

Holocaust Memorial finished

Cross section of religious, civic, communal leaders join dedication

By [Paul Haist](#)
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Several hundred people crowded into a sun-splashed meadow next to Portland's Holocaust Memorial in Washington Park Aug. 29 to hear religious, civic and communal leaders comment on the just completed memorial on the occasion of its formal dedication.

Rabbi Larry Halpern of South Metro Jewish Congregation and a member of the Oregon Holocaust Memorial Coalition executive committee was among the speakers. Halpern has accompanied the Portland Holocaust survivors on much of their nearly 10-year journey to create the memorial.

With his wife, Rabbi Ariel Stone-Halpern of Congregation Shir Tikvah, he traveled with a group of seven Portland Holocaust survivors a few years ago on a return visit to the concentration camps in Europe where the survivors had been incarcerated by the Nazis. They brought back soil from those camps, soil that now has been interred beneath Portland's Holocaust memorial.

Halpern was the final speaker at the dedication and the first to invoke Jewish scripture in the name of the memorial and those whose memory it honors. Halpern recalled the biblical parable of Moses encountering and understanding the burning bush as a command from God, in the rabbi's words, "to act to make real the humanity of all and thus to save his people."

The rabbi found a parallel with the Holocaust memorial, which he shared in the manner of prayer. "We and all who come this way might--by the beauty and power of this memorial -- also be changed, be charged to go forth remembering the humanity of all who live, and demanding for them the rights and dignity we expect for ourselves," said the rabbi.

Central to the dedication were the remarks of the Holocaust survivors and refugees whose efforts led to the creation of the memorial. Jane Rosenbaum, who survived Kristallnacht before escaping from Europe, is the founder of the Oregon Holocaust Memorial Coalition, which she chaired for nine of its 10 years.

She paid tribute to the survivors, refugees and other community leaders, Jewish and not Jewish, whose vision and commitment made the memorial a reality. The survivors she singled out included Alice Kern who first approached Rosenbaum and asked her to form a survivors group. The others were Eva Aigner, Chella Kryszek, and the late Regina Langfus. She also mentioned Debbi Montrose, the daughter of a survivor as another key Jewish player over all the 10 years of planning for the memorial.

Rosenbaum expressed gratitude also to the Oregon Chapter of the American Jewish Committee, which adopted the memorial as a committee project, the First United Methodist Church of Portland, which hosted the coalition, Portland Mayor Vera Katz, former mayor Bud Clark and various other city officials, and landscape architect Marlene Salon who coordinated the team that created the memorial design.

"It was my life's great privilege to chair the coalition for nine years, and all of you who walked the road with me have my most heartfelt thanks," said Rosenbaum. "To you here today I will always be grateful that you are sharing our historic memories on this beautiful day in this miraculous setting," she concluded.

Holocaust survivor Eva Aigner is OHMC vice chair and the group's treasurer. Like Rosenbaum, who introduced her, she used her opportunity to speak at the dedication to express her gratitude to the many volunteers, donors and others who made the survivors' dream come true. "There are so many dedicated individuals who deserve a special recognition on this day. However, it is not possible to publicly thank everyone. But please know that we are so grateful for your help and support," said Aigner. She made a point of noting that support for the \$1.2 million memorial was broad and crossed many lines in the community.

"Never did we dream that we would have so many generous supporters who would join us in sending the message that we each have a personal responsibility to learn from history and educate others in order to build a better future," said Aigner.

Lisa Kaner, an attorney who succeeded Rosenbaum as coalition chair and who long served as a member of the coalition representing the American Jewish Committee, paid tribute to the many contractors, artisans, designers and scholarly researchers without whom the memorial could not have been built. Among those she singled out for recognition was Paul Schlesinger who volunteered as construction manager and whom Kaner asked to stand and whom she thanked for his "unfailing efforts to build this memorial." Noting that with the dedication of the memorial the work of the coalition was done, Kaner said that now stewardship of the memorial would be the responsibility of the Oregon Holocaust Resource Center. She said the OHRC already has written a school curriculum and has trained docents who are available for guided visits.

