

DesignTeam Plus: Design with Heart

By Ashley Zlatopolsky - 12/12/2022 6:00 PM



Lily is chief morale officer at DesignTeam Plus

Giving back to the community is at the core of DesignTeam Plus.

Birmingham-based architectural and interior design firm DesignTeam Plus makes it a mission to pay its employees to give back. The six-person team, led by co-owners Harold Remlinger (principal architect) and Shari Stein (principal interior designer), is fueled by social responsibility and community activism.



Harold Remlinger and Shari Stein at a Habitat for Humanity project.

“It’s really at the core of who we are and what we do,” explains Stein, an Adat Shalom member and active contributor to the Metro Detroit Jewish community. “Everyone here [at the firm] is passionate about giving back to our community.”

For Stein, it’s a lifelong passion that continues to shape the firm’s values today. Yet the seeds for giving back were planted early on, long before the award-winning DesignTeam Plus opened its doors in 2012.

Planting Seeds for Activism

Prior to launching the firm, Stein worked as an instructor at Lawrence Technological University. There, she partnered with students on pro bono work for Yad Ezra, which helps feed hungry families in the Jewish community.

They designed an outdoor mural, among other initiatives, that eventually led Yad Ezra to become a client. Several years later; the firm designed a greenhouse for the Berkley-based food pantry in 2015.

Yet, while she was still working at Lawrence Technological University, Stein began to think of ways to merge community activism with her love for design. While the project for Yad Ezra served as a major inspiration for launching DesignTeam Plus, a second volunteer initiative also played a role in developing the business.



DesignTeam Plus employees volunteering at Yad Ezra

When Stein was approached by Friendship Circle, where she was serving as a volunteer, to design an apartment for Lilya Bromberg, a 21-year-old woman with cerebral palsy and cancer, she knew it was an opportunity she wanted to pursue.

“Everybody in the community provided products, and we designed a fully accessible shower for her,” Stein recalls. “Prior to that, she had no place to shower. It gave her an extra year of life.”

Seeing the real-life impact that the project had, Stein, together with Remlinger, who also worked as an instructor at Lawrence Tech, formed DesignTeam Plus as a way to give back within their careers. Now, the firm operates on the same principles that the business was originally built on.

“All of our employees here have been handpicked because they all love our mission about giving back and they all love to volunteer,” Stein explains. “It’s part of the core of who they are, and the alignment works so well.”

Identifying Volunteer Opportunities

Each year, DesignTeam Plus evaluates their current projects and identifies ways to weave volunteer work into those efforts. One example is a project for Habitat for Humanity, a nonprofit housing organization, where the team took it upon themselves to work one afternoon on a home for women in need.

DesignTeamPlus employees have also volunteered with Gleaners Community Food Bank, Hillel Day School, designing an award-winning sukkah in Ann Arbor and most recently, Yad Ezra, where they spent an afternoon working in the greenhouse they designed, washing and bagging vegetables for the pantry.

The Yad Ezra project also served as a celebration of the firm’s 10-year anniversary, bringing them back to their roots and the mission that helped inspire it all.

While volunteering with these projects, employees are paid for their time. Employees can also select their favorite charity to receive a donation from the firm for the holiday season. “It gives purpose [to our employees],” Stein says. “It drives motivation; it drives excitement. They’re not just coming into work.”

In her own time, Stein also gives back to Gesher Human Services as a mentor and Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Detroit. “The Jewish community has given us so much,” she says. “It’s really important to give back.”

With 10 years under the company’s belt, Stein says she hopes to continue to expand DesignTeam Plus and its services in the near future. “We

constantly educate our staff,” she says. “It’s all about education and mentoring the next generation.”

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