

Camp Miriam Honors Janusz Korczak

Unique educational pavillion for campers

At the end of every camping season, the staff and campers at Camp Miriam come up with a wish list.

"There is the 'absolutely needs,' the 'like-to-haves' and then there is the 'if-a-gift-dropped-from-space,'" said Nancy Gabor, camp committee chair. In the latter category was a large, covered outdoor space where kids could gather in any kind of weather. Until now, the only large covered meeting place was the dining hall, which required moving tables out of the way for activities, then back into place for meals.

A synergy between the philanthropic vision of a Vancouver family, the needs of Camp Miriam and the inspiration of a hero of the Holocaust resulted in the dedication recently of the **Janusz Korczak Pavillion** at the camp.

In addition to being a hero who sacrificed his life to accompany his charges when the Warsaw orphanage he ran was liquidated by the Nazis, Korczak was a renowned educator and children's rights advocate. His philosophy of education placed responsibility on children for self-determination and self-governance. These same values have been lived out for decades at Camp Miriam, where campers select leadership and make consensus decisions throughout the season, while learning about social justice in a Jewish context.

These same values were important to **Paul and Edwina Heller**, z'l. Paul Heller was a long-time admirer of Korczak's vision and work. He was also a supporter of Camp Miriam.

When **Dr. Irene Bettinger**, the Hellers' daughter and trustee of their estate, realized the potential for recognizing Korczak while perpetuating the values that her parents advanced, what was once a longshot dream for Camp Miriam became a reality.

"My father and my mother escaped from Warsaw, Poland, in early September 1939, when Hitler came in," said Bettinger. Her father was an avid Zionist and supported many causes in Vancouver and Israel. In discussions with **Marcie Plom**, director of the Jewish Community Foundation of Greater Vancouver, Bettinger learned of Camp Miriam's needs and saw a connection with her parents' lifelong commitments. It is a policy of Camp Miriam to not name buildings in honor of financial contributors, so when the idea was floated to name the new pavillion in memory of the hero of children's

rights who her father admired, Bettinger saw a perfect circle.

As she began to explore more about the camp's philosophy and history, Bettinger learned that camp alumni make up a large portion of Vancouver's Jewish communal leadership.

"It clearly is one of your major suppliers of future leaders for the community," said Bettinger, who lives in the United



Top: The Janusz Korczak Pavillion is the new heart of Camp Miriam.

Left: Campers watch as the Honorable John Fraser cuts the ribbon on the pavillion.

Below: Dr. Irene Bettinger, centre, celebrates the naming with John Fraser and campers.



States. "And I think if one believes in having a Jewish community continue – I do believe in that and my parents obviously did – I would encourage the Vancouver Jewish community to continue supporting the camp."

Gideon Levit, past chair of the camp committee, conceived and led the project. He enlisted StructureCraft, the local company that constructed the wood components of Richmond's Olympic Oval, and which Levit said is among the best of their kind in the country. As is often the case in a project of this sort, budgets expanded, but Levit credits Bettinger for accommodating the project "beyond anything we could have asked for."

"It's been unbelievable, her support," said Levit. "She's helped with camper-ships as well, moving forward."

Levit also credited the leadership of the **Jewish Federation of Greater Vancouver** and the **Jewish Community Foundation**.

"Past and current Jewish Federation leadership, with Marcie Plom from the Jewish Community Foundation, supported and encouraged us through the entire project," he added.

Ezra Shanken, CEO of Federation, said, "This is another example of our Jewish Community Foundation working very closely with families of those who played wonderful roles in our community during their lives and then were able to leave money to the community after their life, working with their children and descendants to find meaningful ways to create impact with that money that reflects the connections that they had dur-

friendships and values of Camp Miriam help create leaders in the community. "So we take a lot of pride. We're not just a summer camp, we're much more than that and that's something that's always been very important to me."

Jerry Nussbaum, president of the Janusz Korczak Association of Canada, said Korczak's core philosophy was that self-awareness and self-determination are crucial in child development.

"I look at the purely theoretical part, about what's in the 22 volumes that Korczak left behind and that's very important research," Nussbaum said. "But there is also living life according to those rules, and I think the connection between his philosophy and the philosophy of Camp Miriam is quite tight."

The **Janusz Korczak Pavillion** has created a new heart of the camp, a gathering place for organized or impromptu activities, for singing, games and meetings. It has shifted the literal heart of camp further up the grounds and even closer to nature. It has also created a new figurative heart of camp, based around the memory of a great man.

