

Leo Nevas

Leo Nevas, international human rights advocate, philanthropist, Jewish communal leader and distinguished Connecticut attorney, died August 26th, 2009 at his home in Westport, Conn. following a stroke. He was 97 years old.



In 1936, after graduating from the University of Michigan and Cornell Law School as a member of The Cornell Law Review, Mr. Nevas joined his brother Bernard Nevas' law office in Norwalk, Conn. Following his brother's death in 1942, he opened an office in Westport and became the managing partner.

He continued to practice law for seventy three years until his death and rose to become one of the region's leading experts on corporate, real estate, land use, zoning and tax-exempt organization law. Mr. Nevas served as Judge of the Westport Municipal Court and was a member of the Connecticut, American and International Bar Associations.

Mr. Nevas developed an early and enduring commitment to human rights around the world. He served as President of the International League for Human Rights; President of the Blaustein Institute for Human Rights; Member of the International Institute for Human Rights, Strasbourg; Chair of the Human Rights Committee of

World Peace Through Law; and a member of the Connecticut Human Rights Commission.

Mr. Nevas became an early champion of the rights of dissidents and Jews in the Soviet Union. He made his first of many trips to the USSR in 1965 and became friends with Andrei Sakharov and his wife Elena Bonner after first speaking to Dr. Sakharov in the early 1970s and then meeting the Nobel Peace Prize winner after he was released from exile in Gorky in the late 1980s. He often served as a link between Soviet dissidents and the broader human rights community, bringing information and messages to and from the USSR despite frequent intimidation and threat.

He believed strongly in the potential for the United Nations to advance human rights and campaigned broadly for both reforms at the UN and increased US engagement and leadership in human rights. He served as Chairman of the United Nations NGO Human Rights Committee. At the United Nations Association of the USA, he was the longest serving board member and former Vice Chairman. In 2007, UNA-USA recognized his life-long leadership in human rights by creating the Leo Nevas Human Rights Program and Award, of which Mr. Nevas was the inaugural recipient.

Mr. Nevas was also an active national leader of the Jewish community. He served as Chairman of the Board of Governors of the American Jewish Committee, President of the

Norwalk Jewish Community Council and President of Congregation Beth El in Norwalk. He served on the boards of the John F. Kennedy School of Government, Institute for Economic and Social Policy in the Middle East, and American Jewish World Service.

Mr. Nevas and Paul Newman were friends and partners for forty years during which Mr. Nevas helped Mr. Newman launch Newman's Own and the Hole in the Wall Gang camps for children with life threatening diseases. Mr. Nevas served as a member of the Board of Directors and Secretary of the Hole in the Wall Gang Camps. Before he died, Mr. Newman said, "Leo Nevas was both the oar and the anchor of the Hole in the Wall Camps and continues to keep us afloat."

Mr. Nevas was awarded honorary degrees from the University of Bridgeport and Sacred Heart University. He was Founding Chairman of the Board of Westport National Bank, a member of the Board of Trustees at Norwalk Hospital, Vice President of the Fairfield County Community Foundation and Chairman of the Five Town Community Foundation.

A steadfast supporter of Jewish Education, he was an active and continuous member of Reform, Conservative and Orthodox Synagogues. The religious school of Westport's Reform Synagogue, Temple Israel, bears the names of Mr. Nevas and his late wife Libby. The religious school at the Conservative Synagogue in Norwalk, Congregation Beth El, is named for Mr. Nevas' parents.

Leo Nevas was born on January 20, 1912, the seventh and youngest son of Morris and Ethel Baron Navasky. He grew up in Norwalk, Conn. and worked in his parents' grocery store before attending college. He met his wife, Libby Joseloff in 1934 and was married to her from 1938 until her death in 2002. He is survived by his daughter, Jo-Ann Nevas Price and her husband Michael; his son Bernard Nevas and his wife Terry; his son Marc Nevas and his wife Kate; and his eight grandchildren: Daniel Price and his wife Lisa, David Nevas and his wife Jennifer, Rebecca Price, Rachel Nevas Peled and her husband Itsik, Joshua Nevas, Benjamin Nevas, Michael Nevas and Isaac Nevas.

Funeral services will be held Sunday at 1:30 pm at Congregation Beth El, 109 East Avenue Norwalk, Conn. There will be a minyan at 7:00 pm on Sunday at 17 Quarter Mile Road, Westport, Conn. The family will be sitting shiva at 17 Quarter Mile Road, Westport, Conn. and will welcome visitors on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday from 1:30-4:00 pm and 7:00-9:00 pm and on Friday 2:00-5:00 pm. There will be a minyan Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday at 7:30 pm.

In lieu of flowers donations may be made to the American Jewish World Service; the Navasky Religious School at Congregation Beth El, Norwalk, Conn.; or Achievement First Bridgeport Academy, Bridgeport, Conn.

For further information:

Please call: Daniel Price, 917-597-9890