

Rivke Klein Berkowitz, a teacher, daughter of a prominent former Buffalo rabbi and advocate for Jewish education, was widely known throughout the Buffalo Jewish community. She spent nearly 60 years in the classroom, as an administrator or behind the scenes to support schools and education.

In Buffalo, Mrs. Berkowitz devoted significant time as a volunteer, a teacher, an associate headmaster and ultimately a lifetime honorary board member of Kadimah Day School of Buffalo, now Kadimah Academy. The Jewish school was founded in 1959 by community leaders, including Mrs. Berkowitz's parents, Rabbi Isaac and Henriette Klein.

She also taught for many years at Temple Shaarey Zedek Hebrew School, Temple Beth El Hebrew School and the High School of Jewish Studies.

"Rivke was a leader in the community, and an active member at the school," said her husband of 50 years, Gerald Berkowitz. "She was a master teacher and her students consistently voted her as best teacher. She was beloved by generations of students."

Mrs. Berkowitz was a victim of terrorism 45 years ago, while she was pregnant. In September 1970, she, her husband, and her oldest daughter were passengers on a TWA plane that was hijacked by Palestinian terrorists, along with two other planes, and flown to a desert airstrip in Jordan.

Identified as Jewish, she was held on the plane for a week, while her husband was among six men held for nearly a month.

Born in Springfield, Mass., the youngest of three sisters, Mrs. Berkowitz and her family moved to Buffalo when she was a teenager, when her father was named to the pulpit at Temple Emanuel. He later became the rabbi at Temple Shaarey Zedek in Amherst, now Temple Beth Tzedek.

She graduated from Bennett High School, and received a bachelor's degree in education from the University at Buffalo and a bachelor's degree in Hebrew literature from Gratz College.

She also obtained an associate of applied science degree in dental laboratory technology from Erie Community College.

However, she started her teaching career earlier, at age 15, at Temple Emanuel. After marrying Gerald Berkowitz in June 1965, she taught at Jewish centers in New Jersey, Philadelphia and the Bronx, before she and her husband settled in Buffalo in 1971.

She became involved with Kadimah in various roles, and her four children all graduated from the Kadimah School their grandparents started. Her oldest daughter, Talia, is now a teacher at Kadimah.

Mrs. Berkowitz also volunteered for the National Conference of Synagogue Youth, a national group affiliated with the Orthodox movement in Judaism. She and her husband served as Buffalo chapter advisers, and were voted as Advisors of the Millennium for upstate.

"They were the de facto parents of the upstate New York region, serving as a sounding board, a shoulder to cry on and spirited leaders," said Talia Berkowitz.

She was active in community theater, performing at the Jewish Community Center, the Lancaster Opera House, Artpark and the Tralf.

A breast cancer survivor, she served on an advisory committee at Roswell Park Cancer Institute.

"Rivke was known for her vivacious spirit. She was the first one to jump up and dance at a wedding or a Bar/Bat Mitzvah," her husband said. "She was a surrogate mother to countless youth. Her boundless energy, her sense of humor, her engaging smile and her loving ways endeared her to all with whom she came in contact."