

## **Stockton European Study Tour Takes Holocaust Survivors, Second-Generation Survivors and Others to Sites in Germany, Netherlands**

***For Immediate Release; with web and print photos attached, caption and Web site link at end***

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**Galloway, NJ** - Twenty-seven New Jersey residents with diverse backgrounds quickly bonded on a study tour this spring of World War II and Holocaust sites sponsored by The Sara and Sam Schoffer Holocaust Resource Center at The Richard Stockton College of New Jersey.

The group included Stockton President Herman Saatkamp and his wife, Dot, along with two Holocaust survivors, three whose parents were Holocaust survivors and the wife of another second-generation survivor.

They traveled to a number of sites in Germany and to Amsterdam in the Netherlands on a tour arranged by Gail Rosenthal, director of The Sara and Sam Schoffer Holocaust Resource Center, and Dr. Michael Hayse, director of Stockton's Master of Arts program in Holocaust and Genocide Studies and associate professor of Historical Studies.

The group visited Munich, where Adolf Hitler began his rise to power; Nuremberg, where the Nazi Party held massive rallies and also the site of the post-war International Military Tribunal of Nazi leaders; the Buchenwald Concentration Camp Memorial; Berlin, the Nazi seat of power after 1933; and Amsterdam, which was occupied during the war.

They also visited Jewish museums in Berlin and Munich, as well as the Topography of Terror, the Memorial for the Murdered Jews of Europe, and the Diversity Destroyed Exhibition.

Maud Dahme of Flemington, immediate past president of the New Jersey State Board of Education, was a hidden child during the Nazi occupation of Amsterdam. She and Fred Spiegel, of Howell, NJ, accompanied the study tour, sharing their experiences as Holocaust survivors. Spiegel survived multiple concentration camps, including Bergen-Belsen.

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"I have visited Europe on community missions and as a tourist, but being a part of a Stockton Study Tour is a completely different experience," said college Trustee Leo Schoffer. He is the founder of Schoffer Enterprises, which specializes in industrial and commercial real estate development, and the son of Sara and Sam Schoffer, for whom the Holocaust Resource Center is named.

"Rather than guides, we were led by educators and so our visits were as students and not as sightseers," Schoffer said. "This approach made the trip very meaningful to me and I look forward to travelling with Stockton study groups in the future."

Schoffer was able to visit the building where his parents had lived in Munich after surviving the Holocaust.

"I found #2 Max Weber Place, in Munich," he said. "I always heard about the year they spent there, trying to find a way to make living" after the war, he said. "It was interesting to actually see it."

"Gail Rosenthal and I have been leading study tours on the Holocaust and the Third Reich for more than a decade, but this is the first time we have organized one for members of the community and for administrators," said Dr. Hayse, who is director of Stockton's Master of Arts in Holocaust and Genocide Studies program.

"I feel very strongly that visiting the actual historical sites makes the educational experience much more powerful; there really is no substitute," Dr. Hayse continued. "Standing in Dachau or Buchenwald not only gives the visitor a sense of space – these camps were vast – but the knowledge that inmates stood in the same place also affects one viscerally.

"I have been visiting these sites for three decades, and it still gives me a chill," Dr. Hayse said. "It is for the same reasons that we take Holocaust survivors with us: to connect their personal experiences with the history and the places we visit."

Because of the expertise and connections of the study tour's organizers and some participants, travelers were able in some cases to gain access to areas not usually open to the public – and to documents connecting them back through time to their relatives.

Dr. Israel Posner, who was among the second-generation Holocaust survivors on the study tour, was able to get six documents from Buchenwald showing his father's signatures.

"The study tour was one of the most moving and informative experiences of my life," said Dr. Posner, who was joined by second-generation survivors Leo Schoffer and Samuel Krantz. Krantz is an attorney in Somers Point, NJ whose parents, Chana and Joseph Krantz, were both Holocaust survivors from Poland.

"Because of the dedicated and talented staff at our Holocaust Resource Center, I was able to walk in the same steps that my father did when imprisoned by Nazi Germany in the Buchenwald Concentration Camp," said Dr. Posner, who is executive director of the Lloyd D. Levenson Institute for Gaming, Hospitality and Tourism at Stockton.

Krantz, who was born in 1944, remembered living in a displaced persons "barracks" in a brick building near Munich after the war. His father had started a business in Munich, far enough away that he couldn't come home every night.

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Krantz was struck by the group's visit to the Anne Frank house, where they were allowed into Otto Frank's office, which is not usually open to the public.

He said the Germans have acknowledged the horrifying human toll of the Holocaust and tried to take responsibility and teach younger generations about it.

Krantz said the Holocaust Museum at the Holocaust Memorial in Berlin "personalized it with pictures of families and letters, such as one that an 11-year-old girl had written to her father: "They're going to kill me and I'm scared."

"Another girl writes a postcard on a train going to the camps," he continued, "and she throws it out the window where a farmer finds it. He puts a stamp on it and mails it. They have it" (at the museum.)

"You can relate to this," Krantz said.

He noted that Adolf Eichmann, one of the Nazi architects of the Holocaust, said: "A hundred deaths are a catastrophe, a million are a statistic."

"The Germans have turned these statistics into humans again," Krantz said. "It can't help but move people."

Schoffer agreed: "I'm a bigger believer in education than in having memorials on every corner. But German society is taking ownership of the issue of the Holocaust. They are trying to address it and are dealing with it head-on. It's very thoughtful, very sensitive in how they handle the whole issue of monuments."

