharged from the hospital, though the couple stayed for five days at the same hotel as Kantor. For the next three months, Lissek will see his doctors at Weill/Cornell once or twice a week. He reports his new kidney is doing “fantastically.”



We have reached a new and wonderful milestone in our adventure: we are returning to Teaneck today for our first Shabbat at home since Leon's transplant. Leon's new kidney is going strong and he is now up and about.

— Aug. 25, Michal Lissek on Leon Lissek's Carebridge Page



Lynnsie Kantor's daughter, Nava, 27, admits she gets “anxious” about medical procedures, so she was more than a little concerned about her mother's decision to donate a kidney. Nava took some comfort in knowing that as a donor, should her mother need a kidney in the future, she would be moved to the top of the waiting list.

“Mostly, I'm very proud of her,” said Nava Kantor, a social worker at the Missouri Foundation for Health. “My mom has been very open sharing every part of her experience on social media. I hope the result is that more people become donors.”

Rabbi Carnie Rose of B'nai Amoona calls Kantor a “hero.” He also notes that Lissek's situation inspired another congregant to get tested, and she, too, plans to donate as soon as Renewal contacts her.

“What Lynnsie did was such an act of altruism and love,” said Rose, describing it as a “*mitzvah goreret mitzvah*,” one good deed brings another good deed.

“Cantor Lissek gave his life to our synagogue and Lynnsie felt she could give life back to him,” said Rose. “She is a true heroine.”

Kantor doesn't see herself that way at all. In fact, she bristles at the suggestion.

“I am definitely not a hero. I am just someone who heals well and doesn't particularly mind medical stuff or is terrified by it,” said Kantor. “I was healthy enough to do it and for everything else there is Xanax.”

“If I was going to give my heart, then I'd be a hero. But a kidney is a spare part. I wish more people would do it.”

Jewish groups attack Trump's call to end DACA program

BY RON KAMPEAS
JTA

An array of Jewish groups and lawmakers attacked as immoral President Donald Trump's decision to end an Obama-era program granting protections to illegal immigrants who arrived in the United States as children.

The Trump administration said Monday that it would end the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, or DACA, program in six months. President Barack Obama had launched DACA in 2011 after multiple attempts failed in Congress to pass an immigration bill that would settle the status of 11 million undocumented immigrants. The program protected those who arrived as children from deportation and granted them limited legal status.

In statements, Trump and Attorney General Jeff Sessions said the principal objection to Obama's so-called Dreamers program was that it was unconstitutional because it was established by an executive order, and indicated that Trump was ready to sign any congressional legislation that would accommodate the “dreamers.” It was unclear what would happen in the meantime or, should Congress not pass legislation, what would happen to the 800,000 people who have sought and received DACA's protections.

Trump in a statement said his hand was forced as well by plans by attorneys general from conservative states to sue to kill DACA.

“The attorney general of the United States, the attorneys general of many states and virtually all other top legal experts have advised that the program is unlawful and unconstitutional and cannot be successfully defended in court,” he said.

Republican leaders in Congress have expressed a willingness to pass the legislation necessary to protect the affected immigrants, but Jewish groups and lawmakers said ending the program presented immoral perils, given the failures of Congress in the past to agree on

See DACA on page 9A ►



Jo Anne, 80



2nd month FREE!
Move in by 9/30/17

Life's more fun when you can write your own soundtrack.

Getting older doesn't mean you have to stop doing what you love. So we encourage our residents to keep on doing their thing while we take care of the rest.



This feels like home.®

CreveCoeurAssistedLiving.com | (314) 800-0538
693 Decker Lane | Creve Coeur, Missouri 63141
A SPECTRUM RETIREMENT COMMUNITY



The Bris
by Certified Mohel
Rabbi Michael Rovinsky

“Where Care & Concern Make A Difference”
Trained by Pediatric Urologists
Over 14,000 + Procedures Performed
Serving All of the Jewish Community

(314) 727-BRIT (2748)
1-800-85MOHEL
www.brismilah.org

