

Ash Internship Program Celebrates 20th Class

LOCAL

JESSE BERNSTEIN | JE STAFF

THIS YEAR MARKS the 20th annual class of Franklin C. Ash interns, a JEVS program that places Jewish college students in substantive summerlong roles at Jewish nonprofits in Philadelphia.

When the program began 20 years ago with contributions from Ash, his friends and his family, there was enough funding for two interns. This year's class has 15 students, and Ash couldn't be happier.

"This is my yearly shot in the arm," he said. "It's just a joy to be a part of this thing."

The impetus for beginning the program was simple enough: It was Ash's 60th birthday, he said, and his wife, Sharon, "decided I didn't need another golf shirt." Both he and Sharon Ash had been heavily involved in the Philadelphia Jewish community for years — each held leadership positions at JEVS, HIAS-PA, the Jewish Federation of Greater Philadelphia and beyond — and wanted to more deeply invest in its continued success.

The idea was to produce Jewish college graduates who already had significant experience working in Jewish nonprofits, who would understand the necessity of such work. And if you're skeptical of how much the interns can really learn in a summer, Ash wants to reassure you.

"They're put to work," he said. "They're not just filing papers."

Zach Weitz has learned a little bit about work this summer as an Ash intern.

Weitz, 20, studies media and communication at Muhlenberg College, and first heard about the internship through his older sister. He was already familiar with JEVS (his mother works in nonprofits), and when the opportunity arose to

participate in the program, he pounced on it. It helped to have a persuasive sister, too.

"She basically told me that it was a good way for young Jewish people to experience some actual professional development and learn skills in their field aside from just the basics," Weitz said.

There's been plenty of that development already. Weitz was placed in the communications and public relations department at JEVS, and has been

tasked with graphic design, writing blogs, proofreading at a professional level and even planning social media projects. For that, he had to plan and execute a series of social media posts using designs he had made, promoting a new partnership between JEVS and another organization.

"It's super cool," he said. "I didn't even know what went behind a social media plan until this."

It was a welcome surprise

for Weitz.

"I just kind of assumed that I would be the grunt work intern," he said. "It was not that in the slightest."

Each summer, the interns spend a few hours with Ash, talking with him and with one another about what they want to get out of the summer, and what they want to contribute. Weitz was appreciative of the way Ash was able to engage all the interns in a discussion about political values without

making the discussion too, well, political, he said. Ash reports that he, too, finds the discussions valuable.

Weitz also enjoyed the program's emphasis on mentorship. Each Monday, the Ash interns are paired with participants in the Lasko College Prep Program, made up of Jewish students going into their senior year of high school. Those Lasko participants receive

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Photographer Robert Mendelsohn Dies at 61

OBITUARY

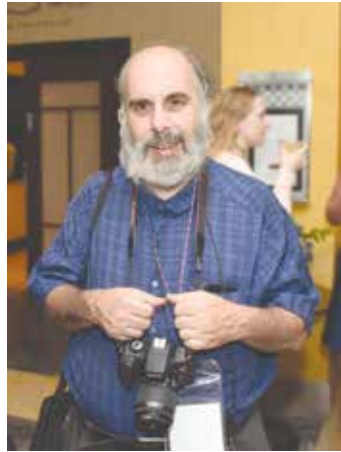
RACHEL WINICOV | JE FEATURE

REP. DWIGHT EVANS. WDAS radio host Patty Jackson. Even Mayor Jim Kenney took to Twitter this week to honor the passing of photographer Robert Mendelsohn.

Mendelsohn, who lived in a Germantown rooming house, was found dead at home on July 26. The cause of death was heart disease. He was 61.

Mendelsohn was a long-time stalwart on the event photography scene, best known for chronicling Philadelphia's African American community in his photographs, often for the *Philadelphia Tribune* and the *Philadelphia Sunday Sun*. "The white Jewish photographer who showcased Philly's black society has died," read a headline in Billy Penn. "If there's a black gathering in heaven," the *Inquirer's* Jenice Armstrong wrote in a tribute, "photographer Robert Mendelsohn is there."

Philadelphia publications remembered Mendelsohn and his commitment to the black community. KYW and the *Tribune*



▲ Robert Mendelsohn Hugh E Dillon

honored Mendelsohn; the *Sun* is planning a memorial page.

