MIAMIBEACH

COMMISSION MEMORANDUM

TO: Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Commission
FROM: Vice-Mayor Steven Meiner
DATE: February 22, 2023

SUBJECT: REFERRAL TO THE PUBLIC SAFETY AND NEIGHBORHOOD QUALITY OF LIFE COMMITTEE, PURSUANT TO SECTION 82-504 OF THE CITY CODE, FOR A RECOMMENDATION ON THE NAMING OF A FACILITY OR OTHER PORTION OF FLAMINGO PARK TO COMMEMORATE MR. ARNOLD NOTKIN, A FORMER PHYSICAL EDUCATION TEACHER AT CENTRAL BEACH ELEMENTARY SCHOOL (NOW FIENBERG FISHER K-8 CENTER), LONG-TIME COACH AT FLAMINGO PARK, AND PRESIDENT OF THE POLICE ATHLETIC LEAGUE WHO PERISHED IN THE TRAGIC COLLAPSE OF CHAMPLAIN TOWERS ON JUNE 24, 2021.

ANALYSIS

Pursuant to Section 82-504 of the City Code, please place on the February 22, 2023 City Commission agenda a referral to the Public Safety and Neighborhood Qualify of Life Committee (PSNQLC) for a discussion and recommendation for the naming of a field or other portion of Flamingo Park to commemorate Arnold Notkin, known by many as “Arnie,” who perished in the tragic collapse of Champlain Towers on June 24, 2021.

I understand that Mr. Notkin contributed to the City of Miami Beach for approximately 40 years as a physical education teacher at Central Beach Elementary School (now the Fienberg Fisher K-8 Center). He was also a long-time coach at Flamingo Park and President of the local Police Athletic League and beloved by the countless students and children he impacted over many years.

Last year, the City of Miami Beach honored Manuel Lafont, a former coach at North Shore Park, who also died in the Champlain Towers collapse, by naming the North Shore Park baseball fields in Mr. Lafont’s honor. I propose that the City Commission consider a similar naming in honor of Arnold Notkin and his legacy of serving students and children in the City of Miami Beach.

Please do not hesitate to contact me or my aide Robert Novo if you have any questions.

SUPPORTING SURVEY DATA

N/A

FINANCIAL INFORMATION

N/A

Is this a "Residents Right to Know" item, pursuant to City Code Section 2-14?	**Does this item utilize G.O. Bond Funds?**
Yes	No

Legislative Tracking

Vice-Mayor Steven Meiner

ATTACHMENTS:

	Description
🗋	Rochester native in Miami condo with wife when it collapsed (Article)

Foster's Daily Democrat

NEWS

Tragic end to love story: Rochester native in Miami condo with wife when it collapsed

Howard Cohen Miami Herald

Published 3:10 p.m. ET July 14, 2021 | **Updated 3:37 p.m. ET July 14, 2021**

Two days before the Champlain Towers South condo building fell in Miami, Myriam Caspi Notkin shared a meme she had seen on Facebook.

One day, you are going to hug your last hug, kiss your last kiss and hear someone's voice for the last time. But you never know when that time will be. So live every day as if it were the last time you will be with the person you love.

That last day was June 24.

Myriam, a retired paralegal and banker, and her husband, a retired physical education teacher in Miami Beach, were inside their home, Unit 302, at Champlain Towers South when the Surfside condo collapsed.

"I would do anything to give her one last hug," her granddaughter Jessica Samuelson Brutman said on Facebook in sharing her grandmother's post in the immediate aftermath of the tragedy.

Arnold "Arnie" Notkin's body was found and identified on July 9, police said. The couple's family is still awaiting word on Myriam, her daughter Belinda Caspi Wiseman said Tuesday.

The Notkins: An American love story

What a life they had. What a love story.

Both had had families and grown children before they met and married in August 1993.

Heartbreak: Surfside mayor tells story of 12-year-old girl who lost father, uncle in condo collapse

“They honeymooned in New York City where I played tour guide and they got to see many of their favorites in person like Regis Philbin and Jackie Mason,” Wiseman said.

“Funny story: My mother always loved to meet famous people and take pictures with them and stopped Jackie Mason in the middle of Broadway and her flash wasn’t working. She got Jackie to wait while I ran to the local photo shop to get her a new flash,” Wiseman said with a laugh. “But she was happy.”

The Notkins bought their apartment in Surfside in 1994, according to Miami-Dade property records, and loved to go to the movies and restaurants. Myriam enjoyed playing Rummikub, a tile-based game that combines elements of the card games rummy and mahjong, her daughter Dianne Ohayon said. She loved and led water aerobics with her girlfriends.

Florida condo collapse: In honor of the Surfside victims

Arnie, as everyone called him, enjoyed sports on TV, especially baseball, and word search puzzles.

Together, the couple watched nightly “Family Feud” and “Wheel of Fortune” game shows on TV.

“Mom was the best at solving the ‘Wheel of Fortune’ puzzles,” Ohayon said. “They liked to travel together. They liked to go shopping at the mall together. Arnie loved bumping into familiar faces and striking up a conversation. Whether it was someone in the lobby of their condo or at a restaurant, he loved talking to people.”

“She loved her family and her temple,” Wiseman added.

The Notkins were regulars at Temple Menorah where at least 350 had gathered on Sunday, July 11, for their joint memorial service.

