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Take a peek at the Zekelman Holocaust Center after \$31M in renovations



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FARMINGTON HILLS — The Zekelman Holocaust Center's redesigned core exhibit puts an emphasis on survivors who later came to call Michigan home.

The museum at 28123 Orchard Lake Road recently reopened following a \$31 million renovation that began in May. The transformed permanent exhibit tells survivors' personal stories of terror, resistance and humanity.

"We have to talk about what the perpetrators did," said Ruth Bergman, the center's director of education. "But, we want to talk about its impact on the victims and how they reacted, what they did, how they resisted and how they got through. One of the things that was very important to us is that the Holocaust story began and ended with the voices of survivors."

People will hear the stories of Michigan residents like Paula Marks-Bolton and Sophie Klisman, who told their stories to Hometown Life in 2020. These survivors and Michiganders, the center hopes, will inspire people to protect those around them from discrimination and genocide.

The museum presents victims, survivors and perpetrators as everyday people who made individual decisions.

"My mother would talk about this Polish supervisor named Gogaz who saved her life," said Arthur Horwitz, the son of a survivor who speaks to student groups at the center. "He spoke up when a Nazi put a rifle to my mother's head. Gogaz intervened and said, 'She's my

responsibility.' The Nazi took the butt of his rifle, according to my mother, and knocked him out. To my mother, it was all about Gogaz. Speak up and take a stand. You have choices."

Rabbi Eli Mayerfeld, CEO of the center, said the museum aims to make the Holocaust accessible to all ages by highlighting Michiganders with little Mitten icons found all through the core exhibit. Many of the museum's visitors are students reading "The Diary of a Young Girl" by Anne Frank.

"It's a lot more about 'This is what happened to me,'" said Mark Mulder, director of curatorial affairs.

People who've visited the Holocaust Center before are in for a new experience. Tickets cost \$8 or less and, depending on the day, may include a presentation from a survivor or the child of a survivor.

Staff hope all visitors will be inspired to be a light in the dark. Marks-Bolton, through a video, begins visitors' journeys with one such reminder:

"It should never make any difference what nationality, what religion or what color skin a person has," she says. "We must protect each other and speak up whenever there are injustices."

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