

## Emanu-El Next: Investing for our Jewish Future

We believe that Judaism guides us on our journey to be better people, create community, and repair the world. Our historic home has long been cherished as a magnificent building that symbolizes Jewish arrival and integration into our city. But the building no longer adequately serves the need of the Emanu-El community and hinders our ability to effectively support and engage our congregation. The demands of the 21st century Jewish community—and Emanu-El's 1,800 congregant families—are quite different than those of the 300 families in the 1920s who created our current building. That's why we have embarked on an ambitious effort to revitalize and reimagine our home to meet the expanding needs of our current members and those of generations to come.

## Donor Spotlight: Myrna and Stuart Aronoff



Myrna and Stuart Aronoff sit side-by-side in their home immersed in abstract works of art. They talk of the cities they've lived in, the projects they've accomplished, and the insights they've learned along the way. Supporters of Emanu-El Next, they view their contribution as a gift to the younger generations who will succeed them. "I believe in giving when your hand is warm, not cold," Myrna says with a forthcoming smile. "We should be generous while we're alive – while we can see the happiness it brings others."

The Aronoffs have lived in San Francisco since 1980. Stuart became Treasurer of Emanu-El in 1991 during our congregation's last major capital project before Emanu-El Next – the renovation of the Temple House. Over the course of his service, he introduced a new dues structure to reestablish Emanu-El's firm financial footing by the late 90s. He also instituted the consolidation of the Home of Peace and Hills of Eternity Cemetery operations.

With humility in his voice, Stuart tells the story of an unprecedented speech he made from the Bimah during Rosh Hashanah in the days when, "no one ever talked about money during the high holy days." He told our congregation: "Now is the time to give. Shrouds don't have pockets, and we should be generous while we live." He remembers how some had considered it a heretic remark. But Stuart understood the urgency of the campaign and stepped up to institute change. As he reflects on the years he's been with Emanu-El, he takes pride in the strides the congregation has taken to adapt to our ever changing world.

Myrna shares her husband's fortitude and strong Jewish identity. She grew up in Springfield, New Jersey, always knowing she'd marry somebody Jewish, and when her children were born they would be members of a synagogue and follow in the Jewish tradition. Stuart's father was the oldest (at 94) serving head usher at Temple Emanu-El in Beverly Hills. Stuart was bar mitzvahed there, graduated from UC Berkeley in 1954 (where he was president of the fraternity Sigma Alpha Mu). He then went into the army for two years and pursued a twelve-year IBM career.

Myrna and Stuart married in 1967 in New Jersey. Myrna was a very independent person and traveled before she got married. She feels that Stuart supported her wholeheartedly in her independence throughout their marriage, which was especially meaningful to her at a time when not many women were in her position.

In 1969 they moved to Los Angeles where their first son Alan was born. There, Myrna got to know Stuart's family – the Aronoffs and the Dillers. "It was lovely to come to LA and have all these cousins because I'm a very family minded person," Myrna says. The couple had their second son, Todd, in 1971, and Stuart again moved the growing family in 1972 to their next stop: London. Myrna remembers with great fondness the nine years they spent there, where they became members of West London Synagogue, grew close with the Jewish community and volunteered with the Joint Israel Appeal.

The Aronoffs came to San Francisco in 1980 when Stuart was appointed executive vice president of Booth Financial, a computer leasing company. They made new friends, found a home and adorned it with marvelous collections of glass and abstract art. To Myrna, art is a passion. She lives immersed with it and shares it with her children, family and friends. Her passion for collecting art, and the feeling of serenity it brings her, has only grown with time.

Early on in their years in the Bay, they toured synagogues to find their Jewish home. When they visited Emanu-El, the couple received what Myrna calls an unbelievably warm reception from Rabbi Asher. They joined our congregation, both their boys were bar mitzvahed here, and Stuart became deeply involved.

"I believe that being Jewish comforts who you are and helps you strengthen your community," Stuart says. Over the years, he's been on the board of the JCCSF, the Jewish Community Federation, the President of the Northern Division of Israeli Bonds, and Board President at Congregation Emanu-El. Knowing that he could provide in his small way a prolonging of the Jewish tradition has always meant a lot to him. He thinks synagogues have to be on the forefront of community involvement, and to do so, they have to be realistic about the circumstances of modern society. "It's our ability to adapt to everyday life and consider new ideas that makes us relevant," he says. To that end, Stuart believes Congregation Emanu-El has excelled through the years.

Myrna's involvement with Jewish fundraising has been an important factor of her life. She got involved in 1981 and was campaign chair for the San Francisco Women's Division and held various other positions in numerous Jewish organizations. She was also on the board of the Juvenile Diabetes Foundation. Her life has been fulfilling, and she has felt a part of the San Francisco Jewish community.

"You have to keep moving forward," Stuart says. "Whether it's physically, financially or philosophically. And that takes effort and intensity." Stuart asserts that the continuity of Jewish life depends on young families. He brings up the Emanu-El Next initiative to upgrade our religious school as an important example of how the temple is moving forward by giving young families the spiritual, yet modern, education their children need in order to continue to cultivate a vibrant Jewish community.

"Thanks to our community's generosity, Emanu-El will be here for years to come," Myrna says, proud of the part that she and Stuart have played in helping give long life to our temple. Myrna and Stuart say that Jews hold hands around the world. Wherever they are, they hold hands and think about one another. "This is our way of holding hands with the next generation."

**Please visit our website, [next.emanuelsf.org](https://next.emanuelsf.org) to learn more. Or, if you would like to make a commitment to Emanu-El Next, please contact Julie Weinberg, Director of Development, at [jweinberg@emanuelsf.org](mailto:jweinberg@emanuelsf.org) or 415-750-7557.**