

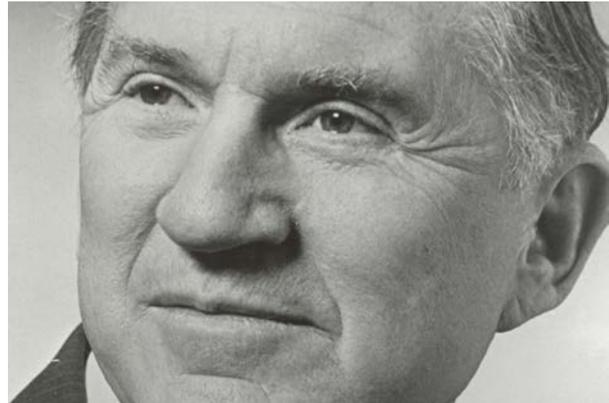
# Cincinnati community remembers Benjamin Gettler

June 11, 2013 | Section: [Featured](#), [Local News](#), [Obituaries](#), [Social Life](#)

In a speech given on June 7, 1945, General George S. Patton concluded: “It is foolish and wrong to mourn the men who died. Rather, we should thank God that such men lived.”

This quote is fitting for a community leader like Benjamin Gettler, who passed away on June 4, 2013, at the age of 87.

Reviewing Mr. Gettler’s career, we are thankful for his many lasting contributions to our lives. A prominent businessman, successful attorney, political activist and civic leader, we in Cincinnati will particularly remember him for his contributions while president of the Jewish Community Relations Council, his work in creating the Jewish Foundation, his leadership positions on the boards of the University of Cincinnati and Jewish Hospital, his role in providing regional transportation for all citizens and his involvement in the Republican Party. Further, he was the executive director of the Rockwern Charitable Fund. Nationally, Mr. Gettler was one of the founders of the Republican Jewish Coalition, and served as Chairman of the Jewish Institute for National Security Affairs.



*Benjamin Gettler*

Born in Louisville, Ky., he was the son of Herbert and Gertrude Gettler. His father, an insurance salesman, moved with the family from Louisville to Chicago, to Indianapolis to Terre Haute and finally to Cincinnati in 1938. Mr. Gettler grew up in the 1930s and ‘40s at a time when antisemitism was prevalent around the world. He carried that memory with him for his entire life, as he aimed to make safety for the Jewish people a top priority. He graduated from Walnut Hills High School at the age of 16 and received a scholarship to the University of Cincinnati, where he graduated at age 19 with a major in Economics. Deciding to pursue a career in law, Mr. Gettler accepted a scholarship to Harvard Law School.

Upon his return to Cincinnati, Mr. Gettler practiced law, and eventually became president of Vulcan International and Chairman of the Board of the University of Cincinnati.

Mr. Gettler served as Chairman of the Board of the Jewish Institute for National Security Affairs (JINSA) from 1994-1998. The mission of JINSA is to support a strong U.S. defense, a strong Israel defense and a link between the two. Throughout his leadership at JINSA, Mr. Gettler remained dedicated to supporting strong and robust American defense cooperation with Israel.

“I first met Ben Gettler in the mid-1970s when he brought a JINSA delegation to visit our factory in Arad. Consistent with his passionate commitment to the city of Cincinnati and the strategic relationship between the United States and Israel, he wanted the group to see a homegrown industrialist helping to build up the Jewish state. Ben’s legacy is his overarching concern for Jewish security, and the impact he made by defining the direction—and enhancing the abilities—of organizations that promoted that agenda,” shared Gary Heiman, chairman and original trustee of the Jewish Foundation of Cincinnati.

“If you are lucky in life you get to work with someone like Ben Gettler. If you are really lucky in life, you get to work with Ben himself. He may be gone but his guiding hand will always be on my shoulder. Ben was an American patriot and a fierce advocate for Israel. Ben was an American original. It was a privilege to have known him,” shared David Steinmann, former president of JINSA.

Admiral Leon Edney, Retired U.S. Navy Supreme Allied Commander, NATO, who also worked closely with Ben and David at JINSA, recently wrote that Ben’s strongest characteristics included his “ethical

integrity, loyalty, a sense of fairness, and a desire to make a difference. Everyone who has the privilege of getting to know Ben and work with him is a better person for the experience. I certainly am.”

Mr. Gettler joined the board of the Jewish Community Relations Council (JCRC) in 1971—eventually becoming Chairman in 1978— primarily as a way to fight antisemitism and to concentrate on Israel’s security. He provided opportunities for politicians on the local, regional and national levels to learn about the Jewish community and Israel.

