

Richard Berkman
President: 2002-2004

Rick Berkman has dedicated much of his adult life to the future of Rodeph Shalom. Rick served as President of Rodeph Shalom from 2002-2004. During his tenure, Rick demonstrated a visionary commitment to planning for the future of the congregation by pushing for much-needed repairs and renovations to the sanctuary and advocating unsuccessfully for the sale of Rodeph Shalom's suburban location. Rick's commitment to that future continued after his presidency, when he became a major supporter of Berkman Mercaz Limud, which is named in his honor.



Rick grew up in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania as a member of the reform congregation, Rodef Shalom, where at the time that congregation held services on Sundays and did not perform Bar or Bat Mitzvahs. Rick became more engaged in religious learning while studying at Harvard College and briefly considered becoming a rabbi. When Rick moved to Philadelphia, he began a lifelong career at the Dechert law firm, as a much sought-after litigator.

At Rodeph Shalom, Rick served as an engaged member long before he was called to serve in the role of President. Rick's dedication to the congregation derived from a sense of obligation to his religious community. Rick was fortunate to learn from many mentors at Rodeph Shalom, including the Gutmans and Ed Snitzer, who he credits for engaging him in the congregational life and eventually helping prepare him for the role of presidency.

When Rick became President, the physical state of the congregation was poor and in need of dire repair. Rather than wait for the culmination of a time-consuming and uncertain capital campaign, Rick led the decision to start repairs on the sanctuary to improve the spiritual nerve center of Rodeph Shalom. Rick was a hands on participant of these repairs, unafraid to climb scaffolding or get down in the minutiae of the technical requirements. As a result, with the support and leadership of others, the sanctuary underwent a major and much-needed facelift during Rick's tenure. Concurrently, Rick was a staunch believer that the time had come to sell the suburban location. As the needs of the congregation had changed, Rick felt strongly that all congregation members in both the city and suburb would benefit from this separation. Rick worked tirelessly to persuade others to this position. While the efforts were not successful at that time, and it was only later that Rodeph Shalom moved forward with the sale, the important groundwork for that separation took place under Rick's leadership.

Rick continued his deep engagement with Rodeph Shalom after his presidency. Rick has been a tireless proponent of cultivating a culture of philanthropy among congregants, leading the way with his support of Berkman Mercaz Limud. Rick has also given thousands of hours of pro bono legal work to the congregation. To Rick, obligation to the congregation is a lifelong commitment and he has continued to demonstrate that both in action and word.

Written by Jonathan Krause