

**The Rissman Family Kol Ami  
Museum celebrates**  
*The Birnbaums at Beth El:  
60 Years of Art and Soul*

The Rissman Family Kol Ami Museum is a unique collection of Jewish art, artifacts and ritual objects. In addition to preserving significant objects for posterity, the museum seeks to develop programs and exhibitions that are designed to educate the congregation and promote an appreciation for works of Judaica.

*North Suburban  
Synagogue*  
**Beth El**  
בית כנסת בית אל



**Leonard and Marjorie Birnbaum** joined North Suburban Synagogue Beth El in August 1955 and quickly became involved in the congregation's many committees and activities. Len was part of the 1959 General Campaign for the construction of the new sanctuary and chaired the 1967 committee responsible for the reconstruction of the "small" sanctuary (now the Sager Family Beit Hamidrash), the remodeling of the Blumberg Auditorium, and the beautification of the main sanctuary. In 1972 as the congregation prepared to celebrate its twenty-fifth anniversary, Len wrote an extensive history of the synagogue's first quarter of a century. He is a past president of the Men's Club, a lifetime member of the Board of Trustees, and a recipient of the Rabbi Philip L. Lipis Award. Marge is a past president of NS Beth El Sisterhood and for many years participated in Sisterhood's Board of Directors, serving on many committees from Membership to Programs and helping in the Gift Shop.

For nearly sixty years, the Birnbaums shared their artistic skills with the NSS Beth El community in multiple capacities. An accomplished calligrapher, Len worked closely with the artist Ludwig Wolpert on the design and execution of the sanctuary beautification project. His children remember that his Hebrew calligraphy was incorporated into Wolpert's ark doors. Len created logos for the

synagogue, designed brochures for events, provided the calligraphy for numerous certificates, and prepared custom ketubot for congregants. His symbolic Torah scroll commemorating the completion of the 1980 Torah writing project is on permanent display in the sanctuary foyer. A calligrapher in her own right, Marge built an invitation and event management business which she called "Having an Affair with Marjorie Birnbaum." Len and Marge also enjoyed performing in dinner dance and other productions, and Marge sang with the synagogue choir for many years.

Len Birnbaum's natural artistic talents were recognized in grammar school; he was enrolled in classes at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago until his graduation from high school. He spent his 45-year career in advertising and product design. The paintings on exhibit are just a few examples of Len's much broader body of work created from the late 1950's through the 1970's. In addition to displaying his work in his home, Len showed and sold many pieces of art at various fairs on the North Shore and in Chicago.