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Holocaust Memorial Center receives \$15M gift, largest single donation in its history

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A \$15 million gift to the Holocaust Memorial Center, the largest single charitable donation in its history, will go toward an endowment to support the Farmington Hills center for years to come and give it more flexibility.

The gift from the Zekelman family and Zekelman Industries — Chicago-based Zekelman Industries is North America's largest independent steel pipe and tube manufacturer — will go to the Holocaust Memorial Center's \$100 million Comprehensive Campaign. The five-year campaign will create a board-designated endowment. It will also finance plans to update the center's core exhibits.

"We are very excited and very grateful to the Zekelman family. This is really something special," said Rabbi Eli Mayerfeld, CEO of the Holocaust Memorial Center.

The 55,000-square-foot Holocaust Memorial Center, situated on the Holocaust Memorial Center Zekelman Family Campus on Orchard Lake Road, is the the only Holocaust museum in Michigan and the first free-standing institution of its kind in the United States. It serves about 100,000 visitors a year, both in person and through online programming.

Mayerfeld said the Zekelmans have been very thoughtful with how they want their \$15 million gift used. After all the challenges that arts and cultural institutions have faced since COVID hit in March 2020, a board-restricted endowment means those funds can be accessed if necessary, unlike a regular endowment, in which the principal can't be touched.

"Having the ability of the board, under circumstances like that (the pandemic), to being able to make changes, makes a tremendous difference in the future of an organization," said Mayerfeld. "On the one hand, they're saying, 'We want these dollars to be available for the future, far into the future.' At the same, they're saying we want flexibility for the board to be

able to recognize that if something happens that demands immediate action, those funds can be used for that as well. So it really is a tremendous gift with a lot of creativity and foresight."

Tuesday's gift isn't the first time the Zekelman family and Zekelman Industries have supported the Holocaust Center. A \$10 million gift in late 2006 went toward reducing the center's debts after it built its new campus in Farmington Hills.

The Zekelmans have deep, personal ties to the Holocaust.

"My late father's parents and siblings were all unfortunately killed during the Holocaust so it's very, very significant to us to be able to do something that not only memorializes their lives but all the others — the 6 million Jews," said Alan Zekelman, a Bloomfield Hills resident who is the treasurer of the Memorial Center's board, whose father survived because he was in the Polish army.

The Zekelmans' gift comes just days after the Holocaust Memorial Center, which has a \$4 million annual budget, received another boost from the Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation. Under a new \$100 million arts and culture initiative unveiled last week, the Holocaust center is one of 11 Metro Detroit arts and cultural institutions in Metro Detroit that will receive annual support for operating expenses.

Zekelman said he hopes his family's gift inspires others to give. He said the center has grown in its mission and accomplishments but there's more work to be done.

"It's really time now to refresh the exhibits, expand the outreach to teachers across the state of Michigan and students across the state," he said. "And they can only do that with more money. We're hoping for people to join us."

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