

# NORTHBROOK

*Living*

December 2023



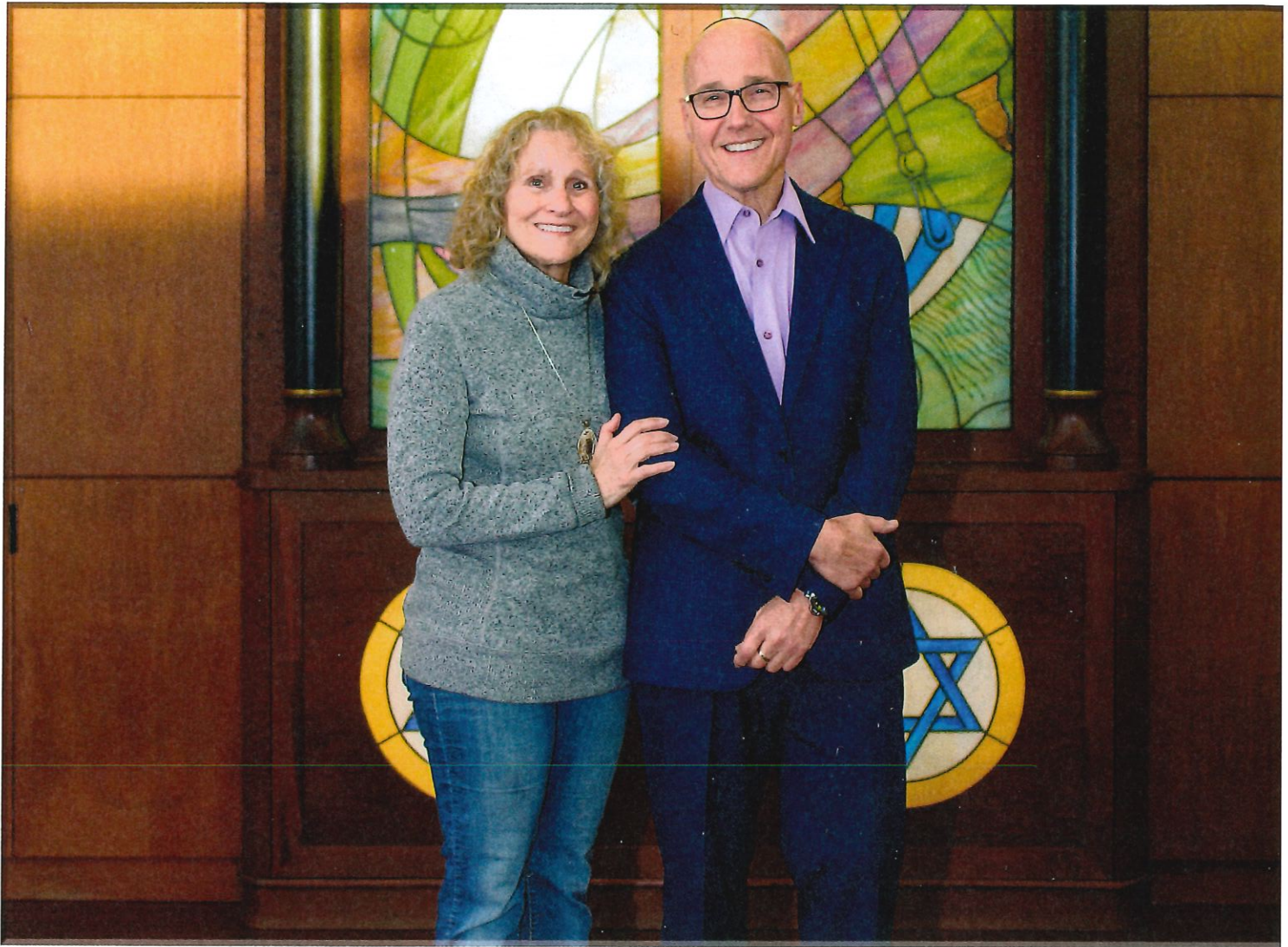
**Meet  
Steven  
and  
Susan  
Stoehr!**

POWERED BY



Photo by Ameer McCaughan Photography

An exclusive magazine serving the Village of Northbrook



## Meet Steven and Susan Stoehr!

By Jessica Wrubel ❖ Photos by Ameer McCaughan Photography

**S**teven Stoehr's story begins in Pittsburgh, where he grew up. He says each of his parents was a "survivor in their own way."

