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Comedian Pamela Schuller performs at BB360's annual BB Bash gala Saturday, Apr. 27 at Avenue Portland. The organization, previously known as BB Camp, unveiled its new branding and name at the event. (Courtesy BB360)

BB360 unveiled

Oregon institution takes on new name at annual celebration gala

By **ROCKNE ROLL**
The Jewish Review

One of the Pacific Northwest's most beloved Jewish institutions has a new name.

B'nai B'rith Camp announced at their annual BB Bash Saturday, Apr. 27 that the organization is rebranding to BB360. The new identity incorporates all the ongoing activities that are run by BB Camp and positions the organization as "A New Jewish Umbrella Over the Pacific Northwest" with the slogan "Camp. Community. Connection."

It's a change that's been eight years in the making,

the end of a search for the answer to a question that seems simple enough but ends up being more complicated: How does an organization that does so much succinctly describe what it does?

BB360 Chief Executive Officer Michelle Koplan explained that the scope of the branding issue came into focus during meetings with those most deeply connected to the organization in the rebranding project's early days.

"The reality is that most of our stakeholders at that

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Rabbi Mel remembered for 'interest in people'

By **ROCKNE ROLL**
The Jewish Review

It's unusual for someone to leave the impact on a community that Rabbi Mel Young, z"l, left on Portland. For almost everyone who does so, it takes a whole career, or even a whole lifetime.

For Rabbi Young, who passed away Sunday, Mar. 31 at the age of 72, it took just five years.

The eldest son of a pair of Holocaust survivors, Rabbi Young spent most of his life in California, working in education. He was working in Pasadena when he met the woman who became his wife of 36 years, Linda Young.

"I don't know if it was love at first sight, but I just knew that this was a good man. I could tell from that effervescent smile and his gentle presence," Young said of her husband. "I can't emphasize enough that he had a genuine interest in people. He wanted to hear their stories and find out about their backgrounds. It could be someone in a grocery store that

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was a complete stranger; he befriended people everywhere and he cared tremendously about other people's lives."

Rabbi Young's first cancer diagnosis came in 2005 and led to the surgical removal of his kidney. By 2009, however, the cancer was back and had metastasized to his chest. Most people don't consider a career change in such a situation, but Rabbi Young retired from education to begin taking classes at the Academy for Jewish Religion California in Los Angeles.

"He was wanting to take a class here, a class there, thinking maybe chaplaincy," Linda Young recalled. "The president of the school said, 'You're not a chaplain. You're destined to become a rabbi.'"

Eight years later, Rabbi Young was ordained. Rabbi Sarah Rensin took classes with him at AJRCA.

"Every time I walked into a classroom with him, he was always smiling," she recalled. "He loved the classes, and he loved teaching."

Despite the joy his rabbinical studies brought him, Rabbi Young was still sick. Living in Pasadena but receiving treatment at Cedars-Sinai Medical Center in Beverly Hills meant that the Youngs were spending a lot of time in the car – too much.

Linda Young's parents live in Vancouver, British Columbia, and she said Rabbi Young "didn't want to go to a sunny climate." He was referred to Oregon Health Science University for continued treatment and the couple moved to Portland in 2019.

Though he was amid cancer treatment, it is unsurprising that Rabbi Young was soon looking for a way to serve his new community. The opportunity soon presented itself.

"In medical appointments, he felt like he was getting support while he was in those settings, but when he would walk out the door from those, he felt pretty alone. He had started searching for a cancer support group in Portland," recalled Missy Fry, Lead Aging and Adult Services Clinician at Jewish Family & Child Service "He just felt that the cancer support group offerings in Portland were pretty limited, so he started to wonder how he could create one for the Jewish community."

After a meeting with Rabbi Barry Co-



Rabbi Mel Young, right, is embraced by a Jewish Family & Child Service client in this undated photo. (Courtesy JFCS)

hen, then Portland's Jewish Community Chaplain, the pair started a support group through JFCS that Rabbi Young continued to participate in through the end of his life.

