

Silver Linings: Alan & Ellen Klein

- [BECKY RASPE | SPECIAL SECTIONS STAFF REPORTER](#)
braspe@cjn.org
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Alan and Ellen Klein

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Married for 52 years, Alan and Ellen Klein are used to seeing a lot of each other and do many activities together. Their love for volunteering is no different – the couple gives back to their community as a pair, along with having individual activities too.

The Kleins spend time volunteering at their synagogue, Anshe Chesed Fairmount Temple in Beachwood, helping people feel welcome during Shabbat services, as well as giving quick tours. They also volunteer at the Cleveland Metroparks North Chagrin Reservation doing crafts with kids, as well as being members of the Forest City Hebrew Benevolent Association.

An ambassador at the Cleveland Clinic Beachwood Family Health Center, Alan assists patients needing directions and escorting throughout the facility, or just spending time with children visiting their families. He also has experience volunteering with Hillcrest Meals-on-Wheels, delivering meals to residents unable to do it themselves.

“My favorite part of the day (at the hospital) is seeing children stopping by the fountains on the first floor,” he said. “I try to brighten their day by giving them a coin to toss in the water as they make a wish. I have a pocketful of coins just for that purpose.”

As for Ellen, she serves as co-executive vice president of the Women of Fairmount Temple, where she helps plan the group’s activities. She also volunteers through the National Council of Jewish Women, where she loves meeting and interacting with “a group of dedicated and caring women.”

CJN: Why did you choose to volunteer in retirement?

Ellen: One of my priorities is to get like-minded people together. My goal is to find interesting people in Cleveland – which Cleveland has a lot to offer. And to give back is another goal. Though people always say that, it's true. It's something I do with all of my activities, especially through NCJW's acts of kindness.

Alan: I just enjoy meeting and talking with people. At Fairmount Temple, we will greet people and I just like to interact, especially when someone comes in. I like to show them around and answer any questions. I find myself feeling like an ambassador wherever I volunteer. It gives people an insight into what we do and why we care about the community.

CJN: How did you decide what you wanted to do, especially since you're both involved in very different things?

Alan: I tried different things, and some weren't a good fit. So, I explored, and I said, "Gee, this is fun, I'll try this." And it worked out well for me in my current endeavors. Things like that were fun and we enjoyed the camaraderie and talking to various people. Other organizations and volunteer associations did not interest me after I got started. It was picking and choosing different things until I was comfortable, and where I could make a difference.

Ellen: I was also in some other organizations. I try to make a difference. I always thought I would never have my name on a building. That's just not me. I want to make a difference with people directly. It makes me happy.

CJN: Why is it important for you to volunteer together?

Alan: We love each other and can't get enough of each other. I always considered Ellen my best friend, so from that standpoint, it's an easy fit to have her not only in my life as my wife and friend but as my co-volunteer. It amazes me how much time and effort she puts in without needing recognition. She does it for others.

Ellen: Sometimes, things just happen. I never realized all that we do together and with other volunteers. We have so many memories and it's a pleasure. It's a lot of fun.

CJN: Do you have a favorite volunteer memory?

Ellen: Probably when a naturalist brought a live owl from the Cleveland Metroparks to the temple's religious school and early childhood center. The kids dissected owl pellets and the parents got into it too. They had never seen one and they were having the best time. The kids wanted to take the bones home. It was so interesting. But, I just have so many (good memories). It's been one great program after another. It's hard to top them.

Alan: One memory that sticks out to me is when I'm over at the Clinic, people come from all over, even out of state. It amazes me what they think not only of the Clinic generally, but also the Beachwood health center. When making a wish at the fountain, one little boy said to his father that the hospital looked like a hotel. That makes a world of difference as people feel comfortable coming here to confront their medical issues.

CJN: How does Judaism play a part in your involvement?

Ellen: That is our main inspiration, actually, without thinking about it. It's giving back to the community, whether it is Jewish or secular. It is just part of us.

Alan: It is also a matter of our upbringing too – although we didn't know each other, we both grew up being members of the temple. It was a part of life growing up too, it was a part of who we are, where we come from and where we are going. It's our Jewish identity.

Looking to the future of their retirement, the Kleins said they expect to do more of what they're currently involved in.

"We'll continue doing what we're doing," Alan said. "But then again, who knows what else we might do. We're open to the opportunity."

