

Museum receives major gift from renowned shoe designer Stuart Weitzman and his family



Stuart Weitzman and WHYY Innovations Reporter Zack Seward at the inaugural Dreamers and Doers speaker series at the National Museum of American Jewish History. Photo by Matthew C. Murray.

PHILADELPHIA, PA.- The National Museum of American Jewish History announced today a major \$1 million gift from the family of renowned shoe designer and entrepreneur Stuart Weitzman. In recognition of this gift, the Museum's "First Families" gallery, which explores the lives of early Jewish settlers in colonial America, will be named in honor of his family.

"We are immensely grateful to Stuart, his wife Jane, and family for this significant contribution to the Museum," says Ivy L. Barsky, NMAJH CEO and Gwen Goodman Director. "From the first time I met Stuart, it was clear that he had a profound understanding of the importance of American Jewish history

and the Museum's unique role in preserving and sharing those stories. The Weitzmans' act of generosity will play an invaluable role in advancing the Museum's work."

Stuart Weitzman says, "My family and I are proud to support the National Museum of American Jewish History. One of our greatest pleasures is having the opportunity to give back to important causes, and we feel very strongly about our Jewish heritage. American Jewish history should be a source of pride for all American Jews, many of whom don't know these stories. Learning this history can inspire a greater appreciation for the diversity of the American experience—and have a meaningful impact on reducing prejudice and antisemitism."

Located on the Museum's fourth floor, the "First Families" gallery focuses on the Colonial period, when Jews began to arrive in North America and settle along the Atlantic coast. Primarily Sephardic Jews who traced their lineage to Spain and Portugal, they enjoyed freedoms unavailable back in Europe. They were pioneers who sustained heritage through marriage and created ways of being Jewish to fit their new homeland. A large illustrated family tree in the gallery highlights the web of marital and family ties binding the Jews of Colonial America to one another and across generations.

Weitzman and his family were specifically drawn to the "First Families" gallery through their connection with Spain, where the Weitzman company's factories have been for decades, and Weitzman developed a special kinship to the stories of Sephardic Jews.

Weitzman has a longstanding connection to NMAJH. He was first drawn to the Museum in 2012 when NMAJH opened its first special exhibition, *To Bigotry No Sanction: George Washington and Religious Liberty*. The show featured one of this country's foundational documents (now on long-term loan to the Museum), George Washington's 1790 letter to the Hebrew Congregation in Newport, RI affirming the importance of religious freedom. In 2013, Weitzman was the inaugural participant in the Museum's annual speaker series *Dreamers and Doers*, which highlights individuals who have achieved extraordinary success in their field and embody an entrepreneurial, philanthropic, and uniquely American spirit.

A native of Long Island, New York, Weitzman learned the craft of shoemaking during a childhood apprenticeship under his father at the Mr. Seymour shoe factory. He considered shoe design a hobby of his at the time and attended the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania to pursue a Wall Street career. After the unexpected death of his father, Weitzman and his brother took over the family business, and in 1994, he established Stuart Weitzman, Inc. He spent decades at the helm of the successful brand, which was sold to Coach in 2015. In addition to this passion for shoes, he is dedicated to many causes, including research and treatment of cancers affecting women. He has previously collaborated on a "Young Hollywood Cares" collection to fund groundbreaking research. Stuart and Jane are longtime supporters of Boston Children's Hospital, and Jane has been deeply involved with the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee.