

Recalling Myra Kraft's many charitable moments

By Elise Kigner

Advocate Staff

On a mission to Israel during the First Intifada, Myra Kraft came armed with 200 Patriots caps.

Under the hot sun, Kraft distributed one to every kid she passed, telling them "wear a hat [or] you'll burn," said Albert Sherman, a former UMass Medical School executive who was also on the trip.

Kraft, whose husband, Robert, owns the New England Patriots, died of cancer July 20 at the age of 68.

Jewish leaders recalled her as a philanthropist who would see a problem and decide on the spot that she needed to help. Her generosity – which benefited causes ranging from Ethiopian Jews to the Boys and Girls Clubs of Boston – inspired others to give, too.

Barry Shrage, president of Combined Jewish Philanthropies, recalled visiting Israel with Kraft during the Second Intifada, when storekeepers in Jerusalem were struggling to attract customers. So Kraft directed the 200 on the trip to go shopping. "She thought, and I think she was right, that one of the best ways to help people is to help them make a living," he said.

Shrage said Kraft hatched the idea for the Boston Opportunity Agenda, which last year pledged \$27 million toward education for everyone from babies to high school students to adults. In doing so, she brought together CJP, the United Way and the Boston Foundation, three of the charities where she had been most active. "She wasn't parochial in her interests, she was universal in her interests," Shrage said. "She couldn't imagine a Jewish community that wasn't engaged in bringing justice to the world."

When Kraft chaired the CJP campaign, she led the fastest growing campaign of all the Jewish federations in the country, Shrage said. "She knew just how to ask," he said. "She never made anybody feel uncomfortable when she asked, but she also had this tremendous prestige and she was a person people wanted to follow."

Nathan Katz, executive director of Maimonides School in Brookline, cited the Krafts' generous support of the school's athletics programs and scholarship funds. Myra Kraft's



Myra Kraft with Maimonides students when she was honored in 2007.

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father-in-law, Harry, was a charter member of Maimonides and a friend and student of school founder Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik.

Beyond that, Kraft showed a genuine interest in the students, Katz said. He recalled that at Chanukah time, she would often socialize with Maimonides families during tailgate parties at Gillette Stadium, chatting with them about latkes.

When she and Barry Shrage were honored in 2007 for CJP's contributions to the school, she came to Maimonides and spent a few hours talking with a dozen seniors about their studies, their chesed projects, and their plans to go to Israel and college.

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of them was going to do with their own life," Katz said.

Nancy Kaufman, former executive director of Boston's Jewish Community Relations Council, said she remembered being at a meeting at CJP where the leader of the Dnepropetrovsk Jewish community, Rabbi Shmuel Kaminetsky, talked about how the day school children there needed food. Kraft promptly handed Kaufman a check for \$5,000.

She said Kraft was a regular at the JCRC trips to Israel for non-Jews.

"She loved introducing people to Israel for the first time, and she thought it was extremely important that non-Jews, especially political leaders, be introduced to Israel," said Kaufman, who is now president of the National Council of Jewish Women in New York. "This is a huge loss for Boston, for women she mentored," she said. "She was the real thing."

Kraft, who lived in Brookline, served on many boards, including those of CJP, the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee and Brandeis University (her alma mater). The Krafts made major donations to the Kraft Stadium for American football in Jerusalem.

In addition to her husband, Kraft is survived by her children, Jonathan, David, Daniel and Josh; her sister, Janice; and several grandchildren.

Jeremy Burton to bring an unusual background to JCRC

justice issues. It offers grants, community investments and service learning programs.

"JCRC and the Boston Jewish community have an incredible reputation of leadership and creativity rooted in core Jewish values," Burton said via email to *The Advocate*. "It is a privilege to have the opportunity to work with this staff and leadership to build upon the many successes of JCRC and to fully realize the potential of the next era of a great organization."

Burton's mother, a Mexican-American, and his father, a secular Jew, converted to Orthodox Judaism and raised Burton in New York City.

He attended haredi day schools in New York and spent two years at yeshiva in Israel after high school.

But Burton wrote in an essay in *The Jewish Week* of New York that he had not felt comfortable with his sexuality.

"I knew in my heart that I was gay," he wrote in the piece. "Yet in my head I believed that if I could find that one perfect woman, I could have the Jewish family that I was taught was the only choice imaginable."

Burton came out to his family when he was in his 30s. Now, he is active in the LGBTQ Jewish community. Burton sits on the executive committee of Keshet, a

Jewish gay-rights organization, and the advisory board for the Human Rights Campaign's Jewish Workplace Equality Program.

Gabovitch said that Burton's background is perfectly suited for the JCRC.

"Because of his personal journey of inclusiveness, of having a background in the Mexican, gay and Modern Orthodox communities, he makes sure there is a place for all people."

Inclusivity has been a hot topic at the JCRC after it recently voted to keep J Street on its council, despite fierce opposition from a few member organizations.

At Jewish Funds for Justice,

Burton built relationships among organizations and led a community response to Hurricane Katrina in 2005. He developed grant making and service initiatives and built the organization's social media presence.

Before working at Jewish Funds for Justice, Burton worked for the Jewish Funder's Network, where he ran educational and research initiatives for people interested in Jewish philanthropy.

Burton also has a history in politics, working on campaigns for New York Mayor David N. Dinkins, Manhattan Borough President Ruth Messinger and the 1996 Clinton/Gore Re-Election Campaign.