

People You Should Know: The MCA Founders Award Honorees

By Marc Rosenweig, MCA Member

To capture the heart and soul of MCA, look no further than the five recipients of the MCA Founders Award. Created in 2018, the award is presented annually to the MCA member who over the years has contributed and dedicated his time and effort to the growth and success of the organization.



Meir Kehila, who was honored in 2021, came to this country from Israel in 1978. He served in the Israeli military during the '73 war. While telling me he was one of the six originals who founded MCA, he admitted "I never thought it would grow to 800."

He's best known as the coordinator of the MCA luncheons. He stepped into the role after the second luncheon. Over the years, the luncheons rotated through more than a dozen clubs. They've now found a home at the Audubon Country Club, which can host 150 members six times a year.

Kehila credits MCA technology maven Larry Israelite with moving the luncheon registration process online. Kehila is pleased there's no more chasing after registrants for their checks. It's strictly "choose between chicken or fish."

"I was totally surprised by the Founders Award," said Kehila. "I realized it was me when (MCA President) Michael Sobol said 'this is the guy that kept saying 'chicken or fish. He runs it like the military.'"

"I'm still dumbfounded," he added. "They planted 14 trees in Israel in my name. I said, 'why not 18?'"

When Kehila came to the U.S., a contact put him in touch with Jay Pritzker, who then headed Hyatt Hotels and is now the governor of Illinois. After two weeks, Pritzker returned his call and eventually invited Kehila to use his management degree at Hyatt. Eventually, Kehila went into sales for a construction company, then founded his own successful construction company.

"This country is great if you're willing to work hard," said Kehila, who moved to Naples from the Chicago area in 2007. When he arrived here he was familiar with the MCA concept. He belonged to the GEL men's group in Chicago (Gentlemen Enjoy Leisure).

"Five women can go shopping and talk for hours. Men can't," said Kehila. "They need activities. Many women say, 'Thank you for the MCA. My husband got off the couch.'"

Glenn Perrin undoubtedly owns the record for hosting the most MCA events. Among them, the hugely popular couples dine-around dinners, Thursday breakfast group at The Patio Café, dinner and theatre with Artis-Naples, and the Florida Repertory Group, the walking group --- and more.

He's also built up the Soulful Shabbat Dinners at Temple Shalom, which have been helpful to both MCA and Temple Shalom.

“When I moved to Naples, I didn’t know anyone here,” said Perrin, who taught French and Spanish in Weston, Ma. for 37 years. “Steve Brazina (the late former MCA president and Founders Award honoree) said ‘You’re outgoing. Do some groups for us.’” Perrin didn’t need a second invitation.

He views his MCA contributions as a natural progression. “I was a teacher for 37 years. I motivated kids. Here I bring people together. It’s a natural skill set,” said Perrin, who also ran his own travel agency.

“I was honored,” said Perrin of receiving the Founders Award. “I get joy knowing people who sat with somebody (at one of the events he organizes) plan to meet again.”

“Glenn is the matchmaker,” said **Richard Prosten**, the most recent Founders Award honoree. “And it’s not always random. He provides a great service to the community.”

Prosten provides service to the community by running the documentary film program, which is now a joint venture with WCA. The group screens six films each year, including interviews with producers and directors of the documentaries. These educational and social events originally were limited to 40-50 people at the old Federation building. Thanks to the Nina Iser Cultural Center, they’re drawing approximately 225 attendees.



Prosten says he learned of MCA after seeing a copy of the *Federation Star* in a grocery store. He moved to Naples in 2015 from the Washington, D.C. area where he was a national leader of the AFL-CIO. He was secretary of the MCA Board for six years.

His wife, Lynn, is the president of the Temple Shalom Sisterhood.

“When I got to Naples I knew one person---I knew nobody,” said Prosten. “I got to know people through MCA.”

Many have gotten to know Prosten through his world class barbeque brisket, which he’s cooked for the Soulful Shabbat dinners at Temple Shalom.

“I love to cook,” said Prosten. “People always ask, ‘Where’s your brisket?’” He’d also like to get together with other transplanted Chicago natives.

“I was honored to have my name on the plaque along with guys like Glenn and Steve,” said Prosten. “My contribution doesn’t equal theirs.” The fifth recipient is the late Dick Janger, a founding MCA member.

Glenn Perrin may have summed it up best. In addition to organizing a wide range of activities, he spends his “leisure time” participating in kayaking, pickleball, the walking group and more.

“You can both organize and participate,” said Perrin. “The more you do, the more you’re able to do.”