

## RICHARD BELLE (President)

Seven years ago, I discovered the warmth and intimacy of Congregation Kol HaNeshama and have been an enthusiastic member ever since. I have had the opportunity to serve in a number of capacities, including newsletter editor, Transition Co-Chair (as we were at that time leaving Southgate and moving to a new location), Program Co-Chair of Rabbi Jennifer's Benefit Luncheon, member of the Rabbi Search Committee, and Board Liaison to the Building Bridges Committee. This is my second year on the KH Board.

I have become president during a period of great transition. As I write this, Kol HaNeshama has hired an inspiring, charismatic rabbi, Sigal Brier, who will assume the pulpit in July 2023. We faced many challenges in the few years preceding, including dealing with Covid, changing our location for services two times, accepting the resignation of our beloved Rabbi Jennifer, and searching for a new rabbi. We have emerged stronger from these challenges, and I intend to build on our core qualities of acceptance, friendship and inclusiveness. I want to make it easier to participate in our many KH activities. Volunteering and supporting our fellow congregants produces a joy and confidence that I wish to share with all of you.

Though I was born in New York, I grew up in Pittsburgh and remain a "yinzer" at heart. I was raised in a reform congregation, led by Rabbi Harold Silver, nephew of the famed Abba Silver. My parents introduced me to reconstructionism as an intellectual construct, however, and I was fortunate to discover the original, founding reconstructionist synagogue, SAJ, while I was a graduate student in New York. It took me another 30 plus years to discover the friendliness and vibrancy of a comparable synagogue when I fell in love with Kol HaNeshama while vacationing in Florida as a snowbird.

I love to travel and dabble in languages, and have traveled extensively in Europe, as well as to Cuba, China and Korea, and a few Caribbean islands. I have been fortunate to visit Israel three times. My first time was the summer after I graduated high school, when I worked at Kibbutz Yad Mordechai (just south of Ashdod and Ashkelon), picking watermelon and cotton. I spent my junior year abroad, studying at Hebrew University in Jerusalem. Lastly, in one of our first travel expeditions after we were married, Marie and I travelled to Israel where we caught up with my parents who were studying on an Ulpan, and then later spent a week in Egypt.

I am a happily retired "sunbird," living full time in Bradenton, FL. I have worked as a college professor, specializing in international politics, arms control and political theory. I subsequently worked as a survey researcher and later as a communications officer for three different non-profit engineering associations. Lastly, I created a small consulting firm, aptly titled "Belle Communications."