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Lees: Abe and Joan Goldstein honoured at Jewish National Fund dinner

 *A man whose life was saved by his mother pushing him from a second-floor window was honoured last week at the Jewish National Fund's (JNF) annual Negev dinner. Abe Goldstein, along with his wife Joan, was praised by 320 guests at the Fantasyland Hotel gala for their contributions to Edmonton, the Jewish community, Canada and Israel.*

By **Nick Lees** • Edmonton Journal
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Abe and Joan Goldstein were honoured at the Jewish National Fund of Edmonton's Negev dinner for their contributions to Edmonton, Canada and Israel.
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A man whose life was saved by his mother pushing him from a second-floor window was honoured last week at the Jewish National Fund's (JNF) annual Negev dinner.

Abe Goldstein, along with his wife Joan, was praised by 320 guests at the Fantasyland Hotel gala for their contributions to Edmonton, the Jewish community, Canada and Israel.

Goldstein was nine when the Nazis invaded his Polish town of Zhetl in 1941, murdering his father and locking up women and children in a theatre prior to driving them to mass open pits to be shot.

“One woman pried a board from a window and pushed her 12-year-old son out,” says Jay Cairns, executive director of the JNF’s Edmonton chapter. “Abe’s mother followed her lead and pushed Abe out. He landed on soft ground and didn’t want to leave his mother and siblings. But the older boy, aged 12, understood what was going on and convinced Abe to flee.”

The boys walked to another town, Dvoretz, where they found hundreds of Jews in a slave labour camp. Partisans later stormed the camp, freeing all who could swim across a nearby river.

Goldstein made it and spent the next few years living in a cave in the forest, cared for by a Jewish man who looked after 10 orphans. He fought alongside the partisans and was

shot twice when sent out on horseback to scout Nazi movements.

Liberated by the Russian Red Army in 1944, Goldstein found his way to Edmonton and was taken in by a young family. At the age of 17 and with a friend, he established the Thorsby Department Store. When he was 25, he met UofA grad Joan Workun, 22, who had come to town to teach. They married in 1965 and have three children.

Goldstein with partners bought Uncle Albert's Pancake House on the corner of Whyte Avenue and 104th Street and opened several more. Again with partners, he bought the Alberta franchise for Tony Roma's restaurants.

Letters of congratulation came to the dinner from many, including Canada's Gov.-Gen. David Johnston, Prime Minister Stephen Harper and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

Joan has been involved in many Jewish organizations and sat on the board of the JNF for many years.

Proceeds from the dinner will support the creation of a park in the Israeli city of Sderot, where more than 2,000 families lack appropriate outdoor play facilities.

The Goldsteins, Edmonton Oiler ticket holders for more than 40 years, were presented with Oilers jerseys with their names on them. Easy rider Advice to me from cyclists and supporter crew on our CASA Cycledelic 1000 bike ride was adamant: “Don’t let him to it. It’s suicidal.” But restaurateur Harmeet Kapur, 67, was determined to cycle down the steep incline from the summit of 1,775-metre Kootenay Pass.

“I haven’t cycled in 45 years,” said the New Asian Village owner. “And I appreciate it is one of Canada’s highest highway passes. But my balance is good.”

Kapur had bought a bike, helmet, shorts and gloves to take part in our ride last week supporting a new building for children, adolescents and their families with mental health concerns. But rather than choose a flat stretch of road, he decided his cycling debut would be downhill on the Kootenay Pass, used by Crowsnest Pass traffic to traverse the Selkirk Mountains.

“I wobbled a great deal,” he told support crew at the bottom of the pass often closed by avalanches. “Goodness knows what speed I was doing. A couple of times I thought for sure going to end up in the ditch.”

The road, being repaired for frost fractures, caused three cracks in the bike frame of Antonio Bilotta, owner of Edmonton's Da Capo cafe.

"I realized I wasn't in shape to ride with you guys on the flats or uphill," said Kapur. "But I shall return next year." Shrinking rider Celebrating Canada Day at the home of Running Room founders John and Bev Stanton, I was worried a wind might come up and blow their son Jason away.

"I weighed a tad over 180 pounds when we ran many of the same marathons in the 1990s," the now 43-year-old told me.

"I'm down to 150 pounds. It's my training for the July 26 Ironman Canada in Whistler I have to thank. I graze on nutritious food all day, drink beer and never put on an ounce."

Jason is training for his fourth Ironman, having completed Ironman Canada in

Penticton twice and the world championships in Kona, Hawii once.

He swims 3,000 metres twice a week; bikes between 40 and 150 kilometres four times each week and runs between 10 and 25 km three times each week.

“My best Ironman time is 11 1/2 hours,” he says. “I’m fitter now and think I can do better. But it’s the Ironman. Anything can happen. As long as I finish in under the 17-hour cut-off time, I’ll be happy.”

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