

DONOR SPOTLIGHT

People are the heart of the J. In the Donor Spotlight we provide a deeper look at some of the special gibborim (heroes) who help create the “community” of the J. Whether through contributions of time or donations, and often both, these special contributors regularly perform acts of chesed (loving kindness) and have helped to shape the J over the years and decades. Jim Guller and Mitch Waks met in BBYO years ago. Little did they know they were creating a friendship that would reappear in their lives as adults. Now as partners running Cooperative Home Care, the pair is giving back to the J.

Introducing Jim Guller & Mitch Waks of Cooperative Home Care

Ericka Zoll, Director of Development: How did the two of you meet?

Mitch Waks: Jim Guller and I first met in BBYO [B’nai B’rith Youth Organization] at our Albert Einstein chapter. We would get together every Tuesday night at the J. Most of the chapter stayed in touch throughout high school, college and even as adults. We also went to high school together at Parkway North.

EZ: What is Cooperative Home Care and what do you do?

Jim Guller: Cooperative Home Care’s business is to help people stay independent and rehabilitate through home care services. We make home care happen because we work with any funding, any amount of care and any skill level. As the President of the company, I focus on the success of our existing business and the services we offer including skilled services for Medicare, personal care programs through Medicaid and private service through long term care insurance, grants programs and self pay. One other service we offer is permanent placement and temporary staffing for health care organizations.

MW: As the CEO, my role at Cooperative is as the visionary of the company. I determine the path that our company will take to meet its objectives while at the same time, defining those objectives. It’s looking at the big picture, learning and knowing the industry trends to make sure we use them to our advantage. For me, it’s about setting the tone and culture of the company, like sponsorships to worthy causes and organizations, so we can give back. My role also includes growth and acquisitions, mergers and building outside relationships. Our sponsorships show that we have a commitment not just to our patients but to the community at large.

EZ: What did you do professionally before you acquired Cooperative Home Care?



J Associates President Eleanor Wolff accepts a donation from Jim Guller and Mitch Waks of Cooperative Home Care.

MW: My mother-in-law started a version of Cooperative that was doing in home tutoring for the developmentally disabled. That was her only clientele at the time. I was doing investment sales and I saw a lot of white papers come across my desk that said we should invest our goods and services in the aging population. At the time, my mother and father-in-law wanted to take time off. She was tutoring 6 – 12 clients. Because I had an education degree, my mother-in-law asked me to fill in while she was gone. I came in and began tutoring. It was then that I had the revelation that this tutoring business could be expanded from in-home tutoring to in-home health care. When she returned, she really didn’t want to do this, but I made her a deal that she wouldn’t have to do anything other than keep tutoring and I would take care of the rest. She really believed the money wasn’t important and people were what mattered. Her beliefs were how we set our value system. She agreed to continue to do in-home tutoring and I would take the company to in-home health care. All our growth has happened in the senior home care market to keep people in their homes because “there’s no place like home care.”



JG: I started my career at IBM in New York in corporate finance and then sales as an international account manager. I moved back to St. Louis in 1994 to work for Citation Computer Systems as a Director of Marketing and Business Planning. Then, I spent two years at Express Scripts as Vice President of Marketing. After six months of working at Cooperative Home Care as Vice President of Sales and Marketing, Mitch invited me to join him as partner and 50% owner.

EZ: Tell me a little about each of your involvements in the St. Louis community and our Jewish Community as a child growing up in St. Louis as well as what you’ve done as adults.

JG: Growing up, my family belonged to Shaare Zedek and that’s where I had my Bar Mitzvah. As a teenager I was very active in BBYO at the J, which is where Mitch and I met. Upon my return to St. Louis as an adult, we joined B’nai Amoona and sent all three kids through Solomon Schechter Day School. I served on the Schechter Board, on the Executive Committee and was president of the Board for two years.

MW: In addition to BBYO, I went to all the J Day Camps. And for many, many years, I attended Camp Sabra. My family belonged to Shaare Zedek where I had my Bar Mitzvah, but later we moved to B’nai Amoona while I attended Epstein Hebrew Academy. As a kid, I took several trips to Israel to visit family. My roots were very well established in Judaism. As an

adult, when looking for a new synagogue to be married in, I took my then fiancé around to several different congregations. On the search we stumbled upon a small congregation meeting in the basement of a church (CRC). This was in 1988 and she loved it. We joined CRC and got married two years later. At CRC, I became involved in a variety of activities and eventually joined the Board (Reform Jewish Academy). Both my kids went to RJA and I feel it was the best thing I could do for them. My wife was the first president and founder of the Parents Association and I joined their Board. Our kids also went to [Camp] Sabra and were involved in youth groups and BBYO.

EZ: This past year, you made a significant contribution to the J, as a sponsor of the St. Louis Jewish Book Festival and as the Presenting Sponsor of the J Associates fundraiser – Dancing in the Lou. What is it about the J that interests you and makes you want to lend your support?

JG: I feel it's important to give back to the Jewish community that has been such a large part of my life. One way is to support organizations like the J that have been integral in my life. The other reason for our company to become a sponsor and lend support is so we can be a resource or an advocate for people that face challenges of dealing with aging parents or older adults in general. We know the services we offer at Cooperative Home Care can be of tremendous value to improve quality of life. We hope our sponsorship helps those in the community to know about us so we can become that resource.

MW: I think the J IS the Jewish community in St. Louis. It is the hub where everything happens that is not religion based. Of course we need to support it. It is our community by definition, whether it's the Adult Day Center, Day Camps, BBYO – everything the J does supports our community.



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in the
lou**

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The Pageant

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