Courage To Remember Exhibit

By: Victoria Ford

"Courage to Remember" is a history exhibit about the Nazi Holocaust that has traveled the world and finally come home to Ocean County. The exhibition has already been seen on six continents by millions of people since 2011.

Together, the Ocean County Cultural and Heritage Commission and the countywide library system have purchased the 40-panel collection and intend to share it widely with the county's residents and visitors, beginning in April, in venues of social, civic, and cultural significance throughout the county.

The exhibition was created by the Simon Wiesenthal Center, a Jewish human rights organization in Los Angeles, California, established in 1977, known for Holocaust research and remembrance, hunting Nazi war criminals, combating anti-Semitism, tolerance education, defending Israel, and its Museum of Tolerance.



Courage To Remember Exhibit Panel.
Photo Credit: Ocean County

Each 24-by-40-inch panel has images and text on a canvas sheet, standing in a metal frame.

One of the panels poses the question for consideration: "Why the Jews?" and talks about how Jews' "social and religious distinctiveness made them persistent targets for persecution, (which) intensified the cohesiveness of their communities." Since European society and politics were organized around Christianity, antisemitism grew during Europe's industrialization in the 19th and 20th centuries, as Jews participated more directly in economic and social life.

Ocean County's purchase of the exhibition is a joint venture to stem the growing tide of anti-Semitism, Ocean County Library Assistant Director Sara Siegler explained.

For the month of April, the whole set was on display and open to the public at Ocean County Library (OCL) main branch in Toms River. On April 20, a ceremony was held to commemorate the exhibition in Mancini Hall at the OCL.

The idea is then to divide them up for display at different venues such as libraries, public buildings, schools, houses of worship, and other educational facilities throughout Ocean County. The Cultural and Heritage Commission Director Tim Hart is in the process of reaching out to other organizations who might want to partner.

The county will have the panels forever, but they'll all be together in one place for only a short time, Siegler said.

A map will be created so visitors may embark on a self-guided tour of the complete collection – and see the sights and learn a little bit about each stop along the way – and others will encounter the panels organically.

Spreading them out exposes more people to the concept and realities of anti-Semitism; increased awareness and knowledge leads to reduced bias and hate, Siegler explained.

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Both the Commission and the Library System are deeply invested in pro-diversity programs, she added, with a shared ethos of, “Let’s talk about it.”

The Wiesenthal Center provides background for the viewing experience: “Six million Jews and millions of others, including Gypsies, Slavs, political dissenters, homosexuals, prisoners of war, and the mentally ill and infirm, were murdered by the Nazis between 1933 and 1945. The Nazi policy of racial hatred moved with relentless cruelty from hateful propaganda to mass murder, [attempting] the extermination of European Jewry and culture.

“The magnitude of brutality, the remorseless cruelty, and the cold industrial character of mass murder during the Holocaust are unique. But ‘The Courage to Remember’ is both a tribute and a warning: a tribute to the lives lost, and a warning that the root causes of the Holocaust persist. Racial hatred, economic crises, human psychological and moral flaws, and the complacency or complicity of ordinary individuals in the persecution of their neighbors are still ominously common.

“We must have the courage to remember and study the Holocaust, no matter how disturbing these studies and memories may be. For only informed, understanding, and morally committed individuals can prevent such persecution from happening again.

“The persecution of people is always and everywhere intolerable, and to act against it is a beginning for hope.

“Remembrance, vigilance, and moral commitment are required if the lives of the victims of the Holocaust are to have enduring meaning.”



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Photo Credit: Ocean County Cultural & Heritage Commission