

OBITUARY KEN LITTMAN

Ken Littman, congregant and board member of Temple Beth El in Fall River, delivers a speech to fellow members of the Beth El community during an event in 2023. PROVIDED BY CONGREGATION BETH EL

‘He was really well loved’

Fall River attorney, pillar of Jewish community dies at 72

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Ken Littman loved to talk, because he had so much to share. Friends said whether the topic was Fall River history, faith, politics, sports, music or the law, he spoke with clarity, conviction, passion and wisdom.

Littman, a Fall River native, attorney, politician and pillar of the city’s Jewish community, died Thursday at 72.

Littman was a longtime congregant and board member of Congregation Beth El despite living 40 minutes away in Jamestown, Rhode Island. In an interview in January, Littman told *The Herald News* he didn’t mind the drive for Sabbath services.

“I’ve always had the connection,” he said. “There

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are other synagogues around here I could have joined, but I always wanted to go back to that one."

Littman a man of 'grace and politeness'

Littman was born in 1951 to Arthur and Phyllis Littman, who owned a dress manufacturing company on Martine Street. He was raised on June Street with his brothers, Michael and Harvey. As a boy he attended Temple Beth El, which in the 1950s and '60s was thriving with hundreds of Jewish families. He attended Hebrew school at the temple three times a week, was a member of its Boy Scout Troop 24, took arts and crafts classes there.

Years later, at a gathering marking the congregation's 95th anniversary in 2023, he showed off a study book he kept from his youth, and a plaque he'd made in woodworking class at Temple Beth El — an image of the Hebrew letter *resh*, or R. He made it when he was 8 or 9 years old. Showing it off to the crowd, he joked, with his usual mix of sentiment and self-deprecating humor: "I still have it to this day — because I can't sell it."

Littman graduated from B.M.C. Durfee High School in 1969 and studied at the University of Massachusetts Amherst, graduating with his law degree from Suffolk University School of Law.

He moved to Jamestown in the early 1980s but always kept a law practice in Fall River, first on Highland Avenue and then at the corner of Cherry and North Main streets. Over his decades-long career, he gained a reputation as a compassionate, fair lawyer who conducted himself with integrity and class.

Ken Fredette, Fall River's assistant corporation counsel, said he first met Littman in 1990, when he had been hired as a prosecutor under then-Bristol County District Attorney Ron Pina. Littman was a defense attorney, and "a regular in the district court."

"I count myself as a friend for the past 34 years," Fredette said.

He soon discovered how Littman loved to share, when shop-talk about legal cases would take tangents into the personal. "We might start talking about legal issues," he said, "and over the passage of time, you learn about the kids that they have, the trips that they take, the hobbies and vocations on the side."

In the courtroom, Littman was admired by his peers and controlled under pressure. "When you're doing defense work, you lose a lot. It's just the way it is," Fredette said. "He's a guy who accepted the rulings with grace and politeness."

A fixture of Fall River's Jewish community and beyond

In an interview with *The Herald News*, Littman said he "didn't really participate in things for a number of years" when it came to temple life, but came back to Beth El in the late 1990s. Still sentimental, he remembered his youth there with great fondness — and he threw himself into the community.

"He was on the board of directors at Temple Beth El, he was the secretary of the Fall River United Jewish Appeal, he was the past president of the Fall River Jewish Home, and instrumental in its



Temple Beth El Board of Directors member Ken Littman chats with those arriving for an Interfaith Service of Peace and Solidarity, held at Temple Beth El on Nov. 28, 2018 in Fall River. JACK FOLEY/HERALD NEWS PHOTO

sale, and the president of the Jewish Omni Fund," said Marie Twomey, office manager at the temple. "We are all heartsick about Ken."

The congregation admired Littman for the energy he put into helping maintain a Jewish presence in the city, and for the love he gave the community. They gave it to him in return.

"I've known him for over 40 years and will miss his kind demeanor, his sharp wit, and his sense of humor," said Robert Falconero, treasurer of the congregation. "His dedication to his family, his friends, the Fall River community, and the Jewish community, will always be remembered and appreciated."

He was a fixture at the temple, Rabbi Mark Elber said, not only for his deep faith but for the sense of camaraderie he felt.

"We would talk after services a lot on Friday evenings," Elber said. "One of the interests that we shared was a love of music — what acts were going to playing at the Narrows, and what we might go see."

"During these last 10 and a half years, the time that Rabbi Mark and I have been the clergy at Temple Beth El, Ken was a regular participant in our Shabbat evening services," said Cantor Shoshana Brown, who said Littman was always warm and full of life. "We were always happy to see him walk into the chapel."

Just as Littman was welcomed back to the congregation after time away, he welcomed others.

"When I moved back to the area four years ago and joined the temple, Ken was one of the first members to enthusiastically welcome me back home," said Beth El congregant Jeff Ginsberg. "He was a constant light and presence at services and temple events, a warm heartfelt man of composure, intelligence and wisdom."

Ginsburg said Littman was always

ready to help the congregation, and was a fountain of historical information, with "an encyclopedic knowledge of the Fall River Jewish community. [He] always enjoyed talking about the evolution and changes in Fall River since when we were kids in the '50s and '60's. His presence and warmth will be sorely missed."

In his adopted home of Jamestown, Littman again tried to make his corner of the world a better place. He was a volunteer for the Jamestown Fire Department, and served on the Town Council for eight years, two of them as president.

Even in the often fraught world of local politics, he made only friends. In a 2005 *Providence Journal* article, colleagues' only quibble was that he encouraged night-long discussions about any topic, whether under the purview of the Town Council or not, from the town tax rate to the War in Iraq. But they were quick to add that Littman had a good heart, and that his primary goal was always a commitment to the community, to make sure everyone was heard.

"I've always thought that whether you agree, disagree or thought that the point was irrelevant," Littman said at the time, "that we should air out the issues and have open debate."

Jewish community plans life celebration for Littman

For the last several months, Rabbi Mark Elber said, Littman had been ill. He said he sat with Littman at the hospital recently, along with Susan Finn, Littman's wife of four decades, and other members of Littman's family. Elber said Littman was unresponsive.

"Despite that, I could not let go of the hope that he would recover," Elber said. "I could not give that hope up."

Littman died Thursday, surrounded



Ken Littman is seen in his 1969 B.M.C. Durfee High School yearbook photo. FILE PHOTO

by his family. He had two children, a son, Jake, and daughter, Abbey. He is also survived by two grandchildren, his brothers, in-laws, and many extended family members.

That extended family includes his beloved congregation, which celebrated Littman's life at a service on Sunday, Feb. 18, at Temple Beth El, 385 High St. Littman was buried at the Hebrew Cemetery on McMahon Street in Fall River.

"The community was very enamored of him," Elber said. "He was really well loved. That's the strongest thing."

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