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## Cherry Hill resident dedicating life to helping seniors and the disabled

Jerry Rothkoff is the founder of the Rothkoff Law Group elder and disability law office and volunteers for multiple organizations dedicated to helping seniors and those with disabilities in the community.



Cherry Hill resident and lawyer Jerry Rothkoff spends much of his life thinking not of himself, but of dozens of seniors and those who are disabled in the Philadelphia area.

An elder care attorney and volunteer for multiple nonprofit organizations, Rothkoff goes through each day of his life looking to make someone's day better.

"There's so much we can do to help seniors and those with disabilities," he said. "It's just a matter of priorities."

As a young lawyer, Rothkoff didn't know a lot about elder law. He graduated from law school at Widener University in 1993 and began his career at a law firm in Philadelphia. However, when the late 1990s came around, Rothkoff admitted he hadn't come across anything he was passionate about in his career.

"I was not satisfied with my role at the Philadelphia firm and I was not fulfilled with the work I was doing," he said.

One day, Rothkoff began working with a client whose husband was living in an assisted care community. It was the first time Rothkoff had worked in elder care law in any capacity.

"She had questions and they were questions I could not answer," he said. "I said, 'I have to learn about this stuff to help this poor woman.'"

To educate himself about elder law, Rothkoff attended the National Academy of Elder Law Attorneys Conference in Philadelphia in 1999.

"I signed up at the last minute," he said. "I signed up for the day and went to some of the seminars. I didn't know anyone. I didn't know what elder care was about."

Rothkoff was blown away after attending the conference and suddenly found a passion for elder law. Six months after the conference, Rothkoff decided to open his own law office, Rothkoff Law Group in Cherry Hill in early 2000.

In the early years of his office, Rothkoff focused on public benefits planning and Medicare issues. However, Rothkoff wanted his organization to become more than a law office.

Inspired by another elder law office in Nashville, Tenn., Rothkoff hired his office's first geriatric social worker in 2005 and adopted a life care planning model where social workers would assist families with advocacy for seniors and the disabled.

"The passion really took off when we hired our first social worker," he said. "That's when I saw that we really started to make a difference. That's when we started to get the hugs from the families. That's when we started getting the thank yous."

Rothkoff's passion for helping the elderly and disabled extends outside of his office. Rothkoff volunteers with the Twilight Wish Foundation, an organization granting wishes to seniors 65 and older who earn less than 200 percent of the poverty level or live in a nursing facility.

"A woman maybe couldn't afford to buy a new oven," Rothkoff said in describing the foundation. "We'd find a new oven somewhere and have it delivered to her. It could be as simple as that."

Rothkoff also serves on the board for Jewish Family and Children's Service of Southern New Jersey, where he advocates for special needs children, seniors, Holocaust survivors and others.

Rothkoff's children also volunteer at the Katz JCC. His twin sons, Greg and Evan, both volunteer as mentors in the Katz JCC's ACHaD special needs basketball league.

The Rothkoff family, which also includes Jerry's wife Erica, twin daughters Liza and Julia, and youngest son Aitan, also gives back to the homeless. The family puts together care packages with toiletries such as soap, clean socks and deodorant, as well as snacks such as pretzels and potato chips.

“They make them up, five or six at a time, every month or so,” Rothkoff said. “When we go into Philly, if I’m stopped at an intersection and see a homeless individual, I’ll say I have this package, are you interested?”

Rothkoff said he and his wife emphasize the importance of volunteering and giving back to the community to their five kids.

“It’s a matter of just showing the kids it’s important to give back in a very very small way,” he said. “When you live in Cherry Hill, you live in a bubble. You live in a bubble for a variety of reasons. Politically, it’s a bubble. It’s a bubble economically as well. You have to realize that not everyone lives this way, that there are people who are suffering out there and people who are not as fortunate as you to have the things you do.”

Rothkoff plans to continue being an advocate well into the future. He hopes to soon form a nonprofit organization helping to address issues facing seniors with early to mid-stage dementia.

Rothkoff also plans to advocate for a new type of assisted living community for dementia sufferers. Last November, Rothkoff traveled with other elder law attorneys to Amsterdam, Netherlands and visited Hogeweyk, a village designed for seniors with dementia. The village includes houses for the residents with live-in caretakers, and a downtown area with a grocery store, arts and crafts store, music store and more.

“It’s a fascinating way to provide services for those who have advanced dementia,” he said. “That concept or pieces of that concept need to be brought to the United States.”

Rothkoff believes such a model can work in the United States and hopes to find a way to bring such a community to the Philadelphia area.

“The mission is not over,” he said. “It’s just beginning.”