Schoffer also said the study tour model may be something the college can expand upon, in other subjects. "We may be able to tie in with other community groups on different study tours to other places, other topics," he said.

Michele Bronkesh, of Linwood, NJ, wanted to make the trip to better understand her husband Noah's experiences as a second-generation survivor who was born in a displaced person's camp in Munich.

"Each survivor deals with it differently," she said. "His family only spoke about the war with other survivors, but it was always sort of a weight on the family."

At Buchenwald, Bronkesh said she saw an exhibit in which one of the pictures resembled her husband's stepgrandfather, whom they knew had been at Auschwitz.

"My husband never knew his stepgrandfather was a prisoner in Buchenwald...It turns out he was transferred to Buchenwald," she said.

She took a photo of the picture in the exhibit and emailed it to her husband.

" 'Yes, it looks like him,' he said," Bronkesh related. Scholars at Buchenwald were able to give her more information about when her husband's stepgrandfather was born and when he was taken there.

Stockton plans to continue expanding its global reach with more study tours, collaborating on

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programs with other universities, inviting German scholars to Stockton and developing internships for students overseas.

Dr. Michael Rodriguez, associate professor of Political Science and the coordinator of Stockton's Washington, D.C. internship program, made contacts at several study tour sites to explore the possibility of establishing future internships.

"The Anne Frank House in Amsterdam explicitly stated that they want to work with Stockton and they do have an internship program with several American institutions of higher education," he said.

"I'm hoping that 2014 will be when we get our first placements in Europe, and probably initially at the Anne Frank house, which does not require that interns speak another language in addition to English," he said. He added that possible future internship programs are being explored at Buchenwald and the Jewish Memorial Museums in Munich and Berlin. He said Dr. Hayse and he will be identifying Stockton students who are studying German as candidates for those in the future.

Dr. Hayse added, "When we take students and others to Europe to visit these sites, we are of course mainly interested in teaching about this disturbing but important era in human history. But when we travel, they also observe how contemporary Europeans – German, Poles, the Dutch – have attempted to come to terms with their difficult, horrible recent past."

At dinner the last night of the trip, people shared their feelings and insights, many of which are memorialized on the web page of The Sara and Sam Schoffer Holocaust Resource Center.

"People said, 'We came on a trip because of Stockton, but now we've become a family,' " said Rosenthal, director of the center.

"This was a group of many different people – scholars, teachers, people that were interested in the Holocaust," Bronkesh said. "We were very different from each other in many ways, but for 10 days, we meshed as a cohesive group. It was a real privilege to be a part of it," she said.

"There was an intensity – it was physically and emotionally very demanding," Bronkesh said.

"It's a trip like no other," she continued. "You have so many different emotions.

At Buchenwald, she said, "It was very cold, snowing – I was walking with a heavy coat and scarf, insulated boots...and I thought how could they have survived in thin pajamas and maybe thin socks, no shoes. How? It's luck, sheer will."

"Those are things that run through your mind when you're there," Bronkesh said.

"You're not only studying history, you're looking into yourself and asking: Would I be strong enough to survive? Would I be brave enough to hide people?"

Stockton President Herman Saatkamp shared his reflections on the resource center's web page devoted to the study tour:

*"We walk back in time, to go forward."*

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**-continued from page 4-**

*“Our gait fractured by the unspeakable, the unthinkable. Lived experienced memories for two, close but second memories for others, new discoveries about a father for one, and all of us filled with images without voices, terror without sounds, emptiness without responses.*

*“Coming together, calling our numbers to assure we are all together, looking and finding and seeing the same and the different. Wondering what we would have done, been, and thought during such times. Our people, our community under siege, an enemy seeking the final solution. Data, statistics, numbers so easily entered, tattooed and calculated. Numbers without memories, without faces, without futures. Where are the persons, the children, mothers, fathers, husbands, wives, grandparents, ancestors, future generations? All individuals.*

*“Grave sites, grave sights, barracks, barbed wire, watch towers, empty buildings, cold, snow, fallen leaves, "Fallen Leaves" with clanging horror, too much for some to walk over.*

*“What did we expect? Not this. Sounds without sound, thoughts without thought, sights without sight. All surrounded by the comfort of everyday life: good food, comfortable hotels, expert travel arrangements, expert guides, great care and attention to detail. Dachau with modern residences around it (how can one live there?), buildings going up, restaurants, bars, clubs, symphony, opera all continue as if deaf to the fallen, to our backward walk in time.*

*“Then the realization: we are out of step. All around us are going forward. Like Janus we have another face, one with a future, one with choice.*

*“We can choose to be different even if history is not on our side. We are in life camps, at home, office, college, everywhere. Our children and students are promises we make to a future we will not see. Perhaps there is little hope, leaves fall every year, holocausts and genocides are not dead and buried they rise from the graves within all humans every year, every chance. But it is worth trying.*

*“We walk back, in time to go forward. I hope.”*

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**Box with Web Site link:**

Moving reflections from study tour participants, including Stockton College President Herman and Mrs. Dot Saatkamp, are available, along with photos, on the college's Sara and Sam Schoffer Holocaust Resource Center [Web site](#).

**Caption:** Members of the European Study Tour group from The Richard Stockton College of New Jersey who visited WWII and Holocaust sites in Germany and the Netherlands, at the Brandenburg Gate in Berlin.

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*Photo courtesy of The Sara and Sam Schoffer Holocaust Resource Center of The Richard Stockton College of New Jersey*

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