"Rabbi Mel was just one of the most humble, selfless people. I say that without any exaggeration," Fry said. "He had mentioned that he often felt like telling his story to others felt very supportive to him, and I think that he wanted to create opportunities for other people to have that experience as well. His hope was basically to create a group that would just bring people together."

It would have been notable if that had been the full extent of his service to Portland's Jewish community. But it's just scratching the surface.

"When I first met him, I felt very like honored that he was working with us," JFCS Volunteer Coordinator Sammy Monk said. "For him to want to work with us and continue to help people despite all his health challenges, I just found very touching. And I felt very lucky to get to work with him."

Rabbi Young started helping drive JFCS clients to activities and medical appointments. It was not on an occasional, when-I'm-up-for-it basis – he was the most active volunteer driver in the pool.

"I started calling him the Commis-

sioner of Transportation because he drove so many clients," Monk said. "He like to drive Holocaust survivors to the Cafe Europa events, like lunch in the sukkah and the Hanukkah party and the picnic. He would always stay and socialize with people and be a helping hand, which is really wonderful. Volunteers aren't required to stay when they drive someone, but he just wanted to keep being around people."

Rabbi Young was also on the planning committee for JFCS's senior prom, but driving Holocaust survivors was special work for him. Monk recalled that he had said it was like having his grandparents in the car. He formed friendships with the clients he drove; even when they were Russian-speaking survivors, Rabbi Young made connections that transcended language barriers.

"Even when he was in and out of the hospital, he was still driving people," Monk recalled.

Rabbi Young was also active with the Oregon Board of Rabbis, helping to teach the Introduction to Judaism class put on by the OBR.

"I always appreciated having Rabbi Mel teach the first class of the term, as he would help the students break-the-ice right from the start. His love for Judaism

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was infectious,” JoAnn Bezodis, the OBR’s administrator said. “Despite the health challenges, he never lost his passion for teaching.”

He had plenty to share, and not just in the classroom.

“By the time he hit Portland, you know, he had done a lot of living, and he was, by nature, an educator, and he was a very reflective person,” Rabbi Josh Rose said. “So, he had a lot of wisdom in him.”

That wisdom came out in more than just conversations, Rabbi Rose explained – it was in the way that Rabbi Young lived.

“I’m trying to avoid cliché, but he was a Jew who walked the walk,” Rabbi Rose said. “With his very being and his very person, he embodied Jewish values without preaching too much about it. He just did it.”

And he did it with a smile – even as his health continued to worsen. A separate cancer, this one in his esophagus, was diagnosed in 2020, requiring a 13-hour surgery and months of recovery.



Rabbi Mel Young, pictured at the Jewish Family & Child Service Schmoozeapalooza adult prom Sunday, Oct. 22, 2023. (Courtesy JFCS)

Last year, his kidney cancer spread to his pancreas and intestines.

“He was always smiling,” Monk recalled. “He would talk to me about all his medical issues and how chal-

lenging it was and how painful it was, and I very much remember him smiling, no matter what.”

“He defied the odds for so long and pushed himself forward and he never

complained,” Linda Young said. “He was passionate about life and learning, and he wanted to know so much more. There was so much more for him to discover, and that kind of propelled him forward.”

After surgery in January, Rabbi Young went on hospice care and returned home. Rabbi Rensin had left her position at the hospice provider that served Rabbi Young not long before Rabbi Young went on hospice. They connected through messages as Rabbi Rensin checked in with her former colleagues to ensure Rabbi Young was well cared for.

“He wanted me to come and see him,” Rabbi Rensin recalled. “But he just declined too quickly.”

“You’re never ready for this time,” Linda Young said. “You’re never ready.”

Contributions in Rabbi Young’s memory can be made to the Kidney Cancer Association or to JFCS.

“I will hold him dear for the rest of my life,” Monk said. “He’s a great example of the person that I want to be.”



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