

Cary Shaw

The Congregation for Humanistic Judaism (CHJ) located in Fairfield County, Connecticut is thrilled and proud of Cary Shaw for being selected as the 2021 recipient of the Sherwin T. Wine Lifetime Achievement Award. Cary clearly deserves this honor for a life-time of work and commitment to the ideals and ideas put forth by Humanistic Judaism and the humanist movement.

If Cary's world-view and values could be summed up in a phrase, it would doubtlessly be "working to make the world a better place through science, reason and rational thought". Throughout his professional and personal life, Cary has worked tirelessly to better the lives of people in his work-place and community.

Born and raised in the Jewish reform tradition, Cary began to question his "God" beliefs early on – even prior to his Bar Mitzvah. By the time he was 12, Cary was questioning the concept of an all-knowing God who makes decisions for you. At some point in his young adult life, he realized he was not alone in his world view after reading about people like Thomas and Aldous Huxley. As Cary himself relates, *"I realized I could lead a life of substance as a non-believer. I also realized that others had their doubts as well. I came out of the closet."*

He attended MIT, earning a degree in "Operations Research" --an area that focuses on applied math and statistics. He went on to earn a graduate degree from the Harvard Business School. Upon graduation from Harvard, Cary moved to Washington D.C., where he worked for the National Planning Association as an economist.

In his spare time, Cary founded, at the age of 27, the Washington Area Bicyclist Association (WABA), an advocacy group for cyclists and sustainable transportation serving Metropolitan Washington DC. Cary enjoyed bicycling, and was aware of the problems: unsafe roads, a lack of bicycle paths and a variety of obstacles bicyclists encountered every day. It was new for a local bicycle organization to speak up about these hazards.

At the time of WABA's founding, the country was beginning to develop an awareness of environmental issues such as autopollution, along with other associated issues, such as higher gas prices. Of course, many people in

Washington and around the country had taken part in first Earth Day celebration. Through persistence and hard work, WABA was founded in 1972.

Since its founding, WABA has grown to be an extraordinarily large and effective organization with literally dozens of community events and activities. WABA has had many environmental successes that were reflected in state and local budgets, public works, and an EPA clean air plan for metropolitan Washington. WABA's annual budget in 2022 (its 50th year!) will be \$2.5 million, with 7,000 dues-paying members.

WABA published the first Washington area Bicycle Atlas, and the organization continues to be an active force in communities around the country. The supporter list consists of about 50,000. These people are not members but they have attended an event, signed a petition, or received the newsletter.

During his time in Washington, Cary continued to explore various approaches to Judaism, including *Jewish Renewal*. It was during this time that Cary met his future wife Joan, who was finishing her Masters in Social Work.

Work at Yale brought them to Connecticut, and when their daughter Jocelyn reached Sunday school age, Cary and Joan discovered the Congregation for Humanistic Judaism (humanisticjews.org). It was the perfect fit. They joined and immediately became active members contributing enormously to the growth and sustainability of CHJ.

Shortly after joining CHJ, Cary became a trimester chair (responsible for programming for a third of the year), Public Relations (Publicity) chair, and eventually Treasurer, Vice President, while continuing to be involved in public relations efforts.

In all these areas, Cary's ideas and influence were profound. For example, as treasurer Cary brought CHJ out of financial straits and onto a sound financial footing, and he was a key player in expanding Sunday School resources. As public relations chair, Cary was able to provide a public profile essential to dramatically increasing CHJ's membership.

Cary also convened a team to draft a statement of CHJ humanistic Jewish principles, which was officially adopted at the 2002 Annual Meeting. So impressed was Sherwin Wine, he suggested it would be a wonderful model or template for

what other congregations might formulate. Given his interest in CHJ and Humanistic Judaism, Cary has also served on the SHJ Board making significant contributions.