"My father was a Holocaust survivor from Ukraine/Poland and my mother was a victim of a stroke in her late 20's," he says. "Each was blessed to live to the age of 90 and 98, respectively."

"After I finished my bachelor's studies at the University of Pittsburgh, I sought employment in the field of creative writing. When that fizzled, I was encouraged by a local Cantor, in whose choir I was singing, to consider the option of becoming a clergyman (Cantor Moshe Taube was a Holocaust survivor, one whom Oscar Schindler had saved during the war)." So Steven took the entrance exams, had his audition, and was accepted to the five-year post-graduate program. He then met his wife Susan while studying in Israel.

"She was in an academic year of study working towards her Masters in Jewish Education while I was in my second year of Seminary studies as a cantorial student," he says. Steven and Susan were matched up as study partners in a

process within Jewish textual studies called Chevruta, a pairing up of students to learn with and from one another.

"In Jewish parlance, we would use the word b'shert, divinely directed fate, which may have had a hand in that partnership," he says.

His first full-time job out of school was with Congregation Beth Shalom in Northbrook, which he has now served for the past 36 years.

"I like to kibitz and define the Cantor in a synagogue as the Swiss Army Knife of religious leadership," he says. "Alongside our rabbinic colleagues, we share the responsibilities of caring for our community members, developing strategies for new programs, pastoral outreach, interfaith work, implementing educational classes, fundraising, and prayer services...[and] that's on Mondays."

Steven says it is truly a 24/7 type of lifestyle that is "spiritually exhilarating at all times and physically exhausting sometimes."

Susan has put her educational credentials to work in a variety of ways. She began working for the Board of Jewish Education and then began working as a private Bar



and Bat Mitzvah tutor. Sometime later she took on a role of tutor within Congregation Beth Shalom and that expanded to teaching adults the Hebrew language and prayer liturgy. Steven notes that Susan has a magnetic attraction with children and adult learners.

"Susan can make the seemingly implausible plausible," he says. "No matter how daunting an educational goal may seem to the student, Susan always succeeds in bringing them to their optimum selves."

Susan's absolute goal while tutoring is to "focus on teaching the person, and not only the curriculum."

When Susan is not engaged in teaching she spends time volunteering to shop and deliver food to adults who need assistance in filling their shopping needs.

"It is a simple gesture of time for me to offer and their genuine appreciation is my sweet reward," she says.

Susan also takes part in a couple of book clubs and leads two social affinity groups for Beth Shalom called "Shmoozin' with Susan."

When Steven and Susan got married and settled in the Midwest, they knew the majority of their family vacations would be traveling east to Pittsburgh to visit Steven's family, or west to Las Vegas to visit Susan's family.

"Two really nice places with quite distinct cultures," Steven adds. "We have enjoyed our periodic opportunities to travel to Israel and travel on a couple of cruise vacations. We also

have taken many driving trips to Florida, Hilton Head, and other warm spots during the kids' school breaks. I believe that the simplicity of the experiences that we gave our children has imbued into them a genuine appreciation for the basic gifts of family time and realizing that one can enjoy vacations without the extravagance of destiny or opulent expenditure. 'The Joneses' are lovely people but we chose not to try and keep up with them."

He and Susan live near the Leisure Center and Indian Ridge Park. They moved to Northbrook in 1988 only a couple of months after his graduation from Seminary and the couple's marriage in Las Vegas (Susan's hometown).

"When we moved here it was expected that the clergy at my synagogue were to observe various guidelines of our faith, one being that we would walk to the temple/shul for Sabbath and Festival holidays," he says. "The synagogue provided for us a parsonage in which we could live during the duration of my employment. We began in one home on River Falls Drive and several years later, when the synagogue added a second rabbi on staff, who also needed a parsonage, we were moved just a few houses away into a slightly larger home, as our family grew."

