

Search ...

(913) 951 8425 chronicle@metromediapublishers.com (mailto:chronicle@metromediapublishers.com)



The KANSAS CITY jewishchronicle

(/)



📅 19 NOVEMBER 2015

Emotions run the gamut at dedication, Israel solidarity rally



Rita Blitt's 'Sending Love' sculpture now graces the Skywalk Memorial Plaza. Plaza. {mprestriction ids="1,3"}I am often asked to cover events that are not explicitly Jewish, so I'm always looking for the Jewish twist. There was more than one Jewish twist at this event. Three Jewish people sat next to the podium — artist Rita Blitt, former Mayor Richard Berkley and Sol Koenigsberg, skywalk survivor and fundraiser extraordinaire.

The dream of this memorial, nine years in the making and 34 years after the tragedy, came to fruition because of the Skywalk Memorial Foundation, Inc. It's a non-profit corporation committed to honoring and remembering the 114 people who lost their lives and those who were injured when the skywalks fell during a dance in the lobby of

Last week I attended two events on the same day, each with different purposes but with one thing in common. They were highly emotional. In each event you could plainly see the blood, sweat and tears that were an integral part of the each event.

The first was the Dedication Ceremony for the Skywalk Memorial



the former Hyatt Regency Hotel on July 17, 1981. Through the planning, design and construction of this permanent memorial, the foundation also seeks to recognize and honor the emergency/medical personnel, firefighters, police officers, public servants and others who so bravely responded to this unprecedented disaster.

Blitt was asked very early in the memorial's planning stages if she would create a sculpture, which she said she was very happy to do. The result is a 24-foot sculpture entitled "Sending Love," depicting two people dancing.

What most people don't know is that one of Blitt's inspirations for the sculpture was her fifth-grade teacher, Ruth Ann Angstead, who was injured when the skywalks collapsed.

"She was the first person who used the word 'create' in my life, and it was very, very exciting to me. To this day I can still feel the excitement in my body thinking about it," said Blitt of the encouragement "Miss Angstead" gave her regarding all artistic genres — including writing stories and poems in addition to drawing.

Blitt said the event was quite touching.

"I thought it was beautiful and I felt honored and happy to be a part of it."

Koenigsberg and his wife, Rosette, of blessed memory, were both at the dance that fateful night. He vividly recalls the sights and sounds of the evening and being buried under debris. Rosette was able to crawl out under her own power. He was not.

"I was pulled out and was in great pain. We were placed together on the sidewalk and triage was put into action. A photograph was taken of the two of us holding hands. That photo got an award and was published nationally and in some overseas countries," he said.

Koenigsberg always felt a memorial should be built and was involved with the project from its inception.

"It took both patience and tenacity to bring this project to a successful conclusion. All of the members of the Skywalk Memorial Board stayed committed. It took many of us campaigning to get it done. Attorneys, a few corporations, many individuals and the contributions of Kansas City, Missouri, and the city of Overland Park," he said. To Koenigsberg's surprise, during the ground-breaking ceremony for the memorial in July it was announced that an anonymous donor had pledged \$25,000 toward the memorial in his honor.

He may not have known about that pledge, but he was heavily involved in many others. Every single speaker at the podium, including Mayor Sly James, mentioned Koenigsberg's tenacity in getting the memorial built.

"Sol, without your help and fierce dedication, we wouldn't have been able to make this happen," said Brent Wright, chairman/president of the Skywalk Memorial Foundation.

Former Mayor Berkely stated, "Sol was persistent to try to get us to move ahead and he got this done!" Later, Berkely told me, "Did you notice no one even used his full name? It was always just Sol. He was that important."

When I asked Koenigsberg how it felt to be mentioned so often, he was very humble about his contributions, pointing to many others who were instrumental in making the memorial a reality.

The day itself was both happy and sad for Koenigsberg, as he is still grieving for his wife.