

2009 Humanitarian Award

Tribute to Joseph & Wolf Lebovic
Presented by Joseph Mapa, President, Mount Sinai Hospital

Good evening everyone,

I am honoured that Joseph and Wolf asked me to participate in this special event and I'm here tonight to pay tribute, together with you, to two men who have made and continue to make an extraordinary impact.

Let me first draw on the eloquent tribute made by our distinguished Governor General of Canada, Michaëlle (mik-ALE) Jean in 2005.

Canada is a nation which prides itself on its giving nature. The commitment shown by the Lebovic brothers to their community and their country is truly admirable. Their contributions and dedication to improving lives within Canada and around the world have helped confirm Joseph and Wolf as leaders and as excellent examples of our Canadian spirit.

Canada is a phenomenal place where so many positive stories can be told. The Lebovic story is one of those, but made more remarkable by their sharing and their relentless ambition to shape a better future where everyone, everywhere can live side by side in peace and harmony.

You are likely familiar with the biographical story of Joe and Willy's journey from Europe to Canada, as well as their entrepreneurial achievements. With their own business acumen, grit and determination, they created an enterprise that is one of Canada's great success stories. Building on their success, they decided to endow their own foundation with a singular goal of making a difference now and well into the future.

It is the quintessential story of two men deeply rooted in their Jewish heritage, integrated into the Canadian mosaic with a view to creating a better world at large. These combined elements are the backdrop to the diverse variety of organizations and programs enriched through their volunteerism and philanthropy – both in Canada and abroad.

While Joe and Willy's story is spectacular, what makes it truly inspiring is their faith and conviction for a better future. In paying tribute to Joe and Willy this evening, I would like to focus on why they do what they do. These motivating ideals resonate with each of us because they reflect the common values and hopes we share for our own families, communities, country and the world beyond – values that underscore acceptance, common understanding and mutual respect. This is the essence of the Beth Shalom Brotherhood's Humanitarian Award that Joe and Willy are receiving this evening.

The key to understanding tonight's award recipients is the richness and beauty of their Jewish heritage, combined with their love of Canada as a land of opportunity and tolerance. This is all the more profound in light of their strong talmudic upbringing and their lived experience as survivors of the holocaust in Hungary – something we can all know intellectually but only a

survivor can truly understand. From it, they have developed remarkable resilience, strength and confidence of character and a profound commitment to effect positive change.

Allow me to articulate their core values, which are firmly grounded in the premise that people must accept each other in spirit of harmony and humanism – live, let live and take responsibility to help each other.

First, the importance of strong and vibrant communities.

Second, and complimentary to this, a strong and credible Jewish community and identity, within the community at large.

Third, recognition of the place of Israel within the fabric of the Jewish community and its broader contributions to the world stage,

Finally, the importance of serving as a role model to stimulate others to give.

Let me give you some examples of how these values have been put into action by Joe and Willy.

All of us appreciate and covet that the Canadian experience is grounded in the diversity and richness of its communities – learning, growing and accommodating each other – each of us contributing in our own way to build a stable, tolerant, and prosperous society. For over 50 years, Joe and Willy have epitomized this through their contributions to a plethora of organizations including United Way, Big Brothers, local children's sports teams, the Metro Zoo, and many others. They have, they participate and they lead by example.

Joe and Willy recognize that the health of our communities is inextricably tied to the health of individuals and families and they have generously supported a number of hospitals in the GTA including the Centenary site of what is now the Rouge Valley Health System in Scarborough. Their contribution of \$50 million to Mount Sinai Hospital, however, is the largest gift ever made to any Canadian hospital and sets the ultimate philanthropic bar, promoting human welfare from the ground up.

As many of you know, the roots of Mount Sinai Hospital are in the Jewish Community and we have evolved into a leading healthcare centre serving the total community. If I may be forgiven for my subjectivity, as an 18 storey building on one of Toronto's finest boulevards, the Hospital stands as a visual reminder of the contributions of the Jewish Community to our city, our province, and our nation. Joe and Willy explained their reasons for making this incredible contribution as follows:

We believe that our support will improve patient care but at the same time we want people to know that Mount Sinai Hospital was founded and is supported by the Jewish community for everyone on the community. We want others to recognize that Jews are proud of the role they play in the community. For us, Mount Sinai Hospital is one of the finest examples of how the Jewish community engenders positive change for the community at large.

For Joe and Willy, this was a magnificent building block designed to transcend communities. Their leadership gift of \$22.5 million to the Joseph and Wolf Lebovic Community Campus in York Region, which created the momentum for that fundraising campaign, is a further testament to their profound belief that the cultivation of Jewish identity and connectivity through cultural, recreational and especially educational programs; are critical to the community's continued vitality. During the opening of this magnificent 50 acre project, one of the speakers noted:

You are making the City of Vaughan and the surrounding area an even better place to live not only for the Jewish Community but for the entire community which will be invited to share in these resources.

While advancing local Jewish education is high on their list, the Lebovics believe more than anything that the most effective means of combating anti-Semitism and indeed, all forms of discrimination, is education. In singling out Joseph and Wolf's contribution in the field of education to the University of Waterloo, David Johnston, its President, explained their support – stimulated by a request from the City of Kitchener-Waterloo - in this way, and I quote:

Their vision spearheaded the Jewish Studies programme at the University of Waterloo that in a short period, has gained world renown and, more importantly, fostered an understanding of Judaism and its rich heritage among the many faith communities represented on our campus.

The welfare of Israel and Jewish identity are best expressed by Joe and Willy in a recent article in Lifestyles magazine:

Israel has a place in our hearts; it's our heritage. Because of its existence, Jews all over the world have a place (to go) and are respected, says Joe. Wolf concurs wholeheartedly. It's important for those of us who do not live in Israel to understand that we need Israel and Israel needs us.

Their recent support for a major infrastructure project in Israel, the Joseph and Wolf Lebovic Reservoir in the northern Negev, is a testament to their commitment to building a strong Israel. Equally important is that the concrete results of this project – cultivated fields, abundant farm produce, and rising living standards for local inhabitants – serve as a successful model for other countries and jurisdictions embarking on the road to national development.

Joe's leadership with the Jewish Agency as Chair of the Taskforce on Jewish Identity in Eastern Europe and his support in providing children with opportunities for camping and visits to Israel – speak to the importance of maintaining Jewish identity.

But it's also important for you to know - and it is a tribute to Joe and Willy's vision - that they undertake all of these initiatives toward a far broader goal in which communities and nations cooperate, collaborate, reinforce and support each other's needs. This utopian thinking is grounded in the strong Jewish belief in the ultimate blossoming of world peace and fulfillment.

So paying tribute to Joe and Wolf Lebovic on this special evening, we take pleasure and pride in the fact that not only do they share our collective beliefs and goals as Canadians, but through

their deeds and actions, they bring their personal vision to fruition. As business leaders, Joseph & Wolf Lebovic build communities. As humanitarians, they contribute to help build a bright and healthy future.

They also humbly recognize that they are part of a large group of men and women, organizations and institutions, throughout Canada and around the world who believe in just societies and work toward these goals. To that end, I have often heard them laud and praise the activities and achievements of others.

Joe and Willy, you make a huge difference and it's appreciated not only for the tangible changes that you have affected but also for the fine example you set as Canadian citizens. Each one of us in this room is grateful to live in an exceptional country where people live side by side, regardless of who they are and where they are from. This is the unique Canadian value proposition and you have advanced it through the pride you take in your ethnocultural heritage, and in your unwavering support for causes that cross boundaries.

For you all this, on behalf of everyone in this room, thank you very much.