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Newest Holocaust Memorial exhibit explores fashion



The Holocaust Memorial Center Zekelman Family Campus has announced its newest special exhibit, “Stitching History From The Holocaust,” will open Thursday, June 22. On display through Dec. 29, it explores the true story of Paul and Hedvika (Hedy) Strnad, a Prague couple who tried to escape the onslaught of Nazi Germany and enter the United States, where Hedy could use her skills as a talented dressmaker.

Seeking an affidavit proving they could be financially independent in the United States, Paul sent a carefully written letter to his cousin Alvin in Milwaukee in 1939. Enclosed were eight sketches of Hedy’s work. Unfortunately, the couple perished in the Holocaust before they had a chance to receive a response.

In 1997, Alvin’s son Burton and his family discovered Paul’s letter and the sketches while cleaning out his mother’s basement. He donated his findings to the Milwaukee Jewish Historical Society, which later became the Jewish Museum Milwaukee. When the museum opened, curators put the sketches and letter on

display and, thanks to a visitor's suggestion, created and premiered an exhibit in 2014.

Exploring fashion, immigration and Holocaust history through one family's eyes, it is highlighted by eight recreations of Hedy's dresses, which were meticulously created with historic accuracy by the Costume Shop of the Milwaukee Repertory Theater.

“Stitching History From The Holocaust’ serves as an example of what happens when human suffering is ignored,” said Rabbi Eli Mayerfeld, CEO, Holocaust Memorial Center. “It also is an abject example of the immense loss of the Holocaust. If Paul and Hedy had been able to escape the Nazis, who knows what kind of fashion empire she could have created, providing jobs and countless articles of beautiful clothing. Theirs is just one of many stories of what could have been, the contributions to society taken away.”

The Holocaust Memorial Center will host special docent-led tours of the display at 1:30 p.m. Sunday, July 23, and Aug. 13 and 7 p.m. Monday, Aug. 28.

The exhibit is generously supported by Rozie and Bernie Friedman, Lisa and Robert Gittleman, Sandra Seligman and Gilbert Glassberg, Nancy and James Grosfeld, Michael Liebowitz, Martina Venter and Frithjof Oldorff, Dorothy and Hershel Sandberg, Sara Guyer and Scott Straus, Malke and Gary Torgow, Anita and Ken Volk, Henrietta and Alvin Weisberg, Stacey and Marc Wittenberg, Michigan Council for Arts and Cultural Affairs, National Endowment for the Arts and Masco Corp. Foundation.

For more information on the Holocaust Memorial Center, go to www.holocaustcenter.org or call 248-553-2400.