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Menorah Park's Bikur Cholim Program Awarded for Excellence in Service

{Beachwood, OH} Menorah Park's *Bikur Cholim* service was recently chosen for *Excellence in Service* by *LeadingAge Ohio*, who stated it "represented an outstanding replicable practice". The Bikur Cholim Program at Menorah Park was developed to enhance the spiritual well-being of residents by encouraging increased visits by ensuring that religiously observant residents and family members have their own dedicated space and programming specifically designed to meet their needs. The mitzvah of Bikur Cholim or visiting the sick is a central tenet to Judaism. This innovative adaptation of a community service which was originally developed in hospitals enables this Mitzvah to continue no matter the circumstance. Evidence through several research studies stresses the importance of regular social contact with family members to combat stress and anxiety through the provision of effective practical and emotional support and also by acting as a source of self-esteem and respect. In order to fully ensure the well-being of our elders, it is incumbent upon us to remove or reduce obstacles or challenges for families interested in remaining close with loved ones, especially as end-of-life approaches.

Menorah Park is the first nursing home to make creative use of space to develop a program providing a private area that reflects Judaism's priority on prayer, rest, and privacy as we join with families, ensuring the Mitzvah Bikur Cholim takes place even in the most difficult times. Families who travel distances to be with their loved one find the Bikur Cholim program provides a welcoming opportunity to have substantial and meaningful visits that include a location to rest or have quiet conversations without leaving the campus. In the past, religiously observant families often limited visits due to the challenges of making arrangements out of the facility for Shabbos and Yom Tov due to limits on travel, availability of specialty foods, and the need for privacy. This innovative adaptation of a community service now allows families to be side by side with their loved one no matter what day of the week, and provides every conceivable religious ritual object, food or comfort needed. This area is particularly critical to those who keep kosher, are unfamiliar with the area, cannot readily obtain a kosher meal and also need a quiet place to relax, reflect and pray during difficult times such as end-of-life.

Families and residents are guided through their experience in the Bikur Cholim Program by the extraordinary Rabbinic Staff at Menorah Park. The Rabbinic staff ensures that residents and families have meaningful experiences and spiritual support, specialized kosher foods not typically found even in a kosher facility 24/7, (not easily obtained during early and late hours). Visitors now find they have increased ability to focus on what is truly important, their loved one, and the comfort that strong spiritual support provides. If they are staying for Shabbos or Yom Tov, complete holidays meals are provided to meet their needs, all coordinated by the Rabbinic staff. Beautiful ritual objects for Kiddush (blessing on wine), Motzei (blessing on bread), Havdallah (concluding ritual for Shabbos), or daily prayer are always on hand to enhance a visit. By creating this space to minister to the needs of the resident and the family, the Rabbinic staff can more easily provide pastoral support to the residents and families enhancing their spiritual well-being. As the attached excerpts from the guest book testify, it has been a life saver for family member's spiritual well-being as well as their loved ones whose quality of life benefits greatly from family interaction.

Since the program's inception in 2012, there have been nearly 1000 visitors who have signed in to use or represent the Menorah Park Bikur Cholim program, while at the same time there are hundreds who have used the room and spiritual guidance who do not sign in. A detailed welcome book listing amenities, sign-in guest book and on-site rabbis, enhance the warmth and comfort this special program brings to families.

"This room is available to anyone, whether they are Jewish or not," said Stone Gardens Administrator Ross Wilkoff. "But it will be especially significant for observant family members, especially those from out-of-town who need access to the essentials of religious life while spending time with their loved ones. Our goal is to best support the needs of our entire community."

In March, Menorah Park's Bikur Cholim program received the National Jewish Programming Award from the Association of Jewish Aging Services (AJAS), recognized for outstanding Jewish programs developed and implemented by AJAS organizations that are innovative, creative and specifically designed to enhance the spiritual well-being of the older adults they serve.

"AJAS is very proud to present a Jewish Programming award to Menorah Park to recognize The Bikur Cholim Program. Menorah Park is the first nursing home to make creative use of space to develop a program providing a private area that reflects Judaism's priority on prayer, rest and privacy. We congratulate Menorah Park on this achievement as it is an example of their dedication to Honoring our Mothers and Fathers," said Don Shulman, AJAS President and CEO.