

Meet the Purim Ball Honorees... Sharon Freundel



Sharon Freundel was Director of Hebrew and Judaic Studies at JPDS-NC for ten years, and has been Director of Jewish Life for two. In her twelve years of service, she oversaw the development of a robust Hebrew and Judaic Studies curriculum, created professional standards and benchmarks for teaching TaNaKH, and has been committed to staff development and collaboration. She has filled many shoes over the years, supplementing her position with roles as school nurse, adult education coordinator, support services provider, and point person for community outreach and *Chesed*. She has also been a true friend to our MILTON/JPDS students.

Sharon came to the school after years of teaching high school and then completing a Masters in Jewish Education at Baltimore Hebrew University. When she walked through the JPDS doors, she fell in love. The school, as she puts it, was teeming with joy, and everything about it was “by, about, or for the children.”

Over the course of nearly eight years, Sharon partnered with the administration, colleagues in Israel, and Hebrew at the Center (HATC) to develop a rigorous and flexible curricular program that is uniquely MILTON. Whether it be assessing needs and progress, or developing daily lessons and extended units, Sharon has guided the MILTON faculty – and, over time, a national cohort – to perform at the highest level. Her commitment to staff development and collaboration shine in what is now a dynamic program fully implemented by MILTON faculty. A weekly Judaic Studies roundtable continues to push forward new thinking and ideas. Out of that process has come the *Chagigot Siddur* and *Chumash* programs, the Yitzhak Rabin curriculum, immersive holiday units, and more. Thanks to Sharon, MILTON does not use off-the-shelf materials in either its Hebrew or Judaic Studies classes. Everything taught has been written in-house and is reviewed yearly to ensure its continued relevance in meeting student needs. It is one of the things that makes MILTON so unique, and is Sharon through and through.

Sharon’s passion is to build a community of lifelong learners, and her one-on-one relationships and willingness to partner with anyone who steps forward is an important part of how she does it. For years, Sharon has held weekly lunch meetings with students, giving them space for creativity and a chance to shape Jewish life at school. Sharon has worked with *Chesed* organizers, Random Acts of Kindness, and local organizations to mobilize service and learning projects, including walks for the homeless, a *sukkah* unity walk, *bikur cholim*, and so much more. And why shouldn’t parents be part of MILTON’s community of lifelong learners, Sharon asks? Her Adult Torah Class is now in its 11th year.

Building relationships is also part of Sharon’s toolkit when it comes to putting a face on Israel. From the *Shinshinim* to partnerships with the Jabotinsky School, Har Tuv, and others, Sharon has connected students to the pulse of Israeli life and history, and built cultural exchange into the lifeblood of MILTON.

What does Sharon take with her from her years at JPDS/MILTON? In addition to the memories, love, and joy of the children, MILTON, she says, has been a testing ground for compassionate listening and has given her a sense of best practices. She has also learned that nothing is static – we change as our children change.