

New Exhibit Explores Impact of Detroit Jews After the Holocaust

By Suzanne Chessler
10/25/2019

The Holocaust Memorial Center in Farmington Hills has a new exhibit from the Detroit Jewish News Foundation that explores how Detroit Jews aided survivors.

Photos courtesy of HMC

If you visit the Holocaust Memorial Center (HMC) in Farmington Hills Oct. 24-Jan. 5, you are likely to view familiar family names as they appear in a new exhibit, “Aftermath: Detroit Jews in the Wake of the Holocaust.”

Either the impact of the people recalled still affects the community or the descendants of those people have continued the commitments established years ago.

The exhibit is the second installment in a two-part series that recalls Holocaust issues as reported by the *Detroit Jewish Chronicle* and the *Detroit Jewish News*. Besides pointing out what local residents did to help members of their extended families, the latest exhibit also describes what they did for survivors personally unknown to them.

“We would like viewers to understand that although the Holocaust itself ended with the Allied victory in World War II, Jewish and non-Jewish communities in Detroit, in America and in the



world had to deal with the effects of the Holocaust,” says curator Mike Smith, Alene and Graham Landau Archivist Chair of the Detroit Jewish News Foundation. He worked closely with Mark Mulder, HMC exhibits manager, and Joanne Loney, HMC exhibits assistant.

“There were millions of displaced persons around the world; hundreds of thousands, maybe a million, were Jewish. They desperately needed food, shelter and the basic necessities of life, and one of the main exhibit themes is that Jewish Detroiters did their part.”

Through the articles posted, viewers will learn how Jewish Detroiters provided generous funding and volunteered in various capacities to support displaced persons who arrived here and for the hundreds of thousands who settled in British Mandate Palestine, a portion of which would become Israel in 1948.

The names Emma Schaver, Louis Berry and Joseph Holtzman are seen throughout the articles. Schaver, a well-known singer, became the first American to perform for those interned in the displaced persons camps.

Stories about not-so-well-known Jewish Detroiters, such as Mabel Giszczak, also are spotlighted. Giszczak taught classes to Jewish displaced persons who arrived in Detroit not knowing English or local governance and customs.



DJN Foundation archivist Mike Smith with Mark Mulder, HMC exhibits manager, and Joanne Loney, HMC exhibits assistant.

A Mighty Response

From fundraising campaigns to political cartoons, the exhibit recalls the people who countered the devastating effects of the Holocaust.

“Unlike secular media at the time, the pages of the *Jewish News* and *Jewish Chronicle* provided ongoing and often stark content and headlines that started with Hitler’s rise to power to the defeat of Nazi Germany,” says Arthur Horwitz, publisher and executive editor of the *Jewish News* and president of the DJN Foundation. “Central to that ongoing reporting was the horrible plight of European Jewry and what we now refer to as the Holocaust.

“Detroit Jewry responded mightily to supporting the American war effort and to activating whatever moral and political influence it had to try and rescue as many Jews as possible from the Nazis and their collaborators. Through the new exhibit, we are able to share the story of how our community continued to respond to the needs of refugees — many who ultimately settled in the Detroit area.”

This exhibit follows last year’s presentation of “The Holocaust Unfolds,” which covered the events that became known as the Holocaust or Shoah. It will be on display Jan. 27-May at the University of Michigan-Dearborn, co-sponsored by the schools Voice/Vision Holocaust Survivor Oral History Archive under the direction of Jamie Wraight.

“We are proud to partner with the *Jewish News* on both exhibits,” says Rabbi Eli Mayerfeld, CEO of the Holocaust Memorial Center. “The second exhibit provides a deeper understanding of how the local Jewish community supported the Jewish diaspora post-war.

“The HMC believes it is important to share localized stories. Articles in the exhibit show how the local Jewish community supported refugees and displaced persons because they understood the importance of helping those in need, an important Jewish value.”

Content in both exhibits is taken from the DJN’s William Davidson Digital Archive of Jewish Detroit History, which contains more than 330,000 pages of content beginning in 1916 and spanning more than 100 consecutive years.

“It is important to show that in addition to capturing countless stories about Jewish Detroiters and their families, content in the digital archive tells broader and deeper stories that have educational and scholarly merit,” Horwitz says.

“From our own experiences, the Jewish community is sensitive to the plight of refugees. With millions of people across the globe displaced by violence and genocidal actions, this exhibit reminds us not to turn a blind eye to hatred and to soberly recognize our collective responsibility to assist those who have endured it.”

“Aftermath: Detroit Jews in the Wake of the Holocaust” will be on view Oct. 24-Jan. 5 at the Holocaust Memorial Center in Farmington Hills. No additional cost beyond general admission. (248) 553-2400. holocaustcenter.org.