

# The Simon Konover Company looking to honor late namesake

**By Alison Jalbert**

*Assistant Editor*

With the passing of noted philanthropist Simon Konover, the company that boasts his name is looking to honor his legacy this year with a new sponsorship.

James Wakim, president and chief operating officer for The Simon Konover Company, said the company is in the process of determining how they want to do that to respect Konover.

“We’re going to branch off with a new day of giving,” he said. “We’re conversing amongst ourselves to come up with a community-sponsored event that will honor Simon.”

Konover passed away Oct. 20, 2015 in Delray Beach, Fla., at the age of 93. He was the founder of The Simon Konover Company and Konover South, a fully integrated real estate organization based in West Hartford and Deerfield Beach, Fla.

Along with his business accomplishments, Konover is recognized as an exceptional philanthropist, both locally and nationally.

He was a founder of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C., and served as president and chairman of the Jewish Federation of Greater Hartford. Konover donated construction

management services to Paul Newman’s Hole in the Wall Gang Camp and initiated the creation of an affiliated camp in Israel.

He was a founding member of Beth El Temple, and a major donor to the Hebrew High School of New England and Hebrew University in Israel.

Michael Johnston, president and chief executive officer of the Jewish Community Foundation, said what fascinated him about Konover is that he cared deeply about many things.

“He cared deeply about the community – the Jewish community, but [the West Hartford] community, too,” he said. “He really believed he could make a difference in making communities stronger, better places.”

A Holocaust survivor, Konover was interned in a Nazi labor farm at age 16 in 1939. He escaped to Russia, where he was drafted into its army, and was then imprisoned for one year in a Siberian hard labor camp until the war ended in 1945. Johnston said many issues related to remembrance and education spoke to Konover and influenced his philanthropy.



*Courtesy photo*

**Simon Konover**

“Like a lot of survivor stories, it’s an astonishing story, [given] all that he went through, that he survived and became such a success. It clearly was a part of his philanthropy. He often said to me how lucky he was and how important it was for him to give back because of all the things he’d been given,” he said.

Wakim said it was an amazing experience to spend time and learn from Konover, who “experienced things no person should ever experience,” which put him in a position to want to do more and help others.

It was Konover’s story and his persona that drew Wakim to the company from private practice.

“There are only a few things you can do in your professional life that can expose you to different aspects of our world that you can get in the first person. Working with Simon specifically was one of those opportunities,” he said. “The man was humbler than the parish priest and bigger than life like Donald Trump. His genius was probably outweighed only by his philanthropy, his sense of community and his sense of family.”

Konover’s business legacy can be described as “business on a handshake,” Wakim said. An astute businessman, Konover tried to make the best deal he could, but he honored his word on a handshake. If he made a bad deal, he respected it.

“He expected a lot of people,” he said. “He was a tough, engaging businessperson. His word was solid. If he gave you his word, he’d follow through.”

The lessons Wakim learned from Konover are simple ones, but important nonetheless.

“When I first started working with him, he sat me down and said, ‘It’s not what you make, it’s what you spend,’” he recalled. “There were a lot of the simplistic lessons in life that he offered a very keen, thoughtful perspective on that were just so familiar and, yet, oftentimes so opaque. He really made them clear.”

Both Johnston and Wakim said Konover served as a major influence in their lives.

“He was a remarkable individual. The breadth of his philanthropy was unusual,” Johnston said. “There are a number of people who give to lots of causes; he had a willingness and desire to help any organization that came to him.”

“I loved him. He was just a wonderful, wonderful man,” Wakim said. “His presence and imprint are going to be missed. Everyone here at the Simon Konover Company are just so proud to the core to have his name on the company and honored to be able to carry on the business he started. It’s an immense privilege to work with the family and follow on Simon’s legacy.”