

Funeral director Abe Green retires at age 89

By [*Debbie Levison*](#)

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FAIRFIELD-HBO's smash hit "Six Feet Under" revealed for viewers the world of the funeral industry with pathos, humor and a definite macabre twist. But for Abraham Green, founder of Abraham L. Green and Son Funeral Home, it is a world in which he has dwelt for more than half a century.

At age 89, Green has officially retired from a career that began when he was still a boy living in New Haven. "My grandfather lived in a home for the elderly there, and I had to visit him every day," recalled Green. "Often, there were funerals being held which my grandfather and I attended. After awhile I became comfortable with the services, and started to lead the prayers at funerals."

It wasn't long before Green realized he could make it a profession; it would be, he said, not just a job but an honor and a mitzvah. His role on the front lines of WWII as a medic in an infantry unit further served to cement his comfort level with death and dying.

As luck would have it, the Bridgeport community in the 1940s was actively seeking someone to open a Jewish funeral home, having had to utilize local Christian establishments which did not necessarily cater to its customs and needs. In 1948, an existing Italian funeral home on Grand Street n near the hub of Jewish life at the time, with its several area synagogues and Jewish neighborhoods n went out of business. Green borrowed money and bought the building. (In 1997, the funeral home moved to its present location on Beach Road in Fairfield.)

The Jewish community back then was thick with immigrants from Hungary,

Russia and Poland.

“They had their traditional Jewish values but their attitudes and customs were old style. They were a tough group of people. They would cross the street when they saw me walking toward them n they were very superstitious,” Green recalled. “I tried to Americanize them.”

With most funerals long ago held in the families’ living rooms, or parlors, it was a leap to move them to the “funeral parlor.” And with the advent of refrigeration, the pragmatic custom of burying the dead within 24 hours n has relaxed.

“What’s different today is that family members live all over the country and abroad,” said Green’s son Sam, who has taken over as director of the funeral home. “So what’s more important, to bury a person quickly or to have all the family members present? The funeral is for the relatives, after all. Today, it is more common to wait for people to arrive and delay the funeral.”

Such attention to the changing needs of the community has made the funeral home what it is today.

"Our community has been enriched by the integrity and compassion demonstrated by Abe Green. In an era when many in the funeral industry have been criticized, our community has benefited by the devotion, dedication and the profound commitment to Yiddishkeit that Abe Green and now his son Sam have exemplified by personal example to the needs of the greater Bridgeport Jewish community," said Rabbi Israel Stein of Congregation Rodeph Sholom in Bridgeport.

In 1991, the Green family helped revitalize the Chevra Kadisha, the Jewish burial society whose volunteer members care for and prepare a body for burial. “This is done as a true mitzvah, by observant Jews,” said Green.

“It is the highest honor to participate in a burial,” added Sam. “When Jewish

communities were being formed, the first thing they established was the cemetery and Chevra Kadisha to care for the deceased... it is a fundamental building block of Jewish communal life. It used to be that each synagogue around here had its own Chevra Kadisha.”

Considering that Abraham Green’s mother was vehemently opposed to his starting a funeral business (she objected to his making a living from the passing of others) Green became indispensable, his being the only Jewish funeral home in Fairfield County. It was a career that required the utmost commitment, Green admitted, in that he was on call 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. His wife, Minnie, whom he met on a blind date in 1936, and their children were accustomed to having the phone ring at home at all hours of the day and night.

The lifestyle is not for everyone, added Sam.

“You have to get used to last minute schedule changes and the disappointments of not being at family events,” he said. “This business is a marriage n you can’t turn it off at 5 p.m.” In fact, a number of Sam’s associates have left the business because of its considerable demands.

“We are meeting people at their worst. My father has always tried to be respectful and sympathize with the grieving families,” Sam said. “We have seen many tragic events. I remember a plane crash in the 1960s in which several local couples headed to Florida were killed. And of course, it is always tragic when young people die an untimely death, of accidents or illness.”

For his part, Abraham Green said that he has derived a great deal of satisfaction from his work, knowing that he has spent his lifetime fulfilling a mitzvah: helping people and easing their time of sadness.