



Henry Topel

Henry Topel, Political, Business and Community Leader

Having grown up on the lower east side of New York City at the knee of his Grandfather, Rabbi Abraham Cohen, Henry was a bright and energetic Yeshiva boy and wise beyond his years. He met Phyllis Lee Parkes of Atlantic City, NJ during shore leave while serving honorably aboard a Clipper ship in the US Navy. The two married on February 5, 1950 and had two sons, Avrim Max and David Louis. Avrim married Vicki Lynn Meier and also had two children, Henry's grandchildren, Cory Lynn Topel and Andrew Lee Topel.

After moving to Wilmington, Delaware, Henry and Phyllis began their partnership in life, business and community service, becoming leaders in the Wilmington community. And what a formidable team they made. Phyllis served as President of the Sisterhood of Congregation Beth Shalom and a variety of community organizations while also serving as speech writer and strategist for her husband's shining political and business career. Although her untimely passing in 1992 left an irreplaceable void in the family, she had already taught profound lessons in love and respect, grounding her family and assuring that they would thrive in the years to follow - a tribute to the strong foundation she and Henry had created.

Henry's career and public life has always been a well-known and open book in the State of Delaware. If he agreed to come on board with any endeavor, whether business, charitable or community based, he gave it his all. As a young man, Henry's business acumen was apparent with groundbreaking projects such as Electra Arms, a state of the art development project which was the first all electric high-rise in the nation.

With a commercial portfolio in Delaware including hotels, office buildings, shopping centers, restaurants along Pennsylvania Ave. and Rte.202, his insight and achievements over a 50 year span have been characterized as smart business development coupled with strategic and responsible community planning.

Governor Charles Terry appointed Henry Chairman of the Delaware Real Estate Commission in 1968. He served on this pro-bono commission for over thirteen years under 4 governors, helping to re-write many of its rules and laws, improving the process of real estate transactions in general and better protecting Delawareans in pursuit of home ownership.

Henry's call to service was extraordinary and led him to the Democratic Party to fulfill his sense of duty. During his life he was involved in many pursuits on a national level, beginning with supporting his mentor Hubert Horatio Humphrey and chairing Senator John Glenn's Delaware presidential campaign.

In 1970 he was elected State Chairman of the Democratic Party, serving with distinction for eight years with an additional term as President of the Democratic State Chairs Association of the United States. In 1972, now Vice President Joseph R. Biden Jr., credits Henry with being one of his early mentors and giving him the green light to run for the United States Senate at the age of 29. In December of 1980 President Jimmy Carter awarded Henry a Presidential appointment to the national Advisory Community Investment Board and in 1995, he was selected by President William Jefferson Clinton as a delegate to the first White House Conference on Travel and Tourism.

Henry served as Vice Chairman of Beneficial National Bank for over fifteen years, and also on the Board of Commerce Bank, Delaware. Henry's charitable and community service activities are numerous and include serving on the Boards of the Boy Scouts of America and Delaware's Conference of Christians and Jews.

Thirty years ago Henry and a small group organized the Greater Wilmington Convention & Visitors Bureau. Henry served as Vice Chairman of the Bureau's Board of Directors for decades. Today, the Bureau is honored to maintain a distinguished twenty-eight member board of directors representing hotels, museums, the Committee of 100 and Delaware's most outstanding institutions, all an outgrowth of Henry's strategic vision and economic insight. Recognizing the significance of his contribution to tourism, in 1995 Governor Tom Carper inducted Henry to the Delaware Tourism Hall of Fame. Under his tenure on the Board of Directors, together with outstanding fellow Board members, the Bureau has grown from a vision to a vital institution - and from a humble caboose to a trailblazing engine propelling and supporting the state's economy. And on October 28, 2008 Governor Ruth Ann Minner and Wilmington Mayor James M. Baker honored Henry with State and Municipal Proclamations of gratitude and honor at a special ceremony held at Hagley Museum.

From helping to organize the original Blue and Gold All Star Game to assisting Governor Pete DuPont garner bipartisan support for the Delaware Financial Act that brought the credit card companies to Delaware, Henry's

dedication to supporting his state was unsurpassed.

In recent years, Henry received the Bill Frank Gridiron Award for civic service, and was inducted into the Delaware Real Estate Hall of Fame. And in June, 2012, Governor Jack Markell awarded Henry Topel with the Order of the State, the highest award for meritorious service a governor can grant.

At the core of Henry's vast community and business experience was his steadfast faith and his love, loyalty and devotion to family and close friends. Henry Topel touched many Delawareans lives in a positive way during his life, and he will be dearly missed.

Funeral services will be held 11:00 am Friday, May 30, 2014 at Congregation Beth Shalom, 1801 Baynard Blvd, Wilmington, DE 19802. A shiva service will also be held at Congregation Beth Shalom on Friday, May 30, 2014 at 4:00 PM. In lieu of flowers, contributions may be made to The Attic Youth Center, 255 S. 16th St, Phila, PA 19102 (www.atticyouthcenter.org/donate)