Leah Levi, camp registrar, recalls the words of a young counsellor when the idea of naming the pavillion after Korczak first came up a couple of years ago. **Ella Zetler** was education director at the camp and her reaction to the idea was visceral: "We are Janusz Korczak," Levi recalls Zetler saying. "That's what we do at camp. We empower kids to be who they are meant to be."

For campers, Fraser said, there is nothing quite like Camp Miriam.

For **James Dayson**, chair of the Haborim Zionist Society, which is a parent agency to the camp, the pavillion is going to help create for future generations the kind of memories he gained as a camper.

"Camp was the single biggest influence in my life and I know it makes a big difference for a lot of kids," said Dayson. The

— Pat Johnson



Reflections on the dedication

On Tuesday morning, July 19, 2016, a delegation consisting of the Honorable John Fraser, former speaker of the House of Commons, Jerry Nussbaum, president of the Janusz Korczak Association of Canada, Nancy Gabor, chair of the camp committee of Camp Miriam, Bernie Simpson, former member of the B.C. Legislature, and I boarded a small plane headed for Camp Miriam, where we would meet up with the rest of the delegation: Dr. Irene Bettinger and her daughter Dana Bettinger, Dr. Robert Krell, Gideon Levit, Philip Dayson and James Dayson, members of the staff, boys and girls.

The plane drilled through the air for a short time and soon, out of the morning mist, emerged the emerald view of Gabriola Island.

I was excited. We were to participate in the dedication of a pavillion in honor of Dr. Janusz Korczak, a Polish Jew, pediatrician, author, a caretaker of a Jewish orphanage and a hero.

We were met and driven through the forests and meadows to the legendary Camp Miriam, nestled among the impressive fir and pines. What an inspiring place Camp Miriam is, surrounded by nature with its spread of wooden buildings, each offering a different branch of camp activity.

Excited young people bustled about laughing and talking, and finally we saw the majestic pavillion. It stood on an incline looming large, a reddish wood post-and-beam structure with a slanted roof, supported by strong, wide pillars.

Soon everyone gathered round for the program announced by James Dayson.

Dr. Bettinger and Dana Bettinger consecrated the pavillion as the Dr. Janusz Korczak Pavillion.

The Honorable John Fraser spoke briefly to the campers, pointing out how proud they must and should be of being Jewish and Canadian. Jerry Nussbaum followed, explaining who Korczak was and introducing the crowd to two new books co-published by the Korczak Association, written by two of Korczak's pupils. The first, titled *Taking Root: My Life as a Child of Janusz Korczak, The Father of Children's Rights – The Biography of Shlomo Nadel*. The second, *White House in a Grey City*, written and illustrated by Itzchak Belfer, a child pupil of Korczak.

Next, I spoke of the Warsaw Ghetto where both I and Dr. Korczak were incarcerated. Me as a child, he as an aging doctor looking after 200 orphans. When the Nazis announced the deportation of children to the camps, Dr. Korczak was offered a reprieve but he refused saying, "My children need me." And he went with them to Treblinka death camp, where they all perished.

At the dedication, I said, "We desperately need more people like Korczak in today's world. To lead our children towards life and light, towards justice and hope. May this pavillion symbolize that the flame lit by this great man burns forever in the hearts of all those who love children."

Next we adjourned for a fantastic lunch which we ate in the shade of gigantic trees and in the aura of interesting discussions.

After lunch, Nancy Gabor took the visitors on a tour of the camp and soon it was time to return home after a day of wonders and miracles both of the mother nature and the human kind.

— Lillian Boraks-Nemetz, author and Holocaust survivor



Shana Tova!
Camp Miriam wishes the community
a healthy and peaceful New Year

Haborim Dror Camp Miriam would like to thank all those who helped to make the summer of 2016 one of the best.

Our wonderful Mazkirut and Tzevet (staff) 2016,
and the following individuals:

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|------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Bernie Simpson | Dr. Bob Bluman |
| David Levi | Dr. Aron Tischler |
| Daphne Nielsen | Dr. Jack Behrmann |
| Dr. Larry Barzelai | Dr. Ross Geddes |
| Dr. Zoe Pullan | Dr. Esther Grunau |
| Dr. Ran Goldman | Dr. Paula Ryan |
| Dr. Robin Friedlander | Dr. Debbie Gold |
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All those who work behind the scenes to make the magic of
Camp Miriam happen year after year after year.

Todah Rabah! Kol Hakavod!

"It takes a Village to raise up a child"

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