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JCRC awardees divided on politics, but united on Israel — and love

by dan pine, staff writer

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He's a lifelong Republican. She's a self-described "Obama Mama." And no, they're not some sort of Bizarro James Carville and Mary Matalin.

They are Larry and Nancy Goldberg of Tiburon, the local Jewish community's bipartisan power couple. They may disagree on some political issues, but both love Israel and the Jewish people.

So much so, the Jewish Community Relations Council will honor the Goldbergs with its Tom Lantos Memorial Humanitarian Award, bestowed at the JCRC's "Behind the Scenes" gala Feb. 16 at the Jewish Community Center of San Francisco.



Larry and Nancy Goldberg

The Goldbergs are only two of the evening's honorees. The JCRC will also present its Courageous Leadership Award to the Rev. Cecil Williams of Glide Memorial Church; the Rita Semel Jewish Civic Leadership Award to LGBT activist Alvin Baum; and the Advocate Award to Yitzhak Santis, the agency's longtime Middle East Project director, who recently made aliyah.

All have racked up the hours in support of JCRC, which works with the broader community to advocate on behalf of Israel and issues of concern to the Jewish community. All have made many friends in the Bay Area Jewish community and beyond. And like their fellow honorees, the Goldbergs have put in countless volunteer hours with JCRC because they believe in the mission.

And each other.

"We are a team," says Larry Goldberg. "We have some differences of opinion on issues, and many things we agree on. We've been supportive of each other from the beginning, and we never let politics get in the way of the relationship."

"Both come to their activism as an expression of their Jewish values," says Abigail Michelson Porth, associate director of JCRC. "They also illustrate the ability to have civil dialogue among

those with divergent viewpoints that you find at JCRC. In that way, they exemplify JCRC's consensus building."

Goldberg has been a JCRC board member, traveled to Israel on JCRC missions and, along with his wife, chaired JCRC task forces and committees. The couple has traveled to Sacramento several times lobbying lawmakers as part of an annual effort co-sponsored by JCRC and the Jewish Public Affairs Committee.

He lobbies the Republicans, she corners the Democrats.

The issues that unite them mirror those the organized Jewish community cares about: fighting poverty and inequality, strengthening education and civil rights, and advocating for Israel.

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“Both of us share a strong interest in human rights,” says Nancy Goldberg, who also serves as president of the S.F.-based Jewish Family and Children’s Services. “We both feel of one mind about gay marriage, women’s rights, the need to take care of those less fortunate. Larry is almost as socially liberal as I am.”

He describes himself as a moderate Republican, so moderate that he co-chaired Republicans for Clinton-Gore in the 1992 presidential election. But for the most part, he subscribes to the party’s articles of faith, from low taxes to strong defense and backing Israel 100 percent.

“I am a lifelong Zionist,” says the Rhode Island native, “and to be connected with the principal voice of the Zionist ideal in the community [JCRC] has special meaning.

“JCRC has been there all the way, including fighting the BDS [boycott-divestment-sanctions] movement.”

His wife, a native San Franciscan, feels passionately about Israel, too, but aligns herself more with those that challenge Israel to live up to the highest of Jewish values.

“There’s more than one way when you love something, and both of us love Israel,” she says, adding, “There are many things there I disagree with, but I don’t live there, and I’m not the one going out my front door worrying about being attacked every day.”

Larry Goldberg’s zeal for Zionism goes back decades. He co-founded a Jewish community relations council in Rhode Island in the 1960s. He was an activist in the Soviet Jewry movement, and always turned to JCRCs as an outlet for his activism.

His life changed when he met Nancy at a United Jewish Communities General Assembly in 1979. “We met on a Thursday,” he recalls, “talked about getting married on Sunday, got engaged, took six months to work out the details.” It wasn’t the first marriage for either, but it was the last.

“Nancy is a life-fulfilling proponent of tikkun olam,” Larry says. “She lives it night and day. The Internet is never turned off. When we watch movies, she’s got her laptop or iPad on, doing [volunteer work] at the same time.”

His wife has a ready explanation for her taste for volunteerism. It has nothing to do with political parties.

“I found out who I was when I married Larry,” she says. “I would not be getting this award if it weren’t for him. I would not be president of JFCS or working against human trafficking or domestic violence if it weren’t for Larry. That’s not a Republican or Democrat thing. That’s about someone who believes in you.”

The JCRC’s “**Behind the Scenes**” gala takes place 6 p.m. Feb. 16 at the JCC of San Francisco, 3200 California St., S.F. Individual tickets: \$125. Information: <http://www.jcrc.org>.

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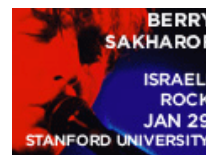
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