Courage To Remember - Throughout Ocean County

By: Ocean County Staff

In the quiet of Mancini Hall at the Ocean County Library's main branch, the 40 panels that make up the ***Courage to Remember*** Exhibition debuted in Ocean County throughout the month of April, a commemoration was held on April 20th.



Community Leaders and Sponsors of the Courage to Remember Panels
Photo Credit: Simon Wiesenthal Center

"Our reason, for all of us being in this room right now, couldn't be clearer," said Ocean County Commissioner Virginia E. Haines, as she addressed the attendees at the opening of the exhibition on April 20. "Today we look back on history, specifically the atrocities of the Holocaust, and we remember the millions that perished, at that time.

“Today, we reflect on our history so that we don't repeat it," said Haines, who serves as liaison to the Ocean County Cultural and Heritage Commission, one of the 12 sponsors of the exhibit.

"We encourage our citizens, young and old, to come and see this exhibit," Haines said. "It's so important that we continue to raise awareness about the past. It is so important to remember that when we are indifferent, then intolerance and hatred spreads like an epidemic."

Haines was joined at the opening of the exhibit by U.S. Rep. Christopher H. Smith, 4th District, Ocean County Prosecutor Bradley Billhimer, Ocean County Commissioner Joseph H. Vicari, Michael Cohen of the Simon Wiesenthal Center, Ocean County Library Commission Member Bonnie Peterson, and a host of representatives from cultural and diversity organizations from across Ocean County that collaborated to purchase and display the traveling exhibit.



Holocaust Survivor Esther Feder-Lesell and daughter Rita Feder.
Photo credit: Ocean County

Esther Feder-Lesell, a Holocaust survivor, along with her daughter, Rita Feder, spoke of endurance and persistence to stay alive during a very dark time in history.

"I had a hard life as a child," said Feder-Lesell. "Growing up, the Holocaust took away my youth. I lost family members and friends to the war in the camps.

"But I stand here today as a proud person, I survived a great deal of hardship but I did not give up on life," she said.

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Congressman Smith, a leader in the fight against anti-Semitism and co-chair of the House Bipartisan Task Force for Combating anti-Semitism, recalled that when he was 12 years old, his father had a store right next to a Jewish delicatessen and very often a Holocaust survivor would come in and have lunch there.

"My father made it a point of having my brothers and I, at different times, sit with him (the Holocaust survivor) for well over an hour… to tell us his story," Smith said. "I sat there mesmerized and inspired by his courage because he was an overcomer."

Smith noted that young people need to see the ***Courage to Remember*** exhibit because Holocaust remembrance is a way of not only sensitizing but encouraging people to ask the hard questions.

"Atrocities and crimes against humanity - against innocent people - are continuing in different ways," Smith said. "The word genocide was invented by Raphael Lemkin because of the Holocaust – so Holocaust remembrance is very important."

The sponsors for the ***Courage to Remember*** are the Ocean County Board of Commissioners, the Ocean County Library, the Ocean County Prosecutor, the Ocean County Sheriff, Jewish Federation of Ocean County, the Ocean County College Center for Holocaust, Genocide, and Human Rights Education, Grunin Foundation, the Ocean County Superintendent of Schools, the Simon Wiesenthal Center, and the Ocean County Cultural and Heritage Commission with funding from the New Jersey Historic Commission and the New Jersey State Council on the Arts.

Michael Cohen, who serves as the Eastern Director of the Simon Wiesenthal Center, said creating partnerships helps in stemming the tide of hatred and raises greater awareness that there is no room anywhere for hatred.

"It is our responsibility as those who understand what happened in the Holocaust, to pass that message forward to our next generation and to use every tool at our disposal to create new and innovative ways to teach our children so they will pay attention and stop history from repeating itself," Cohen said. "This 40-panel exhibition is a key asset to Ocean County."

The traveling exhibition on the Nazi Holocaust, has been seen on six continents by millions of people and continues to be displayed in cities across the United States, in Asia and Africa. Throughout the month of May, the exhibit was displayed at the Ocean County College (OCC) Library where the OCC Center for Holocaust, Genocide, and Human Rights Education lead educational presentations on the exhibit. Courage to Remember will continue to be on exhibit at various locations in Ocean County throughout 2022 and beyond.



Ocean County Commissioner Joseph H. Vicari.
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