

Through tears and laughs, Allen Goldberg remembered

Was a past Federation president

By Neil Rudel

One of the most unique individuals ever to grace Altoona's Jewish community -- and its general community, really -- was laid to rest Jan. 11.

It's been 15 years since Allen Goldberg lived here, but when he passed away suddenly at age 80 in Naples, Fla., on Jan. 8, many of those whose lives he touched quickly arranged to be present to help honor a man who left a significant imprint. Family, friends and longtime members of the community packed the Smith Funeral Home on Broad Avenue.

Allen and his beloved wife, Marilyn, were members of Temple Beth Israel for 40 years. In addition, Allen served as president of the Greater Altoona Jewish Federation in 1991-92. The Goldbergs were instrumental in the formation of the Penn Mont Academy, a Montessori school encouraging independent learning, and were also founding pillars of the Blue Knob Ski Resort. Some 50 years later, both Penn Mont and Blue Knob are thriving parts of the Blair County community.

The son of Orthodox Jews, Allen and his four brothers grew up when downtown Altoona was bustling, when the Jewish community was more than three times its current size, when the Sunday School had 150 children and when the Jewish Memorial Center was a social and recreational hub.

The Goldbergs, who operated Altoona Welding Supply, were at the center of that activity. Allen's commitment to his family, faith, business and philanthropy was matched perhaps only by his extraordinary sense of humor.

He was beautifully eulogized by each of his three children -- daughter Terri and sons Martin and Andy -- and, through tears, each spoke about him as a father and about his values, and each offered humorous stories.

Andy remembers how many of his friends would visit the Goldbergs at their home on Fort Roberdeau Avenue in Altoona and, ever the jokester, Allen would leave doubt, Andy said, on "who was more mature -- my friends or my father."

Martin, a former professional tennis player and a member of the Blair County Sports Hall of Fame, spent countless hours on the tennis courts and on trips with his father. He playfully recited Allen's nicknames -- among them a reference to his skiing prowess in which he dubbed himself as "the flying Heeb[rew]." Allen, who played basketball and baseball (first base) at Altoona High School before enrolling at Penn State, also was part of a large tennis local contingent that called themselves "the Wipers."

Terri paid tribute to her father's love for Marilyn, who died 18 years ago as a result of a skiing accident, and current companion Linda Weiner, with whom Allen enjoyed a loving friendship in Bethesda, Md., for the past five years. Terri also read a note from Allen's oldest friend, Fay "Snooky" Schmitt, who is wintering in Hilton Head, S.C. and could not attend. Snooky helped introduce Allen to Marilyn, a Michigan graduate whose parents took a while to warm up to the idea of their new son-in-law.

Snooky related that she had many stories about Allen, many of which "probably can't be told today."

Rabbi Audrey Korotkin of Temple Beth Israel summed up Allen in her own fitting eulogy by concluding that "many children would have been blessed to have Allen as their father."

With his love of sports (particularly Penn State football) and the arts and his ability to fit into any crowd, he was easily the most popular parent around, often having to be admonished by Marilyn when he occasionally -- OK, more than occasionally -- crossed the line in his quest to entertain.

That personality is what made the funeral seem like a BBYO convention as numerous old friends who were active in the Jewish youth organization in the 1970s gathered. One, Chicago-area resident David Levinson, had just attended the funeral of Harry Rosenthal in Altoona on Sunday and, after flying home, he turned around two days later to be with the Goldbergs. "Allen and Marilyn were a special part of my life," David said.

Rabbi related a conversation Andy had with longtime family friend Harry Benjamin, who told him, "I never met anyone like your father." Indeed. None of us had.

Because there was only one Allen Goldberg.