

JULY 2023

# North Shore

Exclusively Serving the Residents of Bayside, Fox Point and River Hills

# LIVING



## THE STEIN FAMILY

*A Positive Impact*

Photo by Martin Staples  
Staples Photography



Best Version Media



# THE STEIN FAMILY *A Positive Impact*

By Susie Steiner | Photos by Martin Staples, Martin Staples Photography



I am honored to introduce the community to the Stein family. I hope perhaps you have already met them in the community or at their non-for-profit center, The Friendship Circle. The Stein family is defined by kindness and caring for their neighbor. Levi is from Detroit, Michigan and his wife, Leah is from Brooklyn, New York. They married in 2009 and have five children together: Vivi (12), Ettel (10), Mendel (8), Rosie (5), and Benny (2).

It is no surprise that Levi and Leah found each other and have built a loving life together based on shared values of love, kindness, and community. Levi grew up in Detroit. He then had the opportunity to attend a high school boarding school in Rostov, Russia. During this time, he was able to travel on the weekends throughout Russia, Ukraine and all over Europe. These travel opportunities gave Levi a perspective that has helped shape his life. As a teenager Levi was a volunteer for a Friendship Circle in Detroit and as an adult, he also worked at a Friendship Circle in Detroit and Puerto Rico. Throughout Levi's life Friendship Circle has provided him a place that he always felt welcome and loved, no matter what. He is now committed to providing that place for others of all ages and life circumstances.

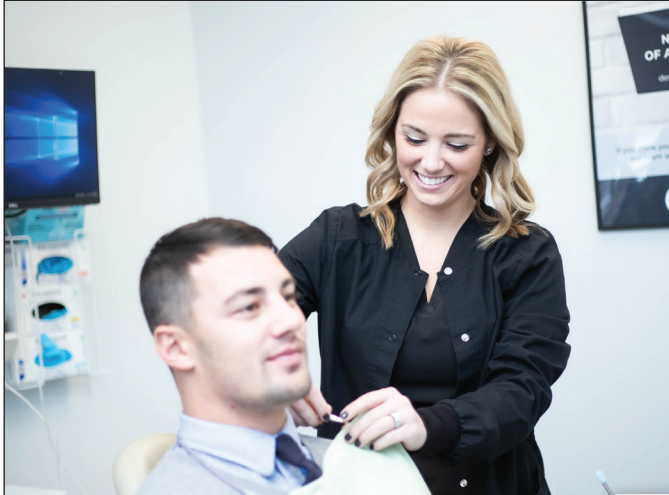
Leah also had an opportunity to study abroad at a seminary high school in Israel and then returned to New York to finish her education at Touro University. She too values the experience she had studying in Israel. Leah has a deep value of education that she has passed on to their children. After they married, she finished her dual master's degrees in special education and education administration from Touro University.

After marrying they lived in New York and started their family. They then moved to Puerto Rico where they founded Friendship Circle of Puerto Rico and established a Jewish Welcome Center for tourists. They traded the warmth of the island for the beautiful and unpredictable four seasons of Bayside, Wisconsin. They chose Milwaukee, because although known for cold weather, Levi shares that they felt warmth and a love imbued by this amazing community immediately. They are so grateful to the great education here and how inclusive people strive to be. The Steins moved to Milwaukee under the auspices of Lubavitch of Wisconsin, and to direct the Friendship Circle of Wisconsin. They have immersed themselves in the community. Vivi, their oldest daughter, attends Bader Hillel Academy in Fox Point. She enjoys drawing cartoons. She has just recently celebrated her bat mitzvah. Leah shares that she is a very kind and caring person. Ettel also attends Bader Hillel Academy. Levi and Leah appreciate that Ettel is quick to tell the family and others that she will be the one to take care of their parents someday. Ettel is also known for changing her earrings every day. She has quite a collection including chocolate bars, rainbows and coca cola bottle earrings. Their eldest son, Mendel, also attends Bader Hillel

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## RESIDENT FEATURE



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Academy. He enjoys memorization which I believe is becoming a lost art. He knows all the names of the presidents, fifty different car companies and excerpts in Jewish Literature. Well done, Mendel. Rosie has just recently graduated from Jewish Beginnings and will be joining her older siblings at Bader Hillel Academy next year. She is known as the talker of the family and especially likes to go on walks with her dad and talk the whole time. The youngest of the family, Benny, adores his siblings. He is known for being on the move, walking and crawling, keeping up with his older siblings. Benny also likes to repeat what his brother and sisters say, not yet always understanding what he is saying at the young age of 2 years old. As a family the Steins enjoy going for family bike rides. They also travel to visit family in Detroit, New York and Florida. You may find them at a Bucks game, Discovery World or WhirlyBall enjoying a family outing. Levi has immersed himself in the community through his volunteer involvement as a board member for both NAMI (National Alliance on Mental Illness), and ADRC (Aging & Disability Resource Center), as well as being a committee member with the Office of Children's Mental Health established by Governor Evers. Levi and Leah's involvement in the community and their own non-profit, The Friendship Circle, has made it clear to them that there is a need to address the community's mental health needs.

They became the new directors of the Milwaukee Friendship Circle in 2016 starting with programs serving people with disabilities. In 2020 they opened the doors to the public with the cafe, bakery and art studio. In 2021 as the effects of isolation became apparent, they expanded their community offerings to include mental health programming. Friendship Circle encourages an inclusive community where all individuals are valued regardless of the challenges they face in their lives.

We need resources in our communities to support people with disabilities as well as to support the mental health of people of all ages. The horrifying statistic that suicide is the second leading

cause of a teen death in Wisconsin needs to be addressed. The Friendship Circle is addressing teen mental health needs through offering U\_Matter programming. U\_Matter's goal is to empower teens and adults to help their peers who are struggling and teach skills for offering support. The programs cultivate an environment of safety and inclusion while emphasizing the strength in seeking help. The programs include suicide prevention training, teen support groups, mental health committee, grief support groups, case management and mom's support group. I encourage everyone in the community to go to <https://www.fcwi.org/umatter> to learn about ways you can get involved. Only through coming together as a community can we begin to address the issues of mental health. Friendship Circle provides the place and the programming to do that but they need our participation.

Levi and Leah share that they "absolutely love the community in Bayside and are active members of the incredible Bayside Shul. With all its events and functions, there's always something happening in The Shul of Bayside!" The Steins also enjoy hosting dinners, and parties on holidays and welcome neighbors and friends to join! They love the North Shore and how people want to make a difference and make an impact on the world. Levi shares, "So many people offer to volunteer and offer their help. It's mind blowing to see how many people really care!"

The Steins have dedicated their lives to build the Friendship café, bakery and art studio, which train and employ adults with disabilities, life and employability skills. They currently have 35 trainees and employees with disabilities in the program. Friendship Cafe has become a place where people all over the North Shore come together to chat, play games, study for schoolwork, etc. The Steins are constantly inspired by people who come by to share their stories and want to be a part of the Friendship Circle Family. They invite the community to come by, grab and drink and say hello to Levi and Leah! They'd be more than happy to meet you! Thank you, Levi and Leah, for all that you do at Friendship Circle and beyond. You are making a positive impact on the community.