

# Purely Commentary: A New Beginning for the Zekelman Holocaust Center

By Rabbi Eli Mayerfeld - 12/29/2022 3:00 PM

## **THE** Zekelman **HOLOCAUST** **CENTER**

We are now in the process of a major update to the Center, to guide the next generation of visitors through a state-of-the-art exhibit informed by best practices in museum education.

The lessons of the Holocaust have taken on greater urgency in recent months, among them that antisemitism neither began nor ended with the Nazi regime. Of late, age-old stereotypes about Jews are reentering mainstream conversation, and acts of antisemitism are occurring with greater frequency nationwide and here at home.

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*Rabbi Eli Mayerfeld*  
*LiebermanPhotography.com*

At the Zekelman Holocaust Center (“the Center”), we have a critical role to play in creating a world free from hate. As visitors explore the vibrancy of European Jewry before 1933, and then journey into the abyss of the Third Reich’s system of dehumanization and extermination of Jews, they viscerally feel what was lost to history: Jewish families never raised and a culture decimated.

They also learn that the darkness that descended over Europe was a result of everyday choices made by ordinary Germans and their collaborators, from the teacher who encouraged taunting of Jewish classmates to the train engineers who drove boxcars filled with Jews.

In so learning, visitors understand that each one of us is capable of both good and evil, and that we have the agency to choose between them. As they read postcards sent from the Krakow Ghetto begging relatives in Detroit for Rosh Hashanah clothing, learn about the Kindertransport and Jews hidden by righteous gentiles, visitors to the Center young and old make connections to their own lives — how do they respond to hatred and intolerance in our world?

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When our founders opened the Holocaust Center in 1984 as a memorial to the 6 million, they could not have anticipated the number of interest

groups, young and old, who walk through our doors, including the tens of thousands of middle and high school students who by state law must receive Holocaust and genocide education.

With great forethought and intention, we are moving away from a perpetrator-centered narrative to one that emphasizes the impact on the victims of history's greatest crime. As the population of Holocaust survivors dwindles, elevating their testimonies becomes increasingly important. In the new permanent exhibit, the local Michigan survivors who settled here after the war and contributed so much to our community will rightfully have the first and last word.

We are also expanding our adult education outreach. Dozens of professional groups from every sector come annually to the Center for tours and trainings with our staff to learn about the complicity of corporate, medical, legal and security professionals during World War II, providing opportunities for these groups to consider what sorts of challenges they might be faced with today and how to respond.

Our overarching goal at the Center is for everyone to stand up to hatred, antisemitism and racism, motivated by compassion and care for our fellow human beings. With your support we can continue to educate Michigan residents about the dangerous consequences of intolerance and hate.

Partner with us as we prepare for the future. In the words of Jack Gunz<sup>1</sup>, a Holocaust survivor who spoke often at the Center, "The world should be a better world, not the one I lived through."

*Rabbi Eli Mayerfeld is CEO of The Zekelman Holocaust Center. To learn more about the Center's Comprehensive Campaign, visit [www.holocaustcenter.org](http://www.holocaustcenter.org) or call (248) 553-2400.*

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