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Oakwood CI marks 100 years

By CYNTHIA GASNER, Special to The CJN

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TORONTO — After three years in the planning, Oakwood Collegiate Institute's (OCI) 100th anniversary celebration was a resounding success.

Bruce Snell, left, a former music teacher at Oakwood Collegiate Institute, is seen at the 100th anniversary celebration with former student Michael Baker.



From April 30 to May 4, hundreds of former and current OCI students came out to celebrate, with some alumni travelling great distances to meet and mingle with friends and former classmates, some of whom they had not seen for more than 30 years.

The weekend activities included a music night at the Toronto Centre for the Arts, where alumni and present-day students performed for an enthusiastic, full-to-capacity audience of 1,000.

There was a gala dinner and dance, a golf day, a pub night at the school, located on St. Clair Avenue at Oakwood Avenue, the opening of an archives room and the rededication of a war memorial.

“It was a lot of work, but it was also a lot of fun,” said Charles Marmoreo (class of 1958), who is in structural steel drafting. “And we had a great deal of co-operation from many people.”

Marmoreo, president of OCI's alumni association and John Iaboni (1970), a sportswriter for the Toronto Sun, co-chaired the 100th anniversary event.

Marmoreo spoke of his recollections of his years at Oakwood. He said that in the 1940s and 50s, many of the classes had a majority of Jewish students.

“Whenever Passover and other holidays came around, we went down to about two students in the class,” he said.

Alumnus Louise (Rappaport) Starkman (1959) said alumni and current Oakwood students worked together and did a “phenomenal job” on the reunion, particularly in assembling class photos and memorabilia and setting up decade rooms.

She noted that the oldest graduate to attend was 97 years old “and he still participates in many activities.”

She added: “The gala was spectacular and at the pub night, it was fun meeting former students as well as teachers, and sharing memories.”

Over the years, the student mix at Oakwood has changed to include many people of Italian descent, and today it has a very ethnically mixed student population.

Starkman spoke of the outstanding teachers past and present in the departments of sciences, arts and sports. “The Oakwood teachers influenced whole generations of students.”

Bruce Snell, a former music teacher attended the reunion. Starkman noted that former students such as Dr. Michael Baker, a professor and physician-in-chief at the University Health Network, played in the school's orchestra and continues to play music.

Baker said he is proud that his children, Jeffrey and Jennifer, attended Oakwood and were also scholarship winners.

There are many Jews among OCI's long list of outstanding graduates, Starkman said, including Supreme Court Justice Rosalie Silverman Abella; Dr. Gerald Baker, professor and head of oral surgery at Mount Sinai Hospital; Dr. Alan Bernstein, the director of the Global Effort to Coordinate HIV Vaccine Development for the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation; former provincial and federal cabinet minister Elinor Caplan; music producer Bob Ezrin; Murray Koffler, founder of Shoppers Drug Mart; filmmaker Ivan Reitman, and Judge Sidney Robbins.

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