Paying tribute: Memorial wall captures heartache in Surfside

“Arnie Notkin, everyone’s good guy, was eulogized as a teacher and coach who put troubled youngsters on the right path by putting them on the right team or safety patrol. Memories of Myriam brought hushed chuckles from the congregation when Rabbi Pearlson talked about the constant emails from her account. So, he wasn’t the only one paying for AOL!” her friend Norma Orovitz said in an email to the Miami Herald.

The two were pals together at the Surfside Community Center’s water aerobics class — the “Esther Williams” class, Orovitz noted. Myriam was its driving force.

Allen Notkin, Arnie's son, last saw his dad at his Cooper City house to celebrate Father's Day on June 20. He also celebrated his dad's birthday in May with Arnie and Myriam.

Like so many after losing a loved one, the younger Notkin's feelings are nagging and universal: Why didn't I thank him? he wishes.

But he's honoring his father by celebrating a life lived well.

"My dad had a great life and he loved so many people." The loss, and the unfathomable way in which it happened, is not a positive, Notkin acknowledges. There's one salve against the pain.

"I'm celebrating what he's done for people and what he's done for me and my brother and sister and I'm just honored."

PE teacher's life lessons

Arnold Earl Notkin was born May 3, 1934, in Rochester, New Hampshire, and moved to South Florida to attend and graduate from the University of Miami in the 1950s. Notkin, who served in the Army during the Korean War, earned his master's in science and education from Nova Southeastern University.

After graduation, Notkin began his 40-plus-year career as a physical education teacher and coach, working with generations of students at Miami Beach elementary schools Leroy D. Fienberg, Nautilus, North Beach and Central Beach.

Notkin taught pee wee football at Flamingo Park and was president of the park's Police Athletic League, "his favorite thing," his son recalled.

Among Notkin's greatest gifts: tapping into a kid's talents and honing them.

"He enjoyed the problem student because he thought he was helping somebody," his son Allen said. "My dad enjoyed helping people find their strength. My dad got the greatest joy out of that."

Making the misfit kid who couldn't catch a ball feel good about himself by finding something he could do and championing that skill? That was "Mr. Notkin" to generations of Fienberg kids.

“Arnie Notkin was the kind of man that, even back in the ‘70s, taught and coached everybody the same,” said Diana Hernandez, one of his students at Leroy D. Fienberg Elementary School. “If a girl was better than a boy at any sport, he’d put us in the game at whatever position. He treated his girl jocks — as I call us — exactly the same as the boys and gave everyone the same opportunities.

“I still possess dozens of certificates and awards signed by him which I will cherish forever,” Hernandez said. “I was always proud to make him proud. He instilled great sportsmanship in all of his students. He will be missed by many generations.”

Caught on camera: Security camera captures exact moment Surfside condo partially collapses

Hernandez’s Fienberg classmate Oyuki Burgos said on Facebook: “I will never forget how Mr. Notkin took my brother Jose and me under his wings, encouraging us to play sports, become Safety Patrols. We were still taking ESL classes and he was instrumental in making us feel comfortable in adjusting to a new life in the States. I remember our first summer here. He got us scholarships to attend summer camp, something our parents could not afford, and what an experience that was.”

As such, Notkin was honored earlier this year by the Miami Beach Kiwanis. At the dinner, scores of people approached Notkin’s family to share stories of how he had inspired them.

“That made me so proud. So amazing,” Allen Notkin said. “As a child you always think your dad is the best. I’d go to dinner and people would come up to me and tell me stories of my dad that would reinforce what I believed. I could be at Aventura’s Brio and the waiter says, ‘Your dad helped me through this.’ There’s always a story. These people reinforce what you believe about your parents. That they’re perfect.”

Escaping Castro’s Cuba

Myriam Caspi Notkin was born in Havana, Cuba, on Jan. 17, 1940.

“She escaped Castro’s Cuba in the fall of 1960 with her parents Sara, Jacob and grandmother Rebecca and moved to South Beach,” her daughter Belinda Caspi Wiseman said. “She married my dad Victor — another Cuban Jew — in June 1961 and went to Atlanta for a brief time and on to New York where they got together with two other Jewban couples, friends of theirs, and they all rented in the same building. Two years later, they moved back to Miami Beach when they were pregnant with me and started their lives.”

More: Miami mayor urges help for Cuban people

Myriam worked as a paralegal in the 1970s and ‘80s and then moved on to her banking career with SunTrust Bank. She was the only bank employee at the time fluent in Spanish, Yiddish and English, her daughter notes. Not a bad combination in Miami.

“She made them feel at home. She remembered everyone’s birthdays and anniversaries and it’s those small details that endeared her to so many,” Wiseman said.

Said Norma Orovitz: “Myriam had beaten Castro by outliving him. Myriam had beaten breast cancer. Myriam had made a good life with Arnie after having been widowed. She was a retired banker, trilingual in English, Yiddish and Spanish, a community dynamo, bold in whatever language. We all loved her. She called me Normita. I miss that already.”

Survivors

Myriam Caspi Notkin’s survivors include her daughters Belinda Caspi Wiseman, Dianne Ohayon and Jackie Samuelson; seven grandchildren; and her sister Graciela Lazoff.

Arnold Notkin’s survivors include his sons Allen and Michael Notkin and his daughter Lori Hayward, and seven grandchildren and two great-grandchildren.

Miami Herald reporter Howard Cohen, one of those misfit kids, was one of Mr. Notkin’s PE students at Leroy D. Fienberg in the early 1970s. He still has his certificates, signed by Arnie, too.