

A Brilliant Retirement!

For 30 years, inquisitive retirees have expanded their horizons at the IRP.

Barbara Lewis | Contributing Writer

When Aaron Lupovitch retired from working as a pathologist, he felt he was in danger of becoming a “ROMEIO” — a Retired Old Man Eating Out.

Lupovitch of West Bloomfield says he was saved by the Jewish Community Center’s Institute for Retired Professionals (IRP), a group he became active with about three years ago and now leads as president. He participates in groups that study history, current events, and science and technology.

IRP will celebrate its 30th anniversary May 25 with a gala dinner at Congregation Beth Ahm in West Bloomfield. The evening, featuring the Dave Bennett Quartet in a Tribute to Benny Goodman, starts with a reception at 5 p.m. Tickets are \$36 for IRP members and \$45 for non-members.

IRP started in 1985 when Mort Plotnick, then executive director of the JCC, recognized a need for intellectually focused activities for seniors. He enlisted the late Irwin Shaw, who modeled the program on one started at New York’s New School for Social Research in 1962.

“There was nothing like this in Detroit, certainly not in the Jewish world,” said Plotnick. “Lunch and Learn programs are very popular now, but they didn’t exist then.”

Detroit’s IRP, like the New School model, emphasizes ongoing member facilitator-led groups, rather than instructor-led groups or classes. All the JCC did was provide space, said Plotnick. The members did the rest.

That is the secret of IRP’s success, Lupovitch said. “Members determine the subjects, and they are the presenters.”

Members don’t have to be Jewish or retired or former professionals. Some continue to work part time. Some never went to college. But all share a curiosity and love of learning.



Aaron Lupovitch



IRP’s poetry discussion group includes co-facilitator Melissa Kaplan-Estrin, Joel Shere, co-facilitator Phyllis Aronson and Shirley Kramer.

Lupovitch said the first time he attended a group he noticed a man across the room who asked very insightful questions. “The man next to me leaned over and said, ‘Not bad for 96!’”

IRP has more than 20 active groups ranging from biographies to medical issues to opera and film. New groups are welcome.

NEW FRIENDS

IRP members form strong friendships, some of which have blossomed into romance.

Faye Menczer Ascher, a retired teacher and social worker, and her husband, Al, who retired in 1991 as executive director of JVS, had known each other for many years but they became close through IRP, where they saw each other almost every day.

They married in 2011, the year she served as IRP president.

“It’s a wonderful place to meet people who are intelligent and social,” said Ascher of West Bloomfield. “There’s something interesting to do every single day.” Many members meet outside of IRP as well, to visit museums or for lunch or dinner.

Jerry Lapidés of Southfield joined IRP in 2003 after retiring from the University of Michigan-Dearborn but while still working as an educator for Ford Motor Company. He became even more involved in 2006.

“IRP saved my life,” he said. “I was still recovering from brain surgery and depressed. It gave me something intellectual to do.”

Lapidés joined a group on the origin of Jewish thought, which meets four times a month, and later became its facilitator.

He also co-facilitates biweekly groups on current events and Jewish social action with David Marcus of Southfield.

Lapidés’ groups meet at Congregation Beth Shalom in Oak Park, which welcomed IRP after the Oak Park JCC closed at the end of August.

Lapidés was sorry to see the Oak Park Center close. “I would go to the gym, have lunch at the deli, then lead my study group,” he said. He said membership in his groups declined somewhat after the Oak Park JCC closed.

HISTORY BUFF

Tev Estrin of Huntington Woods joined IRP after reading a blurb about the history group in the *Jewish News*.

Retired in 2000 from teaching management and accounting at the University of Windsor, Estrin says he’d never been a history buff but has been fascinated by what he’s learned through IRP. The group recently studied the Irish uprising of 1916.

Estrin now co-facilitates the history group with John Gardon. He also co-facilitates a group on Implications of Science and Technology with Bill Rolnick and one on National and International Issues with Mal Hillman. All meet at the West Bloomfield JCC.

His wife, Melissa Kaplan-Estrin, a retired Wayne State psychology professor, co-facilitates a poetry group with Phyllis Aronson.

She’s also active with a film study group, where members discuss current films that they view on their own ahead of time.

Sharon Levine of Oak Park is IRP’s only paid employee. The organization is run by an executive committee and a governing council. There’s also a facilitators’ council.

IRP has about 200 members, said Levine. Anyone interested can attend up to three group sessions as a guest; after that, they’re asked to pay the \$150 annual membership fee, which also includes cultural membership at the JCC. (IRP membership is free for Beth Shalom members). Members can attend an unlimited number of group sessions and programs.

For more information about IRP or the anniversary dinner, call or email Levine at (248) 432-5406 or slevine@jccdet.org. *