



Press Release

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White Plains, NY – Record Number of Area High School Students and Teachers Attend Education Event at Iona University Featuring Holocaust Survivor Speaker

Over 450 students and teachers from a record 43 schools from the greater Hudson Valley area attended the 24th annual Holocaust & Human Rights Education Center (HHREC) Human Rights Institute for High School Student Leaders on Wednesday, March 18th at Iona University in New Rochelle, New York.

The program featured a keynote presentation from Alfred “Fred” Schoenfeld, a Holocaust Survivor who told his story surviving the Nazi regime during World War II as a young boy in Slovakia. Fred shared intimate details about his memory of citizens in his hometown of Presov turning against their Jewish neighbors, and how his grandfather was put on a train and sent to Auschwitz. He went on to tell the story of how he and his parents survived by hiding in the attic of a warehouse, eventually escaped and immigrated to the U.S. He then explained how he was motivated to speak following a return trip he made to Europe to see his childhood home.

As he concluded his remarks, Fred quoted the author Elie Wiesel, saying: “Mr. Wiesel often said “I believe fervently that whoever listens to a witness becomes a witness”. Fred elaborated on this quote, telling the students “Once you hear a firsthand account of the Holocaust, you are no longer a bystander; you now carry a portion of the truth and have a moral obligation to pass it on to future generations.”

The program began with welcoming remarks by Millie Jasper, HHREC Executive Director and Dr. Tricia Mulligan, Provost and Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs at Iona University. Following opening remarks, Westchester County Executive Ken Jenkins greeted the audience and urged the students to continue to speak out about racial injustice, and the role students can play in their own communities and shared his experience as an Iona student and graduate.

County Legislator David T. Imamura then spoke about his experience as a youth and how his grandfather overcame immigration barriers after surviving 133 days on a small boat adrift during WWII, and how his other grandfather fought for America in a Japanese American unit during WWII while Japanese Americans were interned by the federal government, an experience that shaped David's understanding of both the government's capacity to help and its potential to harm. He also shared his experience running for public office, becoming the first Asian American County Legislator.

The program was organized and led by HHREC Program Coordinator Jeanne Claire Cotnoir and included student workshops led by students who encouraged their peers to engage as activists or "Upstanders" in response to human rights violations.

Students Honored for Human Rights, Community Service and "Upstander" Works

A group of students were recognized for their work in promoting human rights in their schools and communities. These honorees included:

The Richard A. Berman Leadership Award for Human Rights was awarded to Angelina Vataj, Byram Hills High School, Breana Sinkfield-Tyler, New Rochelle High School, and Summer Befanis, Somers High School. This award is in honor of the longstanding commitment and dedication of Richard Berman to the Holocaust & Human Rights Education Center, and his commitment to community service and the education of ethically and socially responsible leaders for the global community.

The Andy Cahn Community Service Award was presented to Aiden Mendez, Ossining High School, and Camila Figueroa, Rocky Point High School. This award is given in memory of the contributions and commitments made by Andy Cahn, former Assistant Director of Education for HHREC who was instrumental in the creation of the High School Human Rights Institute.

The Neil Ginsberg Student Upstander Award was presented to Jade Orellana, Sleepy Hollow High School and Amala Fernandez, Mamaroneck High School. This award recognizes the contributions and commitment made by Neil Ginsberg to the Human Rights Institute for High School Student Leaders, and his dedication to the HHREC Educators Program Committee for over 20 years.

Area High School Participation

Students and teachers who attended this year's event included Archbishop Stepinac High School, Ardsley High School, Blind Brook High School, Briarcliff High School, Bronxville High School, Byram Hills High School, Carmel High School, Charles E. Gorton High School, Croton-Harmon High School, Denzel Washington School of the Arts, Dobbs Ferry High School, Eastchester High School, Edgemont High School, German International School of NY, Hastings High School, Horace Greeley High School, Iona Preparatory School, John Jay High School, Lincoln High School, Mahopac High School, Mamaroneck High School, New Rochelle High School, Newburgh Schools, North Salem High School, Ossining High School, Peekskill High School, Pelham Memorial High School, Pleasantville High School, Ridgefield High School, Riverside High School, Rocky Point High School, Roosevelt High School, Rye Neck High School, Saunders Trade and Technical High School, Scarsdale High School, Sleepy Hollow High School, Somers High School, The Ursuline School, Westchester Youth Alliance, White Plains High School, Yonkers Middle High School, Yonkers Montessori Academy and Yorktown High School.

"We were thrilled to see such a tremendous response from area teachers and students who joined us for our program this year," said Millie Jasper, HHREC Executive Director, who added: "It is so encouraging to see so many students and teachers turn out for a full day of learning about human rights, the history of the Holocaust, and lessons learned. We believe the powerful messages they heard from our speakers will resonate with them for years to come and hope they will become active 'Upstanders' who protect and preserve human rights."

The HHREC Human Rights Institute for High School Student Leaders was developed to further their mission by promoting student awareness of human rights issues on a local

and global level, and to empower students to be “Upstanders” by creating and implementing action plans in their schools and communities. HHREC has organized and offered this event to area students and teachers since 2002. For more information visit HHRECNY.org.

About The Holocaust & Human Rights Education Center

The Holocaust & Human Rights Education Center (HHREC) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization based in White Plains New York that serves schools, synagogues, colleges, churches and civic centers in Westchester and the greater Hudson Valley area. The HHREC Mission is to enhance the teaching and learning of the lessons of the Holocaust and the right of all people to be treated with dignity and respect. HHREC works with teachers and students to help schools fulfill the New York State mandate that the Holocaust and other human rights abuses be included in their curriculum. Since 1994, the HHREC has brought the lessons of the Holocaust, genocide and human rights violations to more than 3,000 teachers, and through them to thousands of students. For more information visit www.hhrecny.org call 914.696.0738 email info@hhrecny.org.