

THE JEWISH ADVOCATE®

Founded in 1902 By Theodor Herzl

Vol. 209 No. 44

NOVEMBER 2, 2018 — 24 CHESHVAN, 5778

www.TheJewishAdvocate.com

Celebrating 116 years of service to the Jewish community as its paper of record



PHOTO COURTESY B'NAI B'RITH

Marvin Siflinger, center, at the groundbreaking of the second phase of Covenant House Communities in Brighton in 1991

B'nai B'rith turns 175

Framingham's Marvin Siflinger is the group's VP

By Heather Alterisio
Advocate staff

FRAMINGHAM – On Oct. 13, B'nai B'rith International celebrated 175 years of providing services to senior citizens, building housing for people of all backgrounds, combating anti-Semitism and advocating for Jews around the world. The organization, founded in 1843, launched three of today's major Jewish organizations: the Anti-Defamation League, Hillel International and BBYO.

Senior vice president of B'nai B'rith International Marvin Siflinger, of Framingham, has been a major advocate for housing both nationally and in the greater Boston area for over 40 years.

"I first heard about B'nai B'rith through my work in housing," Siflinger told *The Jewish Advocate*. "I was with HUD [the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development] for 25 years and was the New England regional director back in the late '70s, when folks from B'nai B'rith came to see me and asked for assistance in putting an application together for senior citizen housing."

"B'nai B'rith in Boston with the assistance of B'nai B'rith International has created a nonprofit organization to deal with the housing crisis in Boston," he continued, "and to particularly recognize that at that same time there was about to be an influx of many Jewish refugees from the Soviet Union. There was this motivation on the part of B'nai B'rith and it was our practice at HUD to assist nonprofit and limited profit developers

who were interested in serving a public purpose and creating housing for low income seniors.

"This was only the beginning for Siflinger. "When I retired from HUD and also served as CEO of the Mass Housing Finance Agency, in 1995, the B'nai B'rith folks asked if I would join their local real estate unit, and I did," he said. "A few years later, they asked me to be president of the local housing corporation – the B'nai B'rith Housing Corporation. In that time, we were able to enhance our housing efforts with the help of many of the real estate leaders of the Jewish community. Again, with great assistance of the Washington office of B'nai B'rith International, we created additional housing.

"Siflinger, who has been a B'nai B'rith member since 1981, has been a major asset in expanding the B'nai B'rith Senior Housing Network, which comprises 38 buildings and serves 5,000 low-income seniors across the nation, including at the Irving B. Matross Covenant House I, II & III in Boston and The Coolidge at Sudbury Apartments in Sudbury. B'nai B'rith International is the largest national Jewish sponsor of Section 202 housing in the country.

"So, a great focus in Boston, the whole Boston metropolitan area, even New England as a whole, was to deal with the housing crisis," he said. "B'nai B'rith has created nationally over 4,000 units of housing that serves over 5,000 residents around the country."

Additionally, Siflinger has served as chairman of the B'nai B'rith Senior Housing Committee. In 1995, when he retired from public service, he was elected vice president and then president of both the B'nai B'rith Realty Unit and the Boston-area B'nai B'rith Housing Corporation.

In addition to increasing the number of B'nai B'rith housing units in Boston, housing developments were built in Newton and Sudbury. His introduction of new strategies and fundraising efforts allowed B'nai B'rith to continue its vision of providing as many low-income senior citizens with affordable housing as possible.

Their work, particularly with senior citizens, goes beyond housing, though.

"We are also very active on Capitol Hill to make sure that members of Congress are educated about health needs and the shortage of resources that many of our senior around the country are facing," Siflinger said. "We're very active in local communities, as well as nationally, in educating folks about the crisis."

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Published weekly on Friday by The Jewish Advocate
To subscribe online go to www.TheJewishAdvocate.com or call 617-367-9100 x120.

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ISSN 1077-2995. (USPS-275-020).

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TIMES