Steven and Susan are empty nesters now (the couple has three adult children—Jacob, Talia, and Alana, along with

Continued on page 6



daughter-in-law Ilana and two-year-old granddaughter Liv Hazel) but Steven says distance has not imposed any disruption upon the strong bond in their family.

“Our family is like the threefold cord about which Ecclesiastes speaks in the bible. No matter how geographically distant we may be, there is a magnetic pull between us that is beautifully real,” Steven says. “As in the majority of families, we worked our way through the sibling rivalry period but we have emerged like honey from a beehive.”

Steven says one of his best memories so far is his son Jacob’s wedding, which took place in the synagogue community hall.

“It was a day on which our prayers as parents came true—as did our son’s dreams. While we were unable to invite every special person in our lives, but for the most part, those family and lifelong friends who meant the most to us were able to attend. The musicians were at the top of their game, the food was ample and sumptuous and the dancing was kinetic and filled with love. I hope we have the joy of seeing our daughters reach their dreams,” he says.

At home, Steven and Susan like to relax by watching a good movie, documentary, or for a change of pace, a sitcom, working on jigsaw puzzles or family card games, or “schlepping out to explore estate/yard sales for those ‘must have’ items which ultimately we realize weren’t as ‘must’ as we thought,” Steven says.

The couple also likes to exercise, with Steven noting that weight training and riding his bike out in the forest preserves are two of his favorites. Susan prefers yoga and Pilates. He has also never stopped writing, saying that he has written poetry, a short novella, two children’s books, a multimedia musical production, a staged drama, and recorded three albums.

Steven says that the family home has always been “a menagerie of pets” saying that a cat, frog, bunny, turtle, guinea pig, hamster, rat, and bird have all made appearances at the Stoehr home. Dogs, however, remain the family favorite.

“The dogs began big with Kodi our Newfoundland; then came Rocky, our gentlemanly Chocolate English Setter/Springer Spaniel; Sophie our mixed and mixed-up Shephard; Maddie our polite Boxer/Terrier mix; and now Joey, a high-strung but joyful Australian Shepherd mix. We have acquired each of our dogs from local shelters. Each of our children has the same love and has their own dogs in their homes too.”

Steven also spends his free time volunteering at the Northbrook Inn Memory Care Center leading Friday Afternoon Sabbath Services.”

“I have found time to develop and lead (of course alongside many wonderful volunteers) two programs that benefit the special needs community in our area,” he says. “One is called HUGS which addresses their needs in the Jewish community for creative Sabbath and holiday programming and the second is called SELAH which is an adult choir for members of this community for ages 17 and up.”

Early in his tenure in Northbrook Steven was assigned as a Chaplain of the Riverwoods Police Department. While he doesn’t have an active role there anymore, he is very proud of the impact he was able to make there.

Steven’s most far-off experience of outreach to others was a mission to Uganda to visit and educate the Abayudaya Jewish Community. He says it’s a fascinating place with fascinating people which “opened my eyes to our great fortune of living in the U.S.” Cantor Steve has also traveled to Israel to engage in educational exchange and then to Eastern Europe on various missions to build bridges through music between the Jewish and non-Jewish Communities.

Steven and Susan love living in Northbrook and say that the community has been welcoming and a wonderful place to raise a family.

“It afforded us a safe neighborhood for our children, ample good school choices, easy access to O’Hare airport and the highways, and a population of neighbors who have always been respectful of the various faiths within our area. The police and fire departments are attentive and cordial, and I might add, the same about the postal delivery team and sanitation workers. We never considered any reason we would need to move.”

Steven says the family is thankful for their neighbors in Northbrook and is grateful for all of the opportunities and comfort the community has provided.

“The comfort our family has felt over these past 36 years has been a cocoon of serenity as our children spread their wings and explored more of the world beyond our backyard,” he says. “We hope we can be counted amongst kind neighbors when others think of their Northbrook community.”