



Summer for a lifetime

Congregation Anshai Torah Celebrates Educator Bob Westle's Career

by Deb Silverthorn

Having taught the *aleph, bet, and gimels* – the 10 commandments – and the holidays, for 45 years, Bob Westle is readying to graduate to the next moments of life as he retires from a lifelong career as teacher, principal, education director, and mentor. On May 22, Congregation Anshai Torah bid shalom to Bob with a wonderful celebration for 11 years as Education Director in an open to the community "Fairwell to Bob," a lover of all things on the golf course, morning of good wishes and celebration, from 10:30am to 1pm.

"Without a Jewish education for its children, the Jewish People have no chance for survival," said Bob. "Mind you, as an 11-year-old I got thrown out of my Hebrew School class but I found myself, and what Jewish life meant to me, first in my shul, USY, at Jewish summer camp, and in college. By the time I was in college, the 'rebellious' kid in me was looking at a career in Jewish service and it's been the most important thing I could have done."

Spanning four decades, Bob has nurtured young minds and hearts, introducing children to the treasures of a Jewish education in each of the schools he directed. Affectionately known as "Mr. Bob," he captivated children with his wit, sarcasm, and genuine regard for their well-being.

"While Bob will be remembered by the many children who benefitted from his passion for Jewish education, 'becoming' a latke, Judah Maccabee, or Haman, he always brought a smile to our children's faces and countless adults will always cherish the time spent with him in the classroom," said Congregation Anshai Torah's Rabbi Stefan Weinberg. "Bob's sense of humor, coupled with his breadth of knowledge, offered every student, young and not-so-young an engaging experience dedicated to Jewish learning."

A native of Philadelphia, PA who grew up in Norfolk, VA and Toms River, NJ, Bob is the son of the late Esther and Erwin and brother to Arthur, Tom, and Judy. He was raised at Congregation Bnai Israel where his father was involved in the Men's Club, his mother in Sisterhood, and his social life revolved around the synagogue.

With degrees from Yeshiva University and Spertus Institute for Jewish Learning and Leadership, Bob began his career at the Marlboro Jewish Center in New Jersey. He has been recognized in his career with many honors including a Conservative Jewish Educator certificate, a Permanent Principal and Hebrew Teacher's License by JESNA/Jewish Education Service of North America.

Bob and his Diane, his wife of almost 40 years, have spent their entire careers in education, from the time they met at the bat mitzvah of her cousin, whose family he was friends with. The two, who "dated" by phone for six months, got engaged when Bob realized the phone bill was ridiculous and he'd rather be with her in person. They met in December of 1975 and were married six months later, planting a family tree with branches of sons Scott and Andrew, and Andrew's wife Jamie and grandchildren Ella and Zoe.

Making their way across the country – the Westles, who lived first as a couple in St. Petersburg, FL, have made impacts on Jewish students in Albuquerque, NM, Tucson, AZ, and here in Dallas and Plano. Bob's teaching fingerprints are on the hearts and lesson plans of preschoolers through adults as he's both led classes and created curriculum for all ages.

"It is not an understatement to say that my entire family of Torah readers owes it to Bob's teaching, mentorship, and care - and for the gift he gave me again and again. When our congregation was writing a new Torah, I bought the word *terumah*, meaning gift – also the name of the Torah portion for my *bar mitzvah*, in his honor for the great gift he bestowed upon me," said attorney Howie Slomka who was a student of Bob's at Congregation B'nai Israel in St. Petersburg, FL, and who now belongs to Congregation Shearith Israel in Atlanta.

Slomka treasures the *tikkun*, a book of Torah scroll text, used when learning to chant Torah portions) that Bob gave him so he could continue his *leining* (chanting of Torah). "I read in camp, college, and ever since," said Slomka.

"We've loved being a couple whose life has revolved around our kids and everybody else's, no matter where we've been. We've embraced, and been embraced, in every community we've lived in and the families have all become ours," said Diane, who retired in 2015 after a decade of teaching at the Levine Academy.

"For 40 years we have focused on synagogue life and Judaism as our foundation, following the example set by both of our parents and we've loved every bit, and everywhere, that we've been."

Bob and Diane indeed have followed a legacy and set it forward as well as their son Scott – Rabbi Scott Westle – is the Rabbi-in-Residence at the Abraham Joshua Heschel Day School in Northridge, CA.

"This is definitely the 'family biz' and I have a lot of pride working in Jewish education," said Rabbi Westle. "When I was a kid, we lived in cities with very small Jewish populations and most of the time I wouldn't say out loud what my Dad did for a living."

That changed when the then young Scott overheard a 90-year-old bat mitzvah student of his father's say that he had changed her life. "As I got older, and entrenched in my own Jewish experiences, I realized everything that meant so much to my parents, also meant so much to me."

When Rabbi Westle was ordained at the Ziegler School of Rabbinic Studies at American Jewish University, it was his father who introduced him to the *Beit Din*, the panel of judges, a role usually reserved for rabbis. "It was an incredibly powerful moment because to me, Dad really *is* my rabbi and my parents my first and foremost teachers about Jewish life."

Echoing those sentiments is son Andrew, who looks forward to welcoming his parents, and their pup "Oreo," to their new home, once again reuniting the group. "My father shaped my Jewish identity. By the sheer nature of his job and his devotion to living an observant Jewish life, I was given the foundation and blueprint to follow from an early age. My knowledge and experiences are something that I can pass down to my children to give them the same opportunity that I was given," he said.

"As I grew older, my father's love for his career inspired me to find something that I was passionate about and he has always been supportive of my choices and proud of my accomplishments as an attorney," said Andrew. "As a parent, I constantly find myself saying things to my daughters that my father said to me and I can honestly say that my love for my children is influenced by the love that he has always shown."

"To Bob, I extend my warmest regards for your dedication to Anshai Torah. Your passion for Jewish education never wavered and as you enter into this new phase of life I hope you will always be able to appreciate the difference you made in so many families' Jewish lives," said Rabbi Weinberg. "I trust you will carry with you a deep sense of fulfillment, having dedicated your life to one of the most rewarding professions on this earth. The Jewish people will always be indebted to you for your service to our people."

May you and Diane enjoy much good health over the years to come; may your grandchildren constantly put a smile on your face; and may you spend some quality time on the golf course in the bright sun of Arizona. Your legacy has been established at Anshai Torah."

Retiring – well sort of, since Bob already has two classes lined up at the Phoenix Bureau of Jewish Education, where he'll teach "Intro to Judaism" and the "*Alef Bet* of Torah." "I'm at the end of my career, not the end of teaching. It's what I do – I can't quit cold turkey," he said. "To me, the key is the essence of Shabbat, the essence of Pesach, living *gimilut chasadim* – doing acts of love and kindness, and a true love for Israel. I learned long ago that it has to be relevant to be real and passed on, and I hope my life, and my love of learning has been that real."



Thank You...

On behalf of Diane and myself, I want to thank our Anshai Torah family for the beautiful and heartwarming reception in honor of my retirement. I will always cherish the memories that I take away from Anshai Torah and we greatly appreciate the beautiful Agam sculpture. A special thank you to Jessie Cohen for the video and to Sheryl Billman and Lisa Olschwanger for putting the [entire celebration](#) together. I would also be remiss for not thanking Rabbi Weinberg for his friendship, guidance and being my sounding board these past 11 years.

I learned a long time ago that in Hebrew we don't say good-bye but rather *h'itraot* . . . until we see each other again. .

Bob