Hugh E. Dillon, a fellow Philadelphia society photographer, remembered his colleague's ability to befriend everyone. "He cared about people, events and charities in every community," Dillon said. "He made a difference. He would cover events even if he didn't have an assignment. He would write about them on his FB page, and those events would be seen."

Dillon said Mendelsohn had a personal impact on him as well. "He was a great mentor to me especially when I

first began my career," Dillon explained. "Often he would set up a photo, take it and then call me over to take the same photo, telling me, 'You should take this. It's important.'"

Mendelsohn's upbringing likely contributed to his idiosyncratic 30-year career, said his sister Judy Marcus. One of the few Jews growing up in mostly Catholic Feltonville, Mendelsohn befriended the first African American students bused to his school, his sister said.

"He gravitated towards the black community. He felt accepted and welcomed. He felt a kinship with them." Then again, she added, "He liked everybody and tried to make people feel good."

Marcus said her brother started taking society photos sometime in the 1990s. "It became his love, to watch people come and get their picture," Marcus said. His work became so important to the black community that the *Inquirer* featured him as the first face of its 2013 Black History Month series.

Mendelsohn did not always envision career in photography, his sister said. After

graduating from Olney High School in 1975, Mendelsohn worked in a warehouse at his parents' insistence.

"My parents were both working-class people," she said. "They had a good work ethic that they instilled in us. They pushed us to have a steady job. They said it's an honorable thing that you need to do. For me, it worked. I'm at the same place I've been for going on 50 years."

But Mendelsohn was different.

"For my brother, the warehouse job was so against his grain. He knew that my parents insisted he not sit around. He had to have some responsibility. So he did it for maybe 10 years. Then the company moved out of Center City to Swedesboro. He quit and got a job as a photographer at Kmart."

As a hobbyist, Mendelsohn had already been photographing celebrities visiting the Mike Douglas Show. The Kmart job offered the chance to combine a recreational passion with a steady income. Mendelsohn had a natural gift for taking pictures, which led to paid work for local papers and eventually

to a successful career.

Spending time with family was also important to Mendelsohn, who made a point to visit his sister. She recalled laughing over his food photography this past Passover.

"I wanted to have a home-cooked meal and I wanted to have my brother over. So I made a traditional meal with the brisket, matzah ball soup. And he loved it. He took pictures of everything, and it was funny because plates were piling up. He enjoyed food."

She said her brother occasionally attended services at Congregation Temple Beth'El, the African American synagogue in West Oak Lane.

In a 2012 video tribute to Mendelsohn, entitled "King of the World," filmmaker Joann Guerilus asked him how he would like to be remembered.

His sister wept as she recalled his words.

"I want my legacy to be a nice guy who did the right thing and never hurt anybody," he said matter-of-factly. After a short pause, he added, "and took a pretty good picture that most people seemed to like." ●

Interns

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seven weeks of free SAT/ACT test prep, visit colleges, participate in mitzvah projects and, like the Ash interns, are placed at Jewish nonprofits for a few days a week. Each of them is mentored by an assigned Ash intern.

That was how Annette Dvorak became familiar with the Ash internship.

Dvorak, 28, was family friends with the Laskos and heard about the internship through them. The idea that she'd get an opportunity to mentor students while also gaining the skills that

were important to her career appealed to her. She was an Ash intern in the summer of 2011.

Today, she's an account manager at Riskified, a fraud management technology startup, and traces many of the skills she's needed there back to her summer as an Ash intern.

"My experience at the internship was awesome," she said. "It was really helpful to really see inside a company and how different departments work together to make events happen and execute larger projects."

It's all music to Frank Ash's ears.



▲ This year's class of Franklin C. Ash interns, with Frank Ash.

Photo courtesy of JEVS Human Services

Though Ash is a lifelong businessman, he said that his work with Jewish communal organizations "was my second vocation and, at times, it became my first vocation." He reports that "the kids get better every

year," and that it is ever more challenging to sort through the 100-plus applications received for a limited number of spots.

"I can't think of a better thing to teach young Jewish college students than the

meaning of *tzedakah*, and what it can do for their lives," Ash said. And, he added: He's ready for the next 20 years. ●

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