

Up Close: Janet Wechter

Family, friends and community service have been central to Janet Kent Wechter's life. Although her move to El Paso in 1989 from Louisiana was originally a temporary one to help her sister, Mona Goldberg, she found a nice Jewish community and a sisterhood of women in the National Council of Jewish Women and her future husband, Randy Wechter. They have two adult children, Ryan (29) & Jenny (27), who grew up surrounded by the Jewish Community Center, the El Paso Jewish Academy and family Shabbat dinners with grandparents Sylvia and Aaron Wechter. Randy and Janet love traveling and follow The Grateful Dead, now Dead and Co. The music is magical. Aside from her family commitments, the symphony, garden club, Jewish non-profits and interior design work have occupied much of Janet's time. She enjoys practicing yoga and meditation, hanging out with her five dogs, reading and watching the latest series on Netflix.

What value(s) do we need most in the world today?

Our world needs so many things right now, but if I have to choose just one value, then I choose one that incorporates so many others and that value is INTEGRITY. Our world needs to know and do the right thing. Good and honest principles with strong moral character could do wonders for the world.

Who is your favorite Jewish hero and why?

My favorite Jewish hero is my dad, Sidney Kent; he taught me to live with integrity, how to love, give and forgive. A Jewish hero who inspired me is Ruth Dayan, an Israeli social activist who founded the Maskit Fashion & Decorative Arts House in 1954. It was a way to create jobs for the immigrants making Aliyah and Arab refugees while preserving Jewish ethnic crafts and culture of the various

communities living in Israel. She was the first wife of Israeli Foreign Minister and General, Moshe Dayan. She died at 103, Feb 22, 2021. She dedicated her life bridging cultural divides.

What's the best thing about being a part of our Jewish community?

The best thing about being a part of our Jewish community is coming together to celebrate and worship together. And in times of crisis, we can always depend on one another. I only wish we could celebrate our differences as much as our similarities. Less judgment, more tolerance, compassion and inclusiveness is what every community needs.

Why is it important to be involved in the Jewish community?

It is important to be involved in the Jewish community because we need one another and when we engage and get involved, the quality of our lives improve greatly. As Elie Wiesel once said, "Jews alone are vulnerable. Jews must not be alone."

What made you decide to start your own non-profit?

As my tenure on the boards of the Jewish Federation, The Jewish Community Foundation of El Paso, and The El Paso Symphony Orchestra were coming to a close, I realized I needed a break from board meetings and commitments. Randy and I traveled in our RV to beautiful places throughout our amazing country and continued our 34 year journey following our favorite band, Dead & Co (once The Grateful Dead.) My daughter, Jenny, had asked, "What do you want to do now, Mom?" She mentioned I might integrate my passion for creating beautiful spaces with community service. That got the wheels moving in my head and after telling others my ideas, they wanted to be involved. So with their support, I founded Harmonious



Home which just launched a great website, www.harmonioushometx.org.

Describe your non-profit and its goals?

Harmonious Home is a new non-profit which helps people transition from shelters and transitional living centers to independent living. We work with the Center Against Sexual and Family Violence to identify our clients. We furnish and decorate the apartments, giving people a nice home and hope for a better life. It's a privilege to live in a safe home, but interior design can significantly evoke happiness, inspire confidence, empathy, pride, creativity, security and energy. We offer this to our clients.

What changes have you seen in our community and what are your hopes for the future?

Our Jewish community, like so many others, is getting smaller. Jewish education has been through ups and downs, but now we have The J Center for Early Learning and The Cherry Hill School to offer our youngest generations. I was sad to see UTEP's Inter-American Jewish Studies Program become a memory. It's programs like this that need strong financial

support in order to survive. The pandemic brought new challenges, and we all found ways to adapt virtually. My hope is that our younger generations get involved taking leadership roles to ensure the future of our Jewish institutions. I've always hoped for a shared campus that houses both the Reform and Conservative communities, early childhood and elementary schools. And who knows? Maybe Jewish El Paso would have a better chance at not just surviving, but thriving!

What have you been working on since your presidency and work with the Jewish El Paso Board?

The early months of the Pandemic and the end of my presidency coincided; events were postponed and everything went virtual. I had an opportunity to slow down and center myself. I stayed busy with online classes, interior design projects, completed a Kundalini Yoga Teacher Training and worked on Harmonious Home. I am looking forward to staying involved with Jewish El Paso and growing our local Lions of Judah chapter, one in a dynamic international philanthropic group of women turning 50!

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