In 2002, a California doctor, Dr. Michael Newdow, became the center of national attention when he brought a court case about the recitation of “Under God” in public schools. Cary, keenly aware of this issue and a strong proponent of the “separation of church and state”, took the pro-active step of inviting Dr. Newdow to Connecticut, organizing a panel discussion with local clergy on this issue. The event was widely publicized, garnered a large turnout and significant publicity, and enabled CHJ to increase its profile in the community.

Given his proclivity for making the world a better place, Cary proposed a community service day that many congregations participated in. The programs included food donations, social action marches, and helping disadvantaged children.

Cary also increased the presence and expansion of SHJ by organizing a North East Humanistic Jewish conclave drawing attendees from congregations in New York City, Westchester, Connecticut, New Jersey, Boston, Ithaca and Washington, D.C.

In 2009, Cary, teamed with John Levin and other CHJers, to inaugurate Darwin Day Dinner in Connecticut, celebrating scientific discovery of our natural world, as well as Charles Darwin. It includes dinner with a speaker who usually talks about an important scientific discovery. This event continues to be held every February, with planning in the works for 2022 (darwindayct.org).

After retiring from Pitney Bowes, Cary developed a mathematical model for use during parathyroid surgery to provide real-time probability that enough material was surgically excised to cure the patient. This “Cure Predictability During Parathyroidectomy” was published by the peer-reviewed World Journal of Surgery, (<http://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s00268-013-2327-8>), submitted by Cary Shaw, Robert Udelsman, Chief of Surgery, and Patricia Donovan, assistant for strategy. Cary and Joan were flown to Helsinki, Finland to the international convention of endocrine surgeons where Cary presented his innovation.

Cary's accomplishments continued to evolve. In 2013, he noticed that there was no organization in his area that focused strictly on humanistic issues and goals. He realized it was time to form a secular group that would be compatible with the ethics and values of CHJ, but open to all. He paid special attention to creating a separate set of priorities and initiatives that did not conflict with CHJ's values, ethics and programming efforts.

To achieve this goal, at the annual Darwin Day dinner in 2013, Cary announced the formation of the Humanists and Freethinkers of Fairfield County (hffcct.org). In a typical month HFFC now features a main meeting, Book Etc. group, Science Readers group, and Social Hour. These are supplemented with charitable activities, solstice parties, and movie events. Topics include humanism, "religious" movements, dogmatic delusions, medical advances, climate change, and social concerns such as immigration, poverty, electric vehicles, and indigenous people of Connecticut.

Programs on the lighter side include trivia nights, a talk by a TV comedy writer, and on one particular evening, there was a free-flowing conversation of people discussing their cat's behaviors. Needless to add, there is something for everyone and HFFC has attracted a solid, ongoing membership that continues to grow. Many CHJers also belong to HFFC.

These days, Cary has focused his attention on such issues as ensuring that women have appropriate access to their medical rights in hospitals, particularly institutions receiving public monies, yet restricting services based on non-medical (religious) edicts. Cary wants to ensure that women understand their abortion and related reproductive health options. He has gone to Hartford and spoken to the state legislature to pressure them on this issue.

Under the aegis of HFFC, Cary has also spoken to the legislature in 2019 and 2021 about the bill H.B. 5044 – an Act Concerning Immunizations of children. This Act would protect the public health by ensuring adequate and appropriate immunizations of children. It would remove from Connecticut the religious exemption whereby parents can send their kids to school without having them vaccinated or having a medical reason otherwise. The bill was passed into law. He also gave the invocation, a secular one, in February 2020, to the Connecticut State Senate in official session.

Cary Shaw continues to work on finding solutions to make the world a better place for all. He knows that it is not a simple, easy task, but that one person can sometimes make a difference. However, he adds, "There is strength in numbers. If you have the backing of others and an organization, you can do more and effect real change."

As a CHJer who is also an HFFC member put it very succinctly, "Cary is inspiring and motivating, because he is energized and committed. He gets completely involved in every aspect a project. He works hard, andhe inspires you to work just as hard. He's an absolute dynamo!"For CHJ, Cary's presence and contributions have been enormous. Our heartfelt congratulations.