

Howard and Maureen Blitman



This year RRC honors Howard and Maureen Blitman for helping us to build the future of Reconstructionist Judaism. We word

our tribute this way because building is Howard's profession—he is an accomplished engineer and the president of The Blitman Building Corporation—and because the Blitmans' support of the College has been so instrumental to our success. Yet the phrase is appropriate in another way. Indeed, when Howard joined RRC's board of governors in 2004, he was building upon a foundation laid long before, during summers he spent as a young boy at his family's vacation home in Connecticut. As he thinks back on those days, in the foreground of his memories stand the figures of Mordecai M. Kaplan, Ira Eisenstein and Judith Kaplan Eisenstein.

Howard remembers these central characters in the story of Reconstructionist Judaism as regular guests at the home, connected to his family through dear friends of his parents who spent summers with the Blitmans—and who were early members of the Society for the Advancement of Judaism (SAJ) in New York City. With a group of cousins, Howard read and discussed several writings by Ira Eisenstein, including *What We Mean by Religion*, based on the ideas of Kaplan. Judith Kaplan Eisenstein, an ethnomusicologist, was his music teacher. And the Blitman family traveled from Brooklyn, NY, to SAJ each year for the High Holidays.

Howard served as an officer in the U.S. Army during World War II and again during the Korean War. He recalls that following his service he felt separated from Judaism and lost his belief in God. "It took me quite a while to recapture my interest in and thinking about Judaism," he says. "But when I married Maureen, my

interest returned." The two were married 33 years ago; they have three children and six grandchildren. Though they were members of another synagogue initially, Howard says that more recently the two sought a Jewish connection that would be more meaningful to them; in 1994 they found what they were looking for, at Bet Am Shalom (BAS).

Maureen had grown up in Montreal and was confirmed at a Conservative synagogue. For Howard, the move to BAS was a return of sorts. And for both, Reconstructionist Judaism has been a natural match. "It's the fact that you can practice, worship and understand as your feelings and your spirit move you," Howard says. "I'm not a ritualistic person in any way. But I am very much spiritually involved."

Rabbi Les Bronstein of BAS describes the Blitmans as active and enthusiastic members. The Blitmans, for their part, greatly value the inspiration of Rabbi Les Bronstein—"a rabbi's rabbi"—and of Cantor Benjie Schiller, his wife.

Howard has long been very active in Jewish affairs; he has served the Jewish Child Care Agency of New York for more than 50 years, as both chair of the board and president, and he has worked with the UJA-Federation of New York for more than 25 years. He also is a trustee of the Beth Israel Medical Center in New York City.

So the move to join RRC's board of governors in 2004 came naturally as well. Howard says that his involvement with the College has been very important to him. Looking back, he feels that it has brought him full circle: "I think that being able to work closely with RRC is a culmination of many interests and desires, all through my life."

We hope that you will join us at this year's event as we honor Howard and Maureen for helping us to build the future of the College and the Reconstructionist movement.