“It is impossible to measure the scope of Ben Gettler’s impact on our community. He unleashed his brilliant strategic talents to build many successful Cincinnati-based businesses, lead the Jewish Hospital Board, co-navigate the creation of our Jewish Foundation and promote the establishment of Cincinnati’s best-in-the-nation Israel Experience grant program. Having grown up in the shadow of the Holocaust, Ben fought masterfully and ceaselessly to protect the Jewish people on the local and national levels. Toward that end, Ben made it his personal mission to ensure that Cincinnati’s JCRC was one of the most focused and respected in America. I learned a great deal from Ben. We will all feel the loss of his indomitable spirit as we strive to embody the depth of Ben’s commitment to our people and our community,” remarked Shep Englander, CEO of the Jewish Federation of Cincinnati.

In 1978, Mr. Gettler was invited to join the board of Jewish Hospital, eventually becoming Chairman of the Board in 1991. When Jewish Hospital joined The Health Alliance of Greater Cincinnati, he was instrumental in putting aside funds to begin a foundation that would benefit the Jewish community of Cincinnati.

As a central figure in the establishment of the Jewish Foundation in 1995, Gettler’s leadership and vision helped guide the Foundation’s groundbreaking philanthropic investments in the Cincinnati Jewish community.

Having funded capital projects in many areas of Cincinnati, including the University of Cincinnati, Yavneh Day School, and Cincinnati Hebrew Day School, the initiative considered to be Gettler’s crowning achievement is the Jewish Foundation’s nationally recognized Israel travel grants program, which has helped more than 1,300 young Jewish Cincinnatians participate in educational experiences in Israel. He understood the role the Foundation could play in making critical Jewish identity-building Israel experiences more affordable and accessible.

Rabbi Lewis Kamrass remarked that one of the gifts of Gettler’s leadership was in anticipating changes in the landscape. This proved helpful in his workings with Jewish Hospital and when helping to form the Jewish Foundation. When the concept of Israel Travel Grants was first discussed, Gettler was an immediate advocate of the idea. While other communities offered smaller grants, Gettler supported the concept of having no financial barriers for a person to be able to experience Israel.

“Ben had the great capacity of being a forward thinker. He used strategic thought to reach that vision. He immediately saw value in the Israel Travel Grants and wanted to help young people develop a certain pride, as well as their own relationship, with the Land of Israel,” commented Rabbi Kamrass.

“Ben was a true giant, not only in the Cincinnati Jewish community but in the Jewish world outside of our region. He was a visionary leader, and his accomplishments serve as an inspiration to those of us who follow in his footsteps. Ben was very proud of his role in the establishment of The Jewish Foundation. During his time on the Board, and afterward through his quiet counsel, he helped position us to make a lasting impact on the Cincinnati Jewish community, as well as on the broader community in which we are invested,” remarked Michael R. Oestreicher, president of the Jewish Foundation of Cincinnati.

Guy Peri, president of the Rockwern Academy board, shared some thoughts on Mr. Gettler’s involvement with Rockwern Academy. “It was Ben Gettler’s vision to invest the life savings of his close friend and business partner, Dr. Samuel S. Rockwern, in our community’s pluralistic Jewish day school. The vision united two of Ben Gettler’s bedrock values—loyalty to his friend and education. Ben envisioned the

Rockwern Academy providing the highest quality of both Jewish and general education. We share that vision and are deeply grateful to Ben for the endowment gift that will contribute to a strong future for Rockwern.”

At the suggestion and unwavering support of his wife, Dee, Gettler decided to leave a lasting legacy for his family. He collaborated with his dear friend Michael Rapp to co-author “Visible Footprints: The Life of Benjamin Gettler,” which was published in March 2012.

“Ben was a man of integrity, wisdom, and vision; a man deeply loyal to his friends, the United States, Israel, and the Jewish people; a man who demanded excellence from himself and from those with whom he worked. For all these reasons and more, I’ve always respected him as a colleague, community leader, and most of all, as a dear friend,” said Michael Rapp.

To quote from Goethe’s “Faust:”

What you have as heritage,

Take now as task;

For only thus you will make it your own.

Benjamin Gettler has shown us the way. If we wish to benefit from his work, it is now our task to continue along the path he set forth.

The Gettler family would like to acknowledge their gratitude and appreciation to Dr. Andrew Loewy, Gettler’s primary physician, for the kindness and sensitivity he displayed in caring for him.

Gettler is survived by his wife, Dee Gettler; his children, Thomas D. Gettler, Gail (Alex Eby) Gettler, Jorian (Neil) Roth, Benjamin R. (Brooke) Gettler and John (Julie) Gabriel; his grandchildren, Anna and Layla Eby, Reed Gettler, Benjamin Gettler III, David and Marisa Roth and Will and Kate Gabriel; and his sister, Mona (Michael Rothenberg) Gettler. His sister, Selma Post, predeceased him.

Services were held at Weil Funeral Home on June 6, with Rabbi Lewis Kamrass of Wise Temple officiating.

Memorial contributions to Jewish Institute for National Security Affairs, U.C. Foundation, Track and Field Department or Cincinnati Museum Center at Union Terminal would be appreciated.