Kaner reminded those present that they have a responsibility to teach the history of the Holocaust. "Each of us is now an ambassador for this memorial," she said. "We must each tell our friends, our neighbors, our relatives, our children, their teachers, and our co-workers of the opportunity to visit the memorial and incorporate its message into our daily lives. By being here today you have joined us in making a public statement against hate. This is the first step. Now, we each need to continue our quest to make this a better world for all of us and for future generations."

Flanked at the lectern by fellow death camp survivors Leslie Aigner, Alice Kern, Jake and Chella Kryszek, Al Lewin and Judith Meller, coalition member Miriam Greenstein

Motola spoke from the perspective of the survivors and on behalf of the Oregon Survivors, Refugees and Families group, which predated the coalition and helped to motivate the drive to build the memorial. She likened the survivors to the mythical phoenix which arises from its own ashes.

Motola was among the Portland-area survivors who were accompanied by the rabbis Halpern and Stone-Halpern on the return visit to the Nazi camps to collect soil for the memorial. "It was an overwhelmingly difficult emotional journey," she said, drawing a parallel between that experience and the survivor experience in the years after World War II. "Each survivor has risen to meet the challenge of forging a new existence," she said. "After decades of total silence about the past -€we were compelled to speak up." Looking about her, she added, "It is gratifying to find that our message does make a difference."

Portland Mayor Vera Katz, a Holocaust refugee who had been expected to address the dedication, was unable to attend. City Commissioner Dan Saltzman spoke in her place. When Saltzman observed that "past and present City Councils have supported this memorial over many obstacles," he was the only speaker that day who referred to the legal hurdles the coalition had to overcome. Some Washington Park neighbors had opposed the siting of the project in the park, raising issues of procedure, traffic impact and appropriateness. Saltzman quickly moved on to a broader view. "Whereas the Holocaust was the governmental endorsement and enforcement of hate, here today our civic community joins together to make a public statement against hatred and intolerance. We send a strong message of acceptance of all, by honoring the memory of those who were killed solely for their race, religion, sexual orientation or physical or mental infirmities," said Saltzman.

Catholic Archbishop John Vlazny of the Portland Arch-€diocese delivered the invocation. He called the memorial a place for future generations to learn about those who died and those who grieve. "Today we renew our nightmares to reaffirm our dreams," said Vlazny. "Memory is for tomorrow's sake."

The Rev. Ross Miller of Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon led a responsive reading invoking the memory of all who perished in the Holocaust and those who risked their lives to help the victims, and calling for continued vigilance to avoid a repeat of history. Further underscoring that the memorial is broadly meaningful beyond the Jewish community, Evelyn Thomas of the Oregon Holocaust Memorial Inscriptions Committee read a letter from Leland Robison of the International Romany Union Pacific Northwest Chapter.

Romanies (Gypsies) also were targeted for extermination by Germany's Nazis. "We wish to thank you for including our various tribal groups in the memorial wall concluding text," wrote Robison. "For you this is an act of moral goodness that you did not have to do, but rather did it as an act of truth, kindness and moral clarity." Amy Shapiro led the crowd in a moving English rendition of "Zog Nit Keynmol" ("Never Say"), the marching song of the Jewish partisan brigades in World War II. Rabbi Aryeh

Hirschfield accompanied himself on the guitar in a presentation of the song "The Narrow Bridge."

The Ecumenical Choir, comprising singers from synagogues, churches and various performance groups including the Portland Opera, performed "Cry Out and Shout." Rob Aigner, the son of Holocaust survivors Leslie and Eva Aigner, read his poem, "Seven Shades of Courage," which he wrote when he accompanied his parents and five other Portland-area Holocaust survivors on the trip back to the death camps.

AJC Oregon Chapter Executive Director Emily Gottfried was master of ceremonies. Gottfried took time to introduce several dignitaries in attendance. They included Oregon Attorney General Hardy Myers, Portland City Commissioner and mayoral candidate Jim Francesconi, Multnomah County Chair Diane Linn, Multnomah County Commissioner Lisa Naito, Multnomah County Commissioner Maria Rojo de Steffey, Portland Parks and Recreation Director Zari Santer and Tom Potter, former police chief and current candidate for mayor.