

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
July 18, 2017

Media Contact:
mediarelations@nmajh.org
215.923.3811 x144

**BIOCHEMIST GERTRUDE B. ELION NAMED 20TH INDUCTEE INTO
THE ONLY IN AMERICA[®] GALLERY/HALL OF FAME AT THE
NATIONAL MUSEUM OF AMERICAN JEWISH HISTORY**

**New display features artifacts illustrating Elion's accomplishments,
including her 1988 Nobel Prize**

PHILADELPHIA—Visitors to the **National Museum of American Jewish History** (NMAJH) now have the opportunity to learn about biochemist **Gertrude B. Elion** and her groundbreaking medical research in the Museum's ***Only in America[®] Gallery/Hall of Fame***, located on the free-of-charge first floor. The gallery features several artifacts illustrating Elion's Nobel Prize-winning work, which led to the development of medicines used to treat leukemia, rheumatoid arthritis, malaria, herpes, and organ transplant rejection. Her honor is tied to the theme of Jewish American Heritage Month held this past May, which celebrated *American Jews in Medical Research*.



Gertrude B. Elion (1918 – 1999).

“On the heels of Jewish American Heritage Month, NMAJH is proud to expand *Only in America[®]* to include Gertrude Elion—a medical pioneer who deserves to be a household name,” said **Ivy Barsky**, NMAJH’s CEO and Gwen Goodman Director. “At a time when women had few

opportunities to participate in scientific research, Elion charted her own path and developed medicines that are still impacting the lives of countless individuals across the globe today.”

Four artifacts related to Elion’s life are now on view in the first floor gallery. Her **1988 Nobel Prize medal** is accompanied by the **award nomination form**, in which the Nobel Committee recognized Elion for work that “revolutionized both the development of pharmaceuticals and the field of medicine in general.” Visitors can view her **1962 patent for “purine derivatives,”** used for the treatment of leukemia and resulting in a drug that greatly increased the success rates of kidney transplants and treated various autoimmune disorders. Also on view is **a vial from her 1978 clinical trial of Zovirax**, the first truly effective



A vial of Zovirax from the 1978 clinical trial. Courtesy of the Estate of Gertrude B. Elion.

anti-viral medication. Elion considered Zovirax to be her greatest accomplishment, and she kept this vial from a 1978 clinical trial on her desk until her death in 1999.

Showing signs of brilliance from a very young age, Elion graduated from high school at age 15 and continued her studies at New York City’s Hunter College where she would graduate summa cum laude with a degree in chemistry in 1937. Graduate schools and companies in science-related fields during this time in history were largely unwilling to enroll and employ women, but Elion was hired by Dr. George Hitchings with whom she would later share the 1988 Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine. Elion and her team made leaps and bounds in the medical field by developing drugs that help combat a large number of diseases including hepatitis, rheumatoid arthritis, herpes, and malaria, as well as devising the first successful treatment of childhood leukemia. At the time of her death in 1999, she was recognized as having been a true trailblazer as a female scientist and her work had touched the lives of those suffering with diseases all over the world.

Located on the first floor of the Museum, the *Only in America*® Gallery/Hall of Fame illustrates a number of different stories and themes that can be found throughout the rest of the Museum’s core exhibition. Using a combination of original artifacts, multimedia elements, and interactives,

the *Only in America*® Gallery/Hall of Fame tells the stories of twenty American Jews and the challenges they faced on their respective journeys to achievement and opportunity. Some of the previous inductees include Irving Berlin, Estee Lauder, Albert Einstein, and Leonard Bernstein; the original list is available at survey.NMAJH.org. Visitors are able to visit the *Only in America*® Gallery/Hall of Fame for free any day that the Museum is open to the public. Visitors can also explore a database of over 300 individuals on interactive touchscreens throughout the gallery.

The Nobel medal and vial of Zovirax have been generously lent by the Estate of Gertrude B. Elion. The patent and nomination form have been lent by GlaxoSmithKline Heritage Center.

The late Ed Snider, a Museum Board Member who was the late chairman of Comcast-Spectacor, one of the nation's leading sports and entertainment organizations, was the major benefactor of the *Only in America*® Gallery/Hall of Fame. The *Only in America*® Gallery/Hall of Fame was designed by Local Projects, a New York-based media design firm for museums and public spaces.

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About the National Museum of American Jewish History

The National Museum of American Jewish History, located on historic Independence Mall in Philadelphia, brings to life the more than 360-year history of Jews in America. Tracing the stories of how Jewish immigrants became Jewish Americans, the Museum invites visitors of all backgrounds to share their own stories and reflect on how their histories and identities shape and are shaped by the American experience. An open door for all, NMAJH honors the past and contributes to a better future by sharing the power of imagination and ideas, culture and community, leadership and service, in ways that turn inspiration into action.

The National Museum of American Jewish History is located at 101 South Independence Mall East at the corner of Fifth and Market Streets in Philadelphia. Museum hours are Wednesday to Friday, 10:00 am - 5:00 pm, and Saturday and Sunday 10:00 am - 5:30 pm. Museum admission is \$15.00 for adults, \$13.00 for senior citizens and youth, free for children 12 and under, Museum Members, and active military with ID; reduced prices available if purchased online. Connect with the Museum on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), [Twitter](#), and [Pinterest](#). For more information, visit NMAJH.org or call 215.923.3811.