

Weinberg's community reach 'evident, endless'

December 15 ceremony will honor educator
for countless hours spent helping youth
turn into confident, ethical adults

by Deb Silverthorn
Special to TJP

A woman of valor — a true *aishet chayil* — Wende Weinberg, who has taught Dallas-area children from the aleph-bet to the tying of the knots on a tallis, will be paid tribute at 6pm, Thursday, December 15, at the Renaissance Dallas Richardson Hotel.

"Wende has touched so many and it's our truest honor to pay tribute to our rock and our leader who is such a light — always warm and welcoming," said Staci Rubin, who with her husband Paul and Kim and Dan Gold, are co-chairing the event. "Her essence has woven a solid foundation into our lives and her love of Jewish everything — is evident and endless."

A Philadelphia, Pennsylvania native who moved to Los Angeles as a toddler, Wende is the daughter of Kay and Marty Waterman, both of blessed memory, and the sister of Debbe and Bruce. A product of Los Angeles' public school system and graduate of Hamilton High School, she attended religious school at Temple Beth Am, her family's congregation, until she was 13. At a time when many children cease their formal Jewish instruction, she made the choice to continue her studies then at Sinai Temple and the LA Hebrew High School.

With degrees from California State Northridge, in Early Childhood Education and Jewish Studies, Wende earned masters' degrees from the University of Judaism in Day School Education and in school administration. There she met her b'shert, the future Rabbi Stefan Weinberg, when the two shared a halacha (Jewish laws) course.

The couple married in 1982 and, while Rabbi Weinberg finished his degree at the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York, Wende taught kindergarten at the Solomon Schechter School of Westchester and religious school at Beth El New Rochelle. From 1984 to 1988 the couple first made Dallas their home, he an assistant rabbi at Congregation Shearith Israel and later as their Associate Rabbi from 1990 until 1998; she at Solomon Schechter Academy (now Levine Academy). During the interim (1998-1999), he served Temple Beth Zion in Royal Palm Beach, Florida, and Wende was that congregation's religious school principal. In 1998, the couple became the founding rabbi and rebbetzin of Congregation Anshai Torah, growing the congregation from 125 member families, to its current 540. Partners always, they are a team of strength personified.

Finding spark in each child's life

"Wende is the most incredible partner I could imagine; a wonderful wife, a dedicated mother and rebbetzin who is the epitome of a role model," said Rabbi Weinberg. "She opens our home to everyone — her students and the

members of our congregation and community. She supports our daily minyan and has 35 people for a yontif meal — always comfortable in her role, always right by my side. We're blessed to have found each other." Rabbi Weinberg says the way she engages and is patient is the same as when the couple began. "I've always been intrigued by her ability to find that spark in each child that translates into the child's sense of being," he said. "Her determination, her stubbornness, her magnificent smile and her passion for everything Jewish have coalesced into the person that I love and that I have been privileged to share my life and create our wonderful family with. She from the big city and I from a small town, have woven together a life that has brought us so much joy."

In 1984, Wende was hired by Rabbi Ed Feinstein, an assistant rabbi at CSI and Solomon Shechter Academy's founding director, to teach first and third grades, and shortly thereafter to lead the Judaic Studies department. She has, but for the two years the Weinbergs were in Florida, given Dallas her all.

"The idea of a non-Orthodox day school was new and we made it up as we went along, but Wende definitely had an idea of what day school looked like. Wende has always talked to and listened to the needs of her students, her teachers, everyone she comes in contact with, making sure she knows the need. She has made sure that everyone knows they are a part of a People, responsible for their community. That is strength," said Rabbi Feinstein who left Dallas in 1990 to direct Camp Ramah in California and, since 1993, has served at Valley Beth Shalom in Encino, California. He has remained close to the Weinbergs and many in Dallas' Jewish community. "When you teach, you put yourself and your soul into the world. To gather together to express the value and how she has shaped our lives is marvelous."

Taking youth to Israel

Among the imprints Wende has made are the hundreds of eighth-grade students she has taken to Israel since 2004, always reflecting on her own first visit, in 1973 through the Los Angeles Bureau of Jewish Education's Summer Ulpan program — then, nearly the same age as her own charges. "Every year it's a different 'first' because it's the kids who make the trip. One child said 'I'm in Jerusalem and I don't know if I gave enough to my davening,' or the time a windstorm stopped the cable cars on Masada and we couldn't get right down and we huddled together in a cave.



In Israel 1973



"Life is about the moments; and if you look, you will find in each child when they 'get it,'" said Wende Weinberg, Director of Jewish Studies and Programs at Levine Academy, a pillar at the school for more than 30 years. Shown, of her legions of Levine students, also here with Rabbi Michael Katzman, (from left to right) Abigail Khalameizer, Ella Frydman, Lauren Hazan, Avery Wren, Shayna Rubinstein, Jonathan Persbes, Joshua Saland, and Aiden Mintszkovsky.

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It's when a young lady who was so emotional, again at Masada, and there happened to be a sofer (scribe) there who wrote her a bracha on a piece of parchment; he gave one to her and one to me — mine still a treasure. Israel is a fantastic place, but it's not always the moments, but the moments within," reminisces Wende.

Wende smiles at the memory of her first Schechter trip to Israel when she and one student, born in South Africa, were delayed on the way home because his paperwork — which got him into the country, wasn't deemed acceptable for his return. "I sent the group home and, because it was just before Shabbat, we stayed the weekend while his parents couriered to Israel the necessary papers. For him, it was an adventure. Extra time at the beach and museums — it was for me too — one of the best moments. Life is about the moments and how you manage them," she said. Despite battling cancer since June 2015, Wende — never one to miss teachable moments, or a trip to Israel, led last year's eighth-grade trip.

Results not always immediately evident

"When I think back on my teachers' wisdom, I hope — but am not sure — I took full advantage of the learning; but something in me then knew this would be my life," said Wende, who recalls her Hebrew High teachers, Rabbi Elliot Dorff and Rabbi Joel Rembaum and others now well-renowned, then beginning their careers. "If you look, you will find in each child when they 'get it.'"

"Getting it," for Wende comes in many forms. It's in the student who years later became a rabbi, another whose child's brit milah she attended. It's in the phone calls "just because" a memory came to the forefront, and from the email by a student, now at college, who wrote after the

Teaching Jonah Silverthorn to tie knots to help him create his own tallis, tying him forever to Jewish tradition



high holidays that, in Wende's merit, she'd attended services for the first time in years. "She realized how much her education had given her Jewishly and of how Judaism is the same, wherever you are in the world," said the glowing influencer. "You don't often see the impact until years later but we

see Jewish leadership, community leadership; in AIPAC, in BBYO, in USY. Whether it's religious or cultural — the connection remains."

That connection is fueled by her passion — a word used to describe Wende by everyone interviewed for this story — a word that hasn't wavered for one moment.

"Wende has and always will impart on the students, faculty and parents of Levine — and reaching far into Dallas' Jewish community, a dedication of *menschlichkeit* that is framed in her joyful, Jewish spirit and soul. She is indefatigable, impressively committed to every aspect of our school, as tireless and dedicated as anyone, and she's made the educational experience for so many one for the rest of their lives," said Levine Academy Head of School Tom Elieff. "To begin a sustainable endowment that will ensure the fullness and comprehensiveness of everything Wende is about, is an exquisite reflection of who she is to us all."

The Wende Weinberg Endowment Fund for Jewish Education will serve as an ongoing tribute to her extraordinary dedication, ensuring that children experience the richness of Levine Academy's Day School Education.

"Wende is our *lev* and *neshama* — our heart and soul," said Randy Fleisher, the father of two graduates and a Levine Academy past-president, who co-chairs the Endowment Fund with Sandy Haymann Marks. "There aren't enough 'thank you's' to be said to Wende, but the commitment of this endowment, of all those she has touched, will allow us to deliver in continuing all she brings." From Israel study and holiday celebrations to ensuring that children are taught by the most highly skilled and qualified educators, every donation to the fund will continue Wende's commitment to children for generations to come. Donations made before December 5 will be recognized in the tribute evening's program.

Passing on her values to next generation

"We have increased the quality of teaching and our program through the years, elevating our Judaic program so that it's not an add-on, but that in teaching our tradition, we give the very greatest level of excellence," said Wende. "We have grown in the last 30 years, but no matter the changes, at our core, we're a family, maintaining the value of how we come together as a family."

Among the greatest of honors is the respect children have for their parents. It is mirrored and apparent in her own three daughters—Danielle, Jordana and Adina.

All three young women are graduates of Levine Academy and Jewish high schools. Danielle, a high-tech sector account manager, who made aliyah four years ago, and her husband Gilad Zubery are expecting their first child next spring. "I feel incredibly privileged to look up to my mom who has provided me with a strong Jewish identity, a set of values that continue to guide me and a sense of passion that touches every aspect of my life," said Danielle. "Having watched her help build our amazing Jewish community, I'm proud of everything that she's accomplished and to be the daughter that looks up to her."

Jordana, following in Wende's footsteps but forging her own path, is a physical education teacher at the Denver Jewish day school. "It is easy to see where my passion for education comes from. I'm extremely fortunate to have such an intelligent, creative and strong role model. She's 'wonder woman' and her ability to get things done after a long day, still making sure to get dinner on the table and remembering to call to say 'hi,' are all incredible," said Jordana. "They said the apple didn't fall very far from the tree when I began teaching at a Jewish day school over five years ago and I've never thought twice about any other forum. The solid foundation my mom has instilled and laid out for me over the course of my life is so strong. I'm so fortunate to have her as a role model and influence, and I continue to be amazed by her every day."

Adina, who graduated with a degree in Jewish Studies and Communications from Wende's alma mater, now the American Jewish University, has returned to Dallas. "To talk about mom is to talk about a true commitment to Judaism and it's continuation through the generations. She has spent most of her life dedicated to teaching the values and beauty of Judaism to each generation of young Jewish adults in Dallas. I've spent most of my life an eager recipient of these lessons and I've watched and learned from her how to create a beautiful Jewish home and community and how to incorporate these values into my everyday life and identity to make the most of my life," she said. "Among so many other incredible qualities, she is a vision of humility, strength, kindness and generosity."



The Weinberg family has always stood behind each other, and when it comes to their wife and mother Wende – they couldn't glow more. (left to right) Adina, Gilad and Danielle Zubery, Rabbi Stefan, Jordana and, seated, Wende Weinberg.

The event committee produced a tribute book containing sentiments of love and gratitude in the form of prose, letters, photos and artwork, all of which were reproduced in a hard-bound book with copies given only to Wende and her family.

"Wende has helped sew the fabric of our children's Jewish lives, and this evening of tribute and the everlasting endowment fund created in Wende's honor allows us all the opportunity to share her very essence," said Sandy Haymann Marks. "She has sewn that fabric and believe me, she is an incredible seamstress."

Dinner reservations are \$180/ticket with \$54/tickets available to Solomon Schechter Academy/Levine Academy alumni under the age of 30 and current students. To RSVP, to donate to the Wende Weinberg Endowment Fund, or for more information visit <http://bit.ly/2fRzQ2Y>, or email mqendason@levineacademy.org.

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