Mittleman Jewish Community Center

The Mittleman Jewish Community Center (MJCC) in Portland traces its roots to the B'nai B'rith Building Association, an organization formed in 1910 with the specific purpose of establishing a Jewish community center. In 1914, the two-story brick building opened its doors on Thirteenth Avenue between Market and Mill streets. It offered meeting space, classrooms, athletic facilities, a library, and a billiard room, and soon became a community hub. The B'Nai B'rith Orchestra played in one of its meeting halls, and the Sephardic community held High Holiday services there. Many generations of Jewish Portlanders fondly recall the dances, swimming lessons, social clubs, basketball games, fundraisers, and summer camp activities that were hosted or organized by the center.

In 1971, the center moved to its current location near the intersection of Southwest Vermont and Capitol Highway. When Harry Mittleman donated enough money to retire the building's mortgage in 1976, it was renamed in honor of his wife Helen. The center has expanded several times, adding wings in 1987 and 1996 to accommodate the Portland Jewish Academy and the Early Childhood Learning Center. ??

By the late 1990s, the center was in trouble, facing many critical challenges, among them an aging facility in desperate need of long-deferred maintenance, high overhead, and competition from a nearby tax-supported community center. The board was disbanded to allow the establishment of an emergency board that solicited funds from prominent families and the Jewish Federation of Greater Portland to enable the reorganization and renovations that were essential to MJCC's survival.

In May 2007, the Mittleman Jewish Community Center was rededicated. It welcomes everyone, and more than a thousand people now come through its doors daily for classes, athletic activities, meetings, special events, and programs.

Written by Elaine S. Friedman

Further Reading:

Lowenstein, Steven. *The Jews of Oregon*. Portland: Jewish Historical Society of Oregon, 1987.

Mittleman Jewish Community Center. *Our Heritage, Our History, Our Community*. Portland: The